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It was a date to remember, couples night out with a twist.

Gary Sweetapple, 45, and his wife, Debbie, 46, of Northville, invited another couple to join them for a night of stretching, bending, and meditating at Michigan Yoga Center.

While the couple attends regular yoga sessions together at least once a week, Sweetapple says, this particular partners session was unique in that it included postures, or poses, that required trust in and dependence on each other.

“When you are doing something with somebody else in this modality, you are more sensitive to their needs,” he says. “There aren’t too many activities that provide you with the opportunity to make both the physical and inward connection with each other.”

The practice of yoga that aims to attain unity of mind, body and spirit through exercise, breathing and meditation is not only good for your body, it’s good for your relationships, says Elizabeth Bonev, owner of Michigan Yoga Center.

“The romance of it is amazing,” she says. “Couple who practice yoga together create alignment within themselves and, at the same time, emotionally align with one another to create a level of intimacy that lasts much longer than the hour or two they are in practice.”

Yoga is one of many physical exercises that experts say couples can do together to enhance their own and their partner’s health. According to the American Fitness Association of America, couples that exercise together are more likely to stick with an exercise program. Not only that, studies report that partners that exercise together experience enhanced pleasure between the sheets.

“Unlike running where you have to keep up with your partner, yoga allows an experienced practitioner and an inexperienced practitioner to work together,” Bonev says. “This is really something that a couple can do together no matter what their skill level.”

Jonny Kest, owner of Center for Yoga with studios in West Bloomfield and Birmingham, says many of his clients come to yoga for the workout, but leave with a newfound sense of peace.

“They’re surprised that they start having more harmonious relationships not just at home but at work,” he says. Besides, that, “They’re feeling greater intimacy, more relaxed and more sensual.”

Kest and Bonev both say they their centers offer partner yoga sessions periodically throughout the year, but encourage couples to attend anytime.

“My gentle evening yoga classes on Sunday nights seem to attract husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends,” Bonev says. “I will have them do some poses together where they are side by side or facing each other.”

She says some poses encourage eye contact, which “by itself can be romantic.”

Sweetapple, who says that he and his wife have been doing yoga together for about a year, are pleased with the results.

“I’ve lost 25 pounds,” he says, adding that his wife was already in great shape. (Good answer, dear.) Expect to burn about 250 calories each for each hour of basic yoga stretches.

If the mood strikes you and your partner today, a special Valentine’s Day couples yoga class starts at 8:30 p.m. sharp at the Center for Yoga’s Birmingham location. The session will include intimate music and partner poses that will feel like you are “giving each other massages,” Kest says. Cost is \$49 per couple. Call (248) 258-YOGA, but hurry, space is limited.

If you’re looking for more ways to get fit with your mate, Bethany Thayer, Registered Dietitian, Health Alliance Plan, Southfield, and spokesperson for the National Dietetic Association, offers these suggestions.

“Take a dance class together -- salsa, square dancing, ballroom – anything to get you moving,” she says. “Share to cost of a personal trainer. Or take a walk together.”

Thayer, who conducts health workshops for HAP members, says each partner will be more successful in their weight and fitness goals if they have a supportive mate.

“Having a spouse that brings you foods that are tempting, or a spouse that is always talking you out of exercising can be very frustrating,” she says. “Obviously, there has to be some great communication and respect for each other’s goals.”

Thayer suggested making exercise with your partner fun by challenging each other.

“See which one of you can walk the most minutes or take the most steps in a week,” she says. Use a pedometer or a logbook to keep track and offer a reward – perhaps a massage -- to the winner.

And, when you do decide (and you will) that you’ve earned a sweet treat, lessen the calorie blow by sharing it, Thayer says.

“It demonstrates another nice way of being supportive of each other.” –30-