



**Yoga stretches into sports top 10**  
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*by Sharri Markson*

YOGA has replaced touch football and basketball in the list of Australia's top 10 organised activities, new figures reveal.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) exercise survey reveals that participation in yoga has risen by 150 per cent in the past three years, the largest growth of all physical activity.

ASC research consultant Chris Owens said the Exercise Recreation and Sports Survey revealed that more women were taking up yoga. Over the past four years, basketball and touch football have fallen out of the top 10 while AFL and yoga have moved in, she said. Of the top 10 organised activities, yoga has had the largest increase in participants since 2001.

The majority of that increase has been in women aged 20 to 49 participating in yoga. Yoga teacher Jacasta Berry, who runs the Rasa Yoga Centre at Bondi Junction, said that prenatal yoga was an area of enormous growth. She said there had been a rise in the number of pregnant women turning to yoga to prepare them for labour.

Ms Berry coached actor Michelle Williams in prenatal yoga before the birth of her daughter Matilda to Heath Ledger. Many women start yoga while they are pregnant. It is a safe form of exercise and helps balance hormones, she said.

Yoga classes for mothers and their babies are also very popular at the Rasa Yoga Centre. Women who are working find that yoga is a chance to connect with their baby, Ms Berry said. The baby is taken through a range of moves to work on co-ordination and encourage them to build back and neck strength.

Yoga has become the seventh most-popular organized activity in Australia, with 380,500 devotees.

In NSW, 24,900 men practice yoga, compared with 157,600 women.