

IT'S YOUR HEALTH

BELLY UP TO THE BARRE

Exercise craze using ballet barre here, courtesy of Anushka.

Exercise crazes come and go: hula hoops, spinning classes, the Curves circuit.

But the current craze, using a ballet barre to really feel that stretch, has hit Palm Beach as the latest offering of beauty diva Anushka Blau, of Anushka's Spa and Salon in CityPlace.

La Barre by Anushka, which recently opened in the Royal Poinciana Plaza, uses a method developed by a former dancer, Lotte Berk, that Blau says distinguishes it from other barre classes.

It mixes elements of ballet, yoga, Pilates and core-strengthening in a one-hour class which, to an observer, looks challenging. In fact,

the website for the Lotte Berk Method, barmethod.com, said the program was found years ago to be problematic for some clients' knees, backs and shoulders, and that changes suggested by a physical therapist were incorporated.

Anushka's lead instructor, Lauren Kornblum, an agile and lithe 24-year-old, says she emphasizes "safety first" and checks to see that each woman in the class is performing the exercises correctly to prevent injury and "to get the most out of the



Chris Salata / Daily News

Participants in a class at La Barre by Anushka, a fitness studio recently opened by Anushka Blau in the Royal Poinciana Plaza, stretch at the ballet barre.

exercise.

"We've learned what's good and what's not for the body," Kornblum said. She's been teaching the method since she was 16 when, she adds, she was the youngest teacher sanctioned to teach the Lotte Berk method.

"You can call it a craze, but it's been around since the '70s. Some people, however, have strayed away from the (Berk) method," she said.

The class is designed to accommodate women and men of all ages. Palm Beacher John Nixon said he likes the routine.

"I enjoy the combination of strengthening and stretch work at La Barre. The routine has helped me with both my golf and skiing."

This day, a group of women are warming up. The warmup is designed

to "let tension go." Participants are strengthening their abdominal muscles with floor exercises, holding balls between their legs and working the core.

They then graduate to the barre, a ballet element that lines the room, standing with one leg up on the barre to create a deep stretch, Lauren said.

They move on to using the ball again, squeezing it between upper thighs. By now, you can see some tensed muscles shaking from the effort, although one client from Delray Beach called the one-hour session "low-impact."

Blau, who is participating in the class, takes a break to comment: "We are accustomed to having (gym) machines work for us. This repetition and concentration is like isometrics. You work, and you become more flexible."

As to the pressure some women feel being in a group, Blau credits Kornblum with keeping the class on a noncompetitive

level. "She is such a driving force. She pays attention to you and corrects you. I love the synergy of ballet, yoga, Pilates and core-strengthening that is inherent in a barre class," she said.

Blau herself is anything but a typical client. She is enviably thin at 68 — about 100 pounds on a 5-foot-2-inch frame — who never forgets that she is an anorexia survivor.

Kornblum is acutely aware of women's tendencies to make comparisons and said she encourages participants to focus on benefits such as standing up better and straighter. "I have students who have quit smoking because of these classes," she said. "They are a great stress reliever."

Information on classes and prices are at labarrestudio.com, where you'll see Kornblum's fabulous face.

Remember, don't get jealous.

The classes are about getting fit, not getting discouraged.



Carolyn Susman