

For Some People, Learning Yoga on CD-ROM is a Stretch

As if to lend weight to my contention that your computer can, in theory, teach you anything, along comes a pair of CD-ROMs called Wellness Yoga and Shiatsu Relaxation.

Lithe young women demonstrate these ancient Eastern techniques while mellow-voiced narrators speak over somnambulant music, the better to relax you and make you all well.

Most of us are familiar at least with the concepts of yoga, its slow stretching exercises and its often almost unattainable physical positions. Wellness Yoga is a nicely designed program that packages 74 asanas, or positions, into several packages such as the Quick and Easy Course, the Beauty Course and the Health Course.

The program consists largely of what it calls procedure screens, in which each position is demonstrated in one window while described textually in another. A narrator reads that same text aloud. In addition to the usual tape-recorder buttons to pause, stop and restart the action, there is a graph that displays the approximate duration of each segment of the routine.

The practical difficulties of using this CD-ROM are fairly obvious. The manual, dragged kicking and screaming into English from its Japanese roots, advises the user to First practice forming the pose while watching the screen and try memorizing the whole procedure.' This, unless you have a 24-inch monitor or keep your monitor on the floor, is likely to be difficult. Clearly the actual learning of the poses could be more readily done with a videotape.

On the other hand, you can hunt around in the CD-ROM, choose from the positions you want to learn, and collect them into personal groups. And maybe you've got a really big monitor, and a cordless, long-distance mouse.

This is a nice program, well-made and instructive. My only complaint is that it does not emphasize clearly enough that unless you are as slender as the model executing the poses, you are not going to be able to do many of them -- the Crow, the Heron and the Frog, for instance -- correctly. On the other hand, we can all do the Corpse.

Shiatsu Relaxation, which teaches a massage technique clearly related to acupuncture, is another kettle of fish.

The theory is that rubbing, kneading or poking specific points on the body,

called acupressure points, will make other parts of the body feel better. I am not prepared to argue that premise, but the entire procedure seems shiatsu yourself is not clear, either; the program initially suggests you find some of your own more accessible pressure points, but they are not all available to your own hands and all the demonstrations show one person ministering to another.