

Consistency in your yoga practice, whether taking a yoga class and/or doing yoga at home is key to experiencing the many benefits yoga has to offer. Yoga can comprise the whole of an individual's exercise program and be done daily or most days of the week. Alternatively, yoga can be practiced less frequently as part of a regular exercise program in conjunction with activity that is more specifically geared to develop various aspects of health-related fitness (i.e., cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility).

Yoga offers a great way to stay active when you are traveling. You can take a foldable yoga mat or yoga gloves and socks on the road and practice in your hotel room, or take a local drop-in class in your destination city.

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A Complete Physical Activity Program

A well rounded program of physical activity includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps to maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high-intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2007, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation. Typical aerobic exercises include walking and running, stair climbing, cycling on a stationary or moving bike, rowing, cross-country skiing, and swimming.

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone and some programs may in fact result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.

Selecting and Effectively Using

A Yoga Class



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Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that even moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to longevity. A physically active person with such risk factors as high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can get real benefits from regular physical activity as part of daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more, regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine your suitability for beginning an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance because of dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?

What is Yoga?

Yoga is an ancient Indian practice and type of mind-body exercise that has been in existence for thousands of years. The term yoga means “yoke” or “union,” and yoga practice involves breath work (pranayama) to connect the mind and body, as well as to connect our thoughts and feelings with movement.

Yoga provides a number of well-documented physical, mental, and emotional benefits. These include reduced blood pressure, enhanced feelings of relaxation, stress reduction, improved digestion, better posture, increased strength and flexibility, and improved balance, among others. Yoga also has been shown to benefit individuals with chronic diseases and disabilities through improved body awareness and orientation, the development of focus and concentration, the encouragement of learning and creativity, and increased awareness of our connectedness to others.

Selecting a Yoga Class

You can choose from a wide variety of yoga classes offering different types of yoga and different teachers and styles. Selecting an appropriate class and teacher for your level of experience, health and/or fitness goals, and preferences can help yoga become an enjoyable experience that provides the benefits that you seek.

Types or styles of yoga vary in pace and emphasis from slower-paced practices that include breathing and meditation (Hatha yoga) to faster, flowing movement sequences combined with rhythmic breathing (Vinyasa-style yoga, such as Ashtanga

and Power yoga). Short descriptions of some of the different styles are provided below:

- **Ananda** – Provides a tool for spiritual growth while releasing tension; uses silent affirmations while holding poses.
- **Ashtanga** – A vigorous practice incorporating a fast-paced series of sequential postures that increase in difficulty.
- **Bikram** – Designed by Bikram Choudhury as a method of staying healthy from the inside out; involves practicing a series of 26 traditional Hatha yoga postures (13 standing and 13 sitting) in a hot environment (near 100° Fahrenheit); guaranteed to make you sweat!
- **Hatha** – A more relaxed, slower-paced practice that includes breathing and meditation exercises; emphasizes breathing, strength, and flexibility; good for beginner exercisers or those new to yoga.
- **Iyengar** – Developed by B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the most influential yogis of his time; focuses on proper alignment with the use of props; poses are typically held much longer than in other styles of yoga.
- **Jivamukti** – A highly meditative yet physically challenging form of yoga that includes vinyasa-style sequences of poses asanas, chanting, meditation, readings, music, and affirmations.
- **Kripalu** – Developed by Amrit Desai and the staff at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Massachusetts; three stages make up this practice: will practice, willful surrender, and meditation in motion; characterized by trusting the body's wisdom to move in a way needed to release tensions and enter more deeply into meditation.

- **Kundalini** – Incorporates postures with dynamic breathing techniques, chanting, and meditating to awaken the energy at the base of the spine and draw it upward through each of the seven energy centers of the body (chakras).
- **Power Yoga** – Developed by Bender Birch; a challenging and disciplined series of poses designed with the intention of creating heat and energy flow.
- **Sivananda** – Developed by Rama Berch, who created the yoga program from Dr. Deepak Chopra's Center for Well Being in La Jolla, Calif.; geared toward aiding participants in their journeys toward self-discovery.
- **Svarooopa** – Incorporates proper breathing (pranayama), exercise, relaxation (Savasana), and vegetarian diet with positive thinking (Vedanta) and meditation (dhyana).
- **Therapeutic** – Addresses all levels – physical, emotional, and spiritual – of the healing process to promote health, function, and enhanced quality of life for special populations (e.g., heart patients, hypertensives, cancer survivors, or others with physical limitations).
- **Viniyoga** - A gentle yet powerful and transformative practice in which poses are synchronized with the breath in sequences determined by the practitioner.
- **Vinyasa** – A flow-style of yoga that melds breathing with movement, similar to Ashtanga but with less repetition or following of a set sequence.
- **Yoga For Fitness** – Based upon the Hatha yoga practice, this fitness-based approach is tailored for the mainstream health club member. It utilizes strength, flexibility, balance and power to give you a full workout great for all levels.

Safety

There is an inherent safety partnership that exists between the participant and the instructor in yoga practice. The yoga instructor should be certified through or hold one or more credentials from an established and respected organization and have experience teaching yoga. Some certifications, such as Yoga Alliance's Registered Yoga Teacher – 200 and 500 hours (RYT-200 and RYT-500, respectively), require completion of a certain number and type of trainings along with a specified number of hours of yoga teaching. Ideally, the yoga instructor should minimize risk of injury to participants as well as have CPR/first aid training in order to be prepared to respond appropriately in the event of an emergency.

With regard to minimizing risk of injury, the instructor should have and be able to demonstrate his/her ability to modify poses and flow sequences for different levels of ability and physical limitations. Your yoga instructor may ask at the beginning of a class or series of classes about physical injuries or parts of the body that are healing or need protection. If he/she doesn't inquire, it's helpful to you and the instructor and in your best interests to let him/her know about any physical issues so s/he can offer modifications of poses and flow sequences before or during class. These modifications are important not only from a safety standpoint, but from the perspective of helping each participant optimize the yoga experience and reap as many of the potential benefits of a yoga practice as possible.

Like other workouts and exercise classes, a safe yoga class should include a warm-up of low- to moderate-intensity movements designed to increase

heart rate and respiration, increase blood flow to the muscles, and prepare the body for more intense activity. The warm-up may be followed by a work phase of more intense activity, which would be different from one yoga style to another. For example, the work phase might include a greater number of repetitions, holding poses for a longer period of time, and/or using more explosive movements such as jumping into or out of poses (e.g., forward fold to plank). A yoga class should end with some type of cool-down, which may include lower-intensity exercise, stretching, twisting poses, and a final relaxation.

For participants, it is vital we listen to our own bodies. We need to know our limits and respect them. Yoga often challenges us to find our "edge" – a place where we are "uncomfortably comfortable," where we feel *challenged, yet able* to hold a position or move safely through a flow sequence. It is important to remember that everyone brings a different body (with its unique anatomy, range of motion, function, and genetic potential), different histories with yoga and exercise in general, and different goals for his/her yoga practice. Thus, letting go of the need to compare ourselves to or compete with others helps us practice yoga in a way that is safe and appropriate for us as unique individuals. A good yoga teacher can help remind us of this and to listen to our bodies, but it's up to each of us to put these principles into practice as we do yoga. This might include modifying poses or movements so they are safe for our bodies or choosing to do different poses or movements that our bodies can handle safely, even when not prompted by the instructor.

Equipment and Clothing

The minimum equipment needed for yoga is a sticky mat (a mat your feet won't slide on, and that won't slide on the surface on which it's placed), or gloves and socks with rubber-like pads or dots on the palms and soles. These help participants hold their positions and move safely between poses without slipping and sliding. Mats come in different thicknesses, and participants can use two mats for extra cushioning for the knees and spine or other parts of the body when they are in contact with the mat and bearing bodyweight. Mats are also made of different materials, some of which are "eco-friendly." Some yoga mats are made especially for travel and fold up to take up minimal space in luggage. Mats vary in price, but can usually be purchased from a sporting goods store, a yoga or exercise studio or health/fitness facility, or online for \$10-\$40. Yoga mats should be cleaned regularly to prevent bacterial growth, either with a damp cloth or sponge and mild soap or detergent, or following the manufacturer's recommendations.

Additional types of equipment that may be used in yoga classes, or that can be purchased for home use, include blocks, straps, bolsters, and blankets for modifying poses to enhance technique and body position and/or increase safety and comfort for the participant.

Yoga clothing should be comfortable for the wearer and allow freedom of movement or full range of motion at all major joints of the body (e.g., shoulders, elbows, spine, hips, and knees.). Yoga clothing comes in a variety of colors and styles and at various prices, and is designed for a variety of body types. Because the body is moved through a

variety of positions and yoga classes are often co-ed, participants might wish to consider how their clothing fits and provides coverage as they move and bend.

Etiquette

When attending a yoga class in any setting, there are a few guidelines to follow to ensure that you and everyone in your class have a positive experience.

- **Arrive early** – Allow ample time for your mat and prop set up as well as personal preparation.
- **Enter quietly** – Enter the room/ studio gently, so as not to disturb others.
- **Be free of distraction** – Do not bring a cell phone, pager, etc. to class. This can disrupt you and others around you.
- **Be considerate** – Allow plenty of room between you and your neighbor for free movement. Also, if you must leave the room during class, do so quietly and discretely.

Other Considerations

It is more comfortable to practice yoga on a somewhat empty or empty stomach, so participants might choose to eat lightly in the minutes or hour before practice, or have a bigger meal two or more hours before, depending on what is comfortable and allows the maintenance of appropriate blood sugar levels. Yoga participants may want to have a bottle of water at hand if they get thirsty during practice as well as to rehydrate themselves after practice.

A Home Yoga Practice

Establishing and maintaining a home yoga practice

You can establish a yoga practice at home with minimum equipment and little more space than that required for a yoga mat. Choose a time to practice yoga that works with your schedule (morning, afternoon, or evening), and practice for an amount of time that is appropriate for your schedule, your level of experience (shorter duration for beginners, perhaps longer duration for intermediate and advanced practitioners), your desire, your lifestyle, and the results you seek.

Yoga can be practiced in silence or with music of your choice. It can be practiced alone using poses and flow series of your own creation, or as guided by an instructor and participants on video or DVD. If using a video or DVD, choose one based on the type or style of yoga and the instructor's credentials and experience.

How to maximize benefits

You may experience benefits such as a greater sense of relaxation and connectedness with your body in as little as five to 10 minutes of yoga per day, or develop greater strength, flexibility, and balance in a longer yoga practice lasting 30-90 minutes or more.

Yoga practice can also be tailored to focus on strengthening and stretching specific muscle groups critical to performance in a given sport, such as running, golf or tennis.