

## SWEAT EQUITY

# We're getting the hang of Antigravity Yoga

BY HOWARD COHEN

hcohen@MiamiHerald.com

Imagine you're a Cirque du Soleil aerialist weaving your way up into a fabric hammock while suspended in the air. The sense of freedom and power proves exhilarating. You execute complex yoga positions with ease because your body isn't smack on a cold, hard floor. Hang upside down and . . . *let go!* . . . you're a sky diver on a soft trapeze. Then, wrap yourself in a cocoon of soft fabric and pull it around you, close your eyes, and just float. Ahhh, so this is what it felt like in the womb.

This is **Crunch's** new Antigravity Yoga Wings class and the venue, known for its creative fitness courses, will be hard-pressed to top this one.

It's a blast.

The theory is that fitness students can hold challenging positions longer thanks to a fabric hammock. It can help you move into more daring, inverted poses to relieve compressed joints, stimulate blood flow and align the body.

There's so much going on that the class boasts two instructors: Carole Steinhauser, who guides students in the more yoga-centric moves and post-exercise meditation; and Robin Retherford, a former dancer and fitness enthusiast who leads us in the strength-building skills.

"It's a fun, inventive class," says Retherford, who cheerleads her students into trying positions. "You are able to fuse Pilates, yoga and aerial acrobatics into one class."

From a practical sense, Steinhauser notes that Antigravity Yoga, which has been in Miami only for two weeks, can "help you strengthen your core and move from your center."

As for me? I've always envied the aerial acts at Cirque du Soleil. Now I know what it feels like and can't wait to try it again.

## ANTIGRAVITY YOGA WINGS

★★★★

### DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY

Instructor Robin Retherford runs through a quick checklist of warnings for about 15 students who stand before white, hanging cloths that look like mutant-

sized cocoons from an *X-Files* episode.

Don't take this class, she cautions, if you have high blood pressure, glaucoma or, she laughs, if you've recently had Botox injections. "This is South Beach," she jokes. Inversions might not be a good idea.

Otherwise, Antigravity Yoga Wings is a boon for yoga enthusiasts since it incorporates many familiar asanas but gives you greater movement. For example, to execute a downward-facing dog, the hammock wraps around your pelvis and pulls your hips up and back to lengthen the legs.

For headstands and hanging back bends there is support from the fabric. But, as Steinhauser notes, "as you get stronger you're not just hanging in the hammock."

Using the hammock takes some getting used to as your body presses on the fabric and can initially feel uncomfortable, especially if you're carrying extra weight around the middle. (The hammocks are reputed to hold 1,000 pounds - whew, we're within range.)

One skill calls for you to remove one leg at a time from the support while inverted. It's a cool, choreographed move.

Note: you might feel a bit dizzy after the 60-minute class. That's normal.

### FUN FACTOR . . . . .

Both instructors urge everyone to smile during the course. I've never felt compelled to smile like some goofy exercise bunny on an '80s fitness videotape. But Antigravity Yoga had me grinning. The freedom of soaring in the air, that sense of accomplishment, the feeling of growing strength, it all proved infectious.

### TO DO IT . . . . .

**Where:** Crunch Fitness, 1259 Washington Ave., Miami Beach;

305-674-8222; [www.crunch.com](http://www.crunch.com)

**When:** 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, 7 p.m. Thursday, 4 p.m. Sunday. (Another instructor coaches at 10 a.m. Wednesday).

**Cost:** \$24 day pass (includes use of gym). **Crunch** also hosts The AntiGravity Yoga Workshop on July 12, with 45-minute sessions at 1, 2 and 3 p.m. These sessions are free.



ALEXIA FODERE/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

**NO HANDS:** Robin Retherford, left, leads by example during an Antigravity Yoga "Wings" at Crunch. That's Howard Cohen in the center.