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Shippam says yoga is a way for her to connect with Emily and Carter and for them to connect with each other.

ITSY BITSY YOGA

Burritos and hotdogs fun, but they're not for eating

Movement classes help parents, children bond

CHANTING together, the six students in the Sunday afternoon yoga class are absolutely still, all eyes on their teacher as she leads them through a pose.

Seconds later, toddler-style pandemonium erupts as instructor Cathy Spack asks her young charges about their next move.

"Maybe we should do burrito? Who remembers burrito?" she asks as one toddler insistently calls, "Hot-dog!"

Welcome to Itsy Bitsy Yoga, a class where poses have names like tushie touches and Ring around the Yogi and no one minds if you need a little time out with mommy.

On her way to becoming a certified instructor with the copyrighted program, Spack has recently introduced Itsy Bitsy Yoga (www.itsybitsyyoga.com) to Winnipeg parents and their wee ones.

Developed seven years ago by infant movement educator Helen Garabedian of Sudbury, Mass., the program exposes babies as young as three weeks to dozens of yoga poses adapted for children.

In her book, *Itsy Bitsy Yoga: Poses to help your baby sleep longer, digest better and grow stronger*, Garabedian says

parents can use only 20 seconds of yoga — what she calls magic poses — to make a baby stop crying, or spend minutes to connect with their child.

"The whole benefit of the program is bonding between the mom and the baby, not so much the movement," says Spack, a school speech-language pathologist who squeezes in up to nine weekly classes with children, babies and their parents.

In this class of mostly two- and three-year-olds, in the basement preschool room at a Tuxedo community centre, the poses have names of animals or food (the burrito move encouraged the youngsters to roll themselves in the yoga mat). They're accomplished with the gentle encouragement and modelling of mom.

For instance, the kiddies make a sandwich by pressing the soles of their feet against mom's. They sit back-to-back and sing a yoga adaptation of *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.

Younger babies are taken through poses with the help of mom, says Spack, and the hour-long classes begin with centring exercises for the mother. Like the toddlers' class, the infant course includes adapted songs and nursery rhymes, designed to soothe both parent and child.

"The singing calms the mom and it calms the baby," says Spack, who is just completing her first round of Itsy Bitsy Baby for newborns to crawling stage at the CanWest Global Performing Arts Centre at The Forks.

For mother Nancy Shippam, practis-

ing yoga with her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Emily and five-month-old son Carter has paid off in tangible ways.

"I just see the look of satisfaction on her face," Shippam says as Emily races around the room after the 45-minute toddler class. "She's so excited when she accomplishes a pose."

After taking fitness and prenatal yoga, Shippam says it seemed natural to continue with her baby son, who is relaxed and sleepy after baby yoga.

"I think it's a way for us to connect with each other and for them to connect as siblings," says the River Heights resident.

For Amy Braunstein and her two-year-old daughter Ella, yoga class is more than a fun, active outing.

"I think it's good, also, for her to learn how to relax," says Braunstein.

To aid relaxation at the end of the class, Spack turns out the lights, plays some soft music on the stereo, and encourages the young yogis to lie on their backs, close their eyes and listen to a story.

The mood is serene, if only until the story is over.

"At the end of yoga, what do we do?" Spack asks the toddlers, modelling a classic pose. "We put our hands together like they do in India, where yoga came from."

For more information on Itsy Bitsy Yoga classes, contact Spack at 284-0250.



Child's Play

Brenda Suderman