

JULIA ROBERTS



THE NEW MOM BOUNCES BACK

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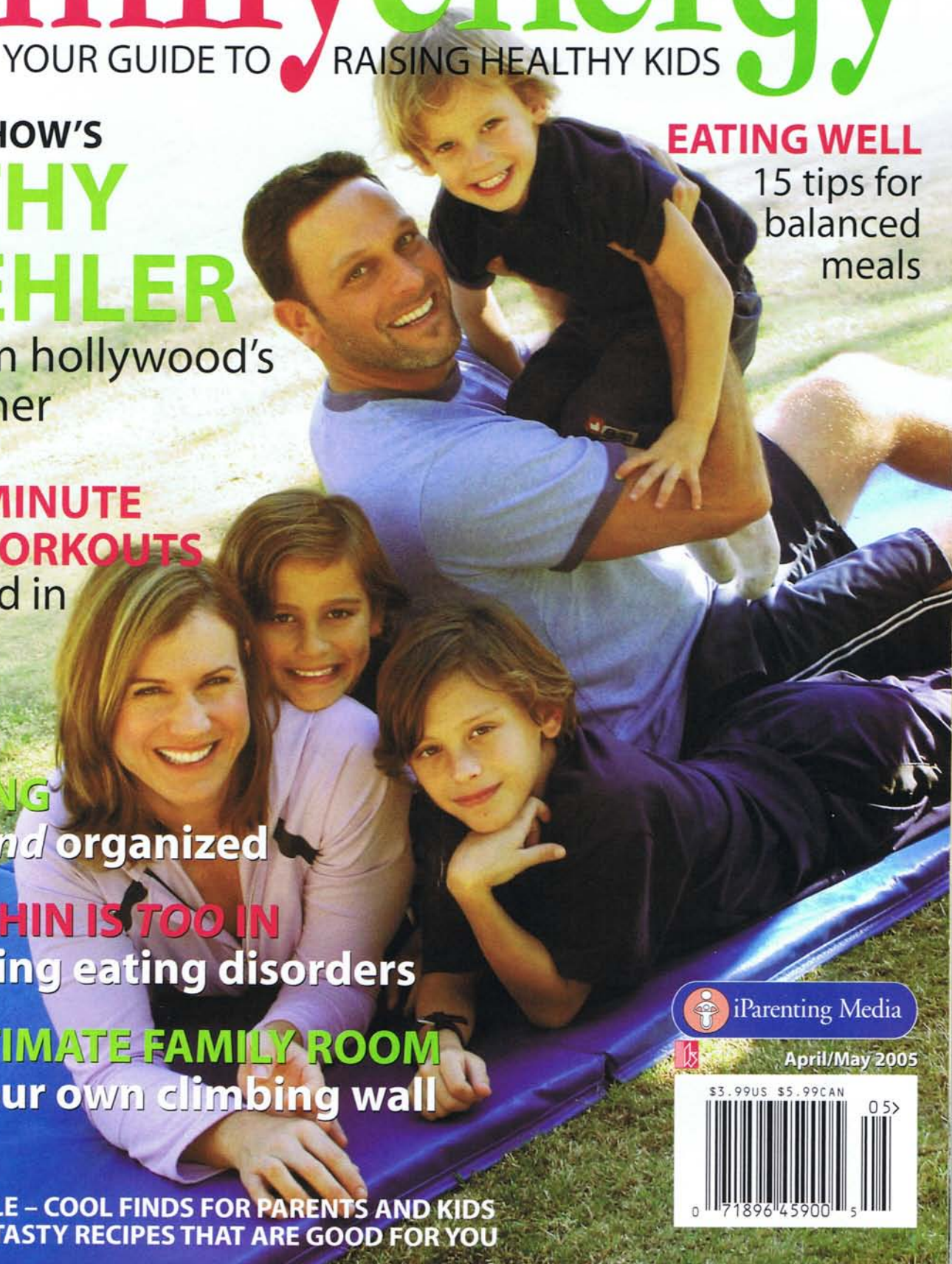
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STEP BY STEP - baby energy

we do some of the poses from our class, and she immediately smiles and forgets what she was fussing about."

BEYOND BONDING

Kenny and her daughter both benefit from the classes they're taking together. According to Skylar Hill-Jackson, owner of Baby & Me Pregnancy and Postpartum Fitness in Ontario, Canada, that's what "baby and me" classes should be all about. The company offers fitness and Pilates classes, yoga, stroller fitness classes and aquatics programs. All classes are located in neighborhoods to make them more accessible and to increase the chance that mothers will find like-minded moms with whom to bond.

"On the first day when the moms introduce themselves, we have them say what street they live on as well so they can figure out who lives close to them and perhaps make arrangements to get together outside of class," says Hill-Jackson. "This is great for new moms because it allows them to get out, meet friends and discuss parenting issues with moms who are going through the same thing at the same time."

Helen Garabedian, founder of Itsy-Bitsy Yoga and author of *Itsy Bitsy Yoga: Poses to Help Your Baby Sleep Longer, Digest Better and Grow Stronger* (Fireside, 2004), started teaching mom and baby yoga classes five years ago. According to Garabedian, she started up the classes not only so like-minded parents could meet those who share their parenting values, but also because she feels that yoga movements can help a baby learn important coping skills.

"Our classes incorporate a lot

of voice and eye contact," says Garabedian. "For example, we have a pose called 'I love you' that simulates the Moro [startle] reflex so that when the baby is frightened it helps them re-center and calm themselves."

Yoga classes have soared in popularity throughout the world in the last few years. Hill-Jackson attributes this to famous mom Madonna, who put yoga on the map when she was pregnant. Now many centers that offer baby and mom classes have a yoga class, and most yoga centers have a class that moms can take with their babies.

While yoga may be the newest thing, aquatics classes are definitely the mainstay of mom and baby bonding. YMCAs have long offered classes of this type, as do private fitness facilities.

Classes that teach songs, finger plays and nursery rhymes are found not only in centers that focus on baby and mom classes but also in libraries and community centers. Danelle Eikens, of Middleburg Heights, Ohio, takes a class at her local library and likes the fact that her daughter, Payton, is learning nursery rhymes and simple skills such as counting. "I was a teacher before becoming a stay-at-home mom so I was very interested in her learning at an early age," says Eikens.

Another class that's growing in popularity is sign language. Lora Heller founded Baby Fingers, a New York-based center where babies learn American Sign Language, because of her own experience working with hearing-impaired children. She feels that signing, in addition to verbal communication, strengthens the bond between mother and child

choosing a baby and me class

The following checklist is courtesy of Kim Balint, founder of Mind, Body and Baby, a Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.-based family fitness center.

✔ **Goals.** If your goal is to get in shape, look for an exercise class that Baby also can attend. If you want to stimulate your baby's intellect, look for a story or play group. If you just want to bond, something gentle, such as yoga, may be right for you.

✔ **Cleanliness.** The class should maintain a high standard of cleanliness, as a lot of work is done on the floor. Any toys or equipment should be thoroughly cleaned between classes.

✔ **Safety.** If the class is held in a facility that is not primarily geared toward baby classes, is the area baby proofed?

✔ **Sick Policy.** Does the facility enforce a policy of not bringing a sick baby to class? If your baby gets sick and you miss a class, can you make it up at no charge?

and reinforces vocabulary skills in children.

"The moms and babies that come here are developing a lifelong mode of communication and second language," says Heller. "It's really something special that happens between them." ✨

editor's pick

My Baby Can Talk - First Signs by Baby Hands Productions, Inc., is an iParenting Media Award winner that is a series of videos allowing parents and babies to bridge the gap between the time a baby can communicate with her hands and the time a baby can speak. Find out more at www.babyhandsproductions.com.

