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# **“DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH, FEEL YOUNGER AND GET FITTER AND STRONGER?”**

## **“IT'S EASY WITH - THE *ULTIMATE* BEGINNERS GUIDE TO YOGA!”**

**TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE A LONGER,  
HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER LIFE...VISIT:**

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### **Table of Contents**

1. Types of Yoga: the Myriad Effect of Popularity.....	2
2. The Benefits of a Yoga Class.....	3
3. Dressed for Success: What to Wear to a Yoga Class.....	3
4. The Classroom "Don'ts: Etiquette in a Yoga Class.....	4
5. Get the Gear: Yoga Equipment.....	5
6. Home Sweet Home: Yoga on your Own.....	5
7. Sisters for Health: Yoga and Diet.....	6
8. A Complete Relaxing Breath: Three Part Breath.....	7
9. A Strong Foundation: Beginner Poses in Yoga.....	8
10. A Teaching Approach: Iyengar Yoga.....	9
11. Better Your Heart and Brain Power: Yoga as Meditation.....	9
12. Breath-Synchronized Movement: Vinyasa Yoga.....	10
13. Bun in the Oven: Practicing Yoga While Pregnant.....	11
14. Detox by Sweat: Hot Yoga.....	12
15. Drishti: A New View on Yoga.....	12
16. East Meets West: Yoga and other Forms of Exercise.....	13
17. Eight Limbs: Ashtanga Yoga.....	14
18. Family Time: Yoga for Parents and Their Children.....	14

19. Send in the Stork: Yoga for Infertility.....	15
20. Stress Relief by Relaxation: Yoga as a Help for Insomnia.....	16
21. "Sun-Moon": Hatha Yoga.....	16
22. The Deeper Side: Yoga as a Religion and Philosophy.....	17
23. Untapped Spinal Energy: Kundalini Yoga.....	18
24. The Next Step: From Student to Teacher.....	19

## 1. Types of Yoga: the Myriad Effect of Popularity

Name a method or philosophy, and it'll have countless variations. Yoga is no exception. Each of the most popular types of yoga stresses different things, making it ideal for different people. However, all forms stress correct fundamentals and pose.

Iyengar involves the use of props and slow pose progression so correct form is learned, making it useful for beginners or people not used to exercise. The many props also assist people with back or joint problems. It focuses on certain classical poses of yoga, providing the fundamentals for any other style of yoga you happen to try. Iyengar yoga eases tension and chronic pain, while toning muscles.

Athletes prefer Ashtanga, commonly called "power yoga." The meditation element of yoga is downplayed, and the building of flexibility, stamina, and strength is heavily stressed. A warm temperature is beneficial to this style, to lessen muscle strain. Ashtanga yoga focuses on breathing control with the movements and on the eyes' focal point. Movement between poses is swift to make a physically demanding workout, even for beginner lessons, so people not used to exercise shouldn't start with it.

Bikram is better known as "hot yoga," because this highly physical and intense type takes place in a hot room. It's been shown to relieve chronic pain and disease symptoms with regular practice. Bikram yoga should be attempted by people somewhat used to exercise.

Hatha is a comparatively mellow form of yoga, and most other popular types of yoga are its derivatives. Comfortable pacing is stressed, as is taking your time with the poses. Meditation and breathing are stressed. Hatha yoga is considered a relaxing method for winding down at the end of the day. In general, though, the term can apply to most physical types of yoga.

Kundalini incorporates chanting (or mantras), guided relaxation, meditations, and visualizations into yoga. It seeks to heal and "purify" the body, emotions, and mind. Precise postures, sounds, and breathing are combined for specific results. People overcoming addictions have found Kundalini yoga particularly useful. Sivananda is another precise type, like Bikram and Kundalini, with a set series of 12 poses. Sivananda yoga uses mantras, relaxation, breathing exercises, and the Sun Salute as its basis.

Kripalu works in stages, though it's overall smoother, more spontaneous, and meditation oriented than other types. The first stage involves short poses, and the second stage lengthens the poses and adds meditation. The final stage in Kripalu yoga involves swift spontaneous changing of yoga postures while meditating.

Vinyasa means "breath-synchronized movement." It's generally vigorous (though this term is, like "Hatha," used to describe a number of class types). Vinyasa yoga focuses on a series of Sun Salutations.

## **2. The Benefits of a Yoga Class**

When you first begin studying yoga, no matter what kind you choose, you have the option of taking a class or trying it on your own at home. Many beginners feel out of shape and uncomfortable and opt to work out at home instead of in a class setting, but this can actually be detrimental in the end. There are many benefits to taking a yoga class, so be sure to consider this option if you are thinking about starting a yoga workout routine.

Classes provide stability. Our lives are busy, and it might be difficult to fit a yoga class into your schedule, but if that is the case, it is also probably difficult to fit in exercise at all. By taking a class, you become more motivated to actually work out—if you paid the money for instruction, you will feel as though it would be stupid to skip class. Your instructor can also keep you motivated to come back by being fun and knowledgeable. If, after three classes, you dread going, consider a different workout option or a different class in yoga.

Your instructor's expertise is a great benefit as well. He or she can help you perform the correct poses because a teacher can see your body while you cannot. Even if you work out at home in front of a mirror, you cannot completely see your body. If you get into bad habits, poor posture will stick with you and can actually harm the body. Difficult poses can even be dangerous. By going to a class, you can be sure that you are getting the maximum benefit from your routine and you can stay safe.

A yoga class also brings together many people with a common interest. In your class, you should be closely paying attention to the teacher. However, after class, you may find that you have other things in common with class members as well. You can trade healthy recipes, for example, with others in your class who like to cook with body-happy foods. You can also learn about yoga events and news if you join a class. Go a step farther and take a class offered at a gym, so that you buy a gym membership. This will give you access to exercise equipment and other classes as well, in case you find that yoga is not for you. Learning yoga can be a fun experience; by taking a class you can make sure that it is most beneficial to your health needs.

## **3. Dressed for Success: What to Wear to a Yoga Class**

When you begin practicing yoga, one thing that you must consider (and many people forget this step until it is too late) is what you will wear. Yoga is unlike most exercises in that you will find yourself in many different positions in a single routine. Therefore, you need clothing that will be comfortable and also will not create problems as you move in unconventional ways. Wearing the correct kind of clothing is especially important when you begin going to a yoga class. Fortunately, many clothing companies have a variety of products made for students practicing yoga, since this form of exercise has becoming increasingly popular in recent years.

Choose yoga clothing that is comfortable for your body when you are moving. Clothing that is too tight may “ride up” and shift in uncomfortable ways as your limbs rub against one another, for example. You also want clothing that makes you feel good about your body—no matter what your shape or size, you don't want to spend the entire class feeling self-conscious because you think your pants make you look fat. In all honesty, everyone is probably too engrossed in class to notice what you are wearing, but poor clothing can be a mental block and prevent you from learning.

Poor clothing choices can also be embarrassing. Remember that yoga involves inverting your body in many cases. Clothing that is too loose can sag or fall, revealing excess amounts of your body. This is embarrassing for you and makes others in the class uncomfortable. Clothing that is too tight can be stretched too far and rip during class. Tight clothing can also be too revealing if there are members of the opposite sex enrolled in your yoga class. Be respectful of those around you and stay covered as much as possible while still feeling comfortable.

Yoga is an exercise, and like all exercises, you will sweat. Take this into consideration when choosing the fabric that you want to wear. Some fabric absorbs sweat more readily than others do, allowing you to remain dry during your workout, at least to some extent. If your clothing is wet, it could be dangerous to attempt some positions, and the same is true if your clothing is too loose.

If you aren't sure what clothing to wear, practice some of the basic and inverted positions at home in various outfits and choose the one that is most comfortable. Your teacher or an advanced student may also be able to offer advice. Yoga clothing is an important thing to consider when beginning a yoga class.

#### **4. The Classroom "Don'ts: Etiquette in a Yoga Class**

Basic yoga may look easy, but it's a tough flexibility and strength workout. One of the easiest ways to learn the skills you need for yoga is to take a class. However, as with all kinds of classes, it is important to understand the basic rules of etiquette before you sign up. By following these rules, you and those around you will be more comfortable.

First of all, keep a positive attitude. Don't lose patience. Like anything else, yoga takes time to learn and to develop skill in. Don't let the frustration drive you away. (Though, if after awhile in a class you're more frustrated than before, you might want to try a different instructor or class.) If you are feeling negatively, it is best not to voice your frustration during class, but instead to speak with the teacher afterwards.

Don't put your mat too close to or too far from the other students around you. You need enough space to stretch out your arms and not touch your neighbor. On the other hand, don't take any more space than you need. Crowded classrooms need all the space they can get.

Don't wear clothes that will fall off or show too much skin. Wear clothing that is comfortable and will stretch, but bear in mind that you might be doing such unusual positions as turning upside down. Showing skin can make others feel uncomfortable and can create embarrassing situations if your clothing slips.

Don't stare; you may be more advanced than those around you, or you may be the only first beginner in the room. Everyone starts somewhere, and everyone has his or her strengths and weaknesses. Respect that. Staring at someone who is or is not doing the techniques correctly is unfair—stare at the teach instead, that is what an instructor is for.

Don't overstrain yourself—if you can't perform a stance, just do it as far as you can or substitute the alternate stance that the instructor will probably suggest. Don't force yourself to do something you can't yet just because you're too embarrassed to admit that you need the alternate stance. Don't overestimate your abilities. Injuring yourself can disrupt the entire class. Avoid other interruptions as well and don't draw attention to yourself. Respect other students and yoga's goal of peace and overall balance (inner and outer). Avoid chatting and loud breathing, and turn your phone off.

Don't be offended if the instructor corrects your pose. You can't see what you're doing; he or she can, and the instructor is there to help and teach you. It's meant to be help, not an insult. That is what classes are for—help with your technique—so by learning the rules of etiquette, you can be sure to enjoy class and keep it an enjoyable place for those around you.

## **5. Get the Gear: Yoga Equipment**

If you are a beginning yoga student, there are a number of items you may want to consider purchasing to help with your training. Yoga equipment will keep you safe, and also help you find the correct posture for various poses. In a class, a teacher or gym may provide the basic equipment you need, but if you are doing yoga at home or wish to have your own items, you'll need to go shopping.

First and foremost, it is important for anyone practicing yoga to have a good mat. Mats come in all shapes and sizes, so you have many choices when making a purchase. Look for a mat that is large enough for you when you are sitting. You also want to make sure your mat is dense enough so you don't sink into it and wobble when you are doing poses. Mats that are lined with non-slide material are your safest bet, as they will protect you even when you are doing more complicated poses. Whatever you choose, be sure that it is washable—many can be cleaned in a washing machine. Remember, yoga is exercise, so wash your mat every few sessions to prevent the spread of bacteria and other germs.

There are a number of other items you can buy to use in your sessions as well. Many things can be used to correct your posture. Blocks made especially for yoga students are available in most stores. Made of dense foam, they can be used to help learn specific positions. They are light and durable, so you can easily take them to and from class. Bolsters can also be used for the same purpose, and although they are heavier, they more easily conform to the shape you need.

Next, you may consider purchasing a bag to carry your equipment. Mats can be large and cumbersome, and many yoga companies make special bags in which they will fit, along with your other yoga items. Again, remember to find a material that is not only durable, but also washable, so that you can prevent the spread of germs.

More advanced yoga students may wish to consider other props to help with stretching and correcting postures. A yoga sling, for example, can be mounted to any ceiling and used to do inverted positions. Yoga ropes also come in handy here, and sets of ropes can be mounted to your walls and ceilings to help your posture and flexibility. If those sound a bit too advanced for you, consider sandbags with handles. These can be used to create a bigger stretch when you are doing certain poses.

Lastly, you can purchase yoga books and videos to help you continue the learning process at home if you are in class, or on a deeper level if you already study at home. Learning new poses is always easiest when you have a live instructor, but videos and books can double in a pinch and they make great gifts for any yoga student in your life.

## **6. Home Sweet Home: Yoga on your Own**

When you first begin practicing yoga as a form of exercise or meditation, you must first decide how you want to go about learning it. You have two basic choices. First, you can learn from an instructor, either with a one on one private session or in a class setting. Secondly, you can choose to practice yoga from the comfort of your own home. Home practice is common for both experts and beginning students, and while there are many benefits from a class, you can learn yoga at home successfully as well.

When you are practicing yoga or any sort of exercise at home, the concern that should cross your mind first is safety. Make sure that you are attempting routines that are correct for your body and that you are not inhibited by your surroundings. Therefore, it may be necessary to move furniture or lock the door when you are doing your yoga routine. Imagine if you don't: your children could run in, startling you, which will cause you to lose your balance during a difficult pose and bump your head on the coffee table as you fall. Be safe—practice in an environment that will not harm you!

On your own, you will have to invest more money to get started at the same level as at a class. Yoga requires little equipment—in fact, a mat should do the trick. However, to learn correct posture for various positions on your own, you will need to invest in learning tools such as videos and books. It may also be necessary to buy props to help correct your posture. These are invaluable since you will not have an instructor to look at your position and tell you if you are doing it incorrectly. Props you may wish to research include bolsters, slings, ropes, sandbags, and blocks. A yoga instructor or advanced student can recommend specific brands that will work better than others will in a home setting.

The benefit to doing yoga exercises at home is that you don't have to conform to a gym or class schedule. You can practice yoga late at night after most gyms are closed or early in the morning before most gyms are open. This, then, becomes the preferred method for those who work odd hours or those who travel.

Sometimes you cannot take a yoga class without buying a complete gym membership. A gym membership can be invaluable, but if you will not use it or already belong to another gym, it may be a waste of money to purchase a membership just to take a yoga class, especially if you are not yet sure yoga is for you.

There are a number of resources to help you get started practicing yoga at home. The best thing to do is to try both learning at home and in a class setting so that you can compare the two and decide what is best for you and for the health of your body.

## **7. Sisters for Health: Yoga and Diet**

One healthy turn flows into another, making diet and yoga common sisters in the same person. Exercise is only part of what makes a healthy body and mind. Diet also contributes to this. Exercise all you like; if your diet's poor, your mind and body will still suffer for it, and you won't get the most out of what exercise you are able to perform. A healthy diet is therefore necessary.

Many people know yoga as a flexibility and strength-building method of exercise, or perhaps as a meditation method. Yoga can encompass much more than that. Its focus on serenity and peace can be applied to such mundane matters as diet.

Yoga approaches the body from the view of controlling powers that must be balanced for health. "Health" refers to someone with a peaceful and cheerful mind as well as a vigorous body. A

healthy individual will also sleep well, which few of us can claim to do. This is where a diet comes in addition to yoga as exercise. The exercise will wear the body out, and the diet will ensure that the body (and mind) receive the nutrition required for optimum function.

A "yogic" diet focuses on nonviolence and purification, making it vegetarian if not vegan, and different types of diets exist. Different foods can be declared "good" or "bad" from their respective humors, and the climate in an individual's location also changes what his or her diet should be. Diet should also reflect a person's age and bodily health. In general, yogic diets stress the use of natural foods, avoiding processed and artificial foods, while preferring foods native to your locale and climate.

According to one guideline, mealtimes should be fixed at particular times each day. People should limit themselves to two meals a day, with strict rules about what constitutes a "snack" instead of a "meal," in order to keep from overstraining the digestive system. Diet should also be balanced amongst the six flavors: bitter, salty, severe, sour, spicy and sweet. Not all yogic diets state this; on the extreme, a yogic diet can focus on the consumption of raw foods, frequently interrupted by fasting.

You have to find your own nutritious diet that works for you to match with yoga as exercise. Bear in mind, though, that not all diets will work for everyone. Consulting with a professional nutritionist is a good idea if you want an idea of where to start for a diet personalized to your own health needs.

## **8. A Complete Relaxing Breath: Three Part Breath**

The Dirga Pranayama (Three Part Breath) is one of the basic pranayamas (or breathing exercises) of yoga. Sometimes called the "Complete Breath," this pranayama is often the first one that beginners learn. The Three Part Breath calms the mind, centers it, and draws the breather's concentration into the moment.

The Three Part Breath is therefore useful to learn even for those who wish to relax. Knowing how to relax (and actually relaxing) lessens the harmful effects of stress on the body and makes restful sleep easier to accomplish. It encourages proper breathing from the diaphragm, clears residual carbon dioxide from the lungs, and oxygenates the blood.

It's often done while sitting comfortably in a cross-legged position, though it can also be done while lying flat on the back. Beginners may find it easier to learn this breath while lying down, since you can better feel the breath moving through your body.

To perform the Three Part Breath, lie on your back (or sit in the comfortable cross-legged position) and close your eyes. If you're sitting, make sure your spine is straight and erect. Relax your body and face. Observe your natural breathing patterns while trying to avoid any notice of distracting thoughts so your focus is on the breathing.

Inhale through your nose, filling the belly with your breath as if it's a balloon; exhale, expelling all breath from your belly through your nose, pulling in the stomach to make sure it's empty of air. Make sure your breathing is relaxed and smooth, without straining. Repeat this several times, and then shift to the next type of breath.

Perform the next inhale like the one before, except, when the belly is full of air, breath in a little more so the air enters the lower chest. Your rib cage should expand. Exhale from the chest first, then exhale from the belly as described for the previous type of breath. Repeat this for several

times before transitioning to the third and final type of breath in this pranayama.

Inhale into the belly, then lower chest, then upper chest so it expands and lifts your collarbones. Exhale through the nose, from the upper chest first, then lower chest, then the belly. Continue this for about ten breaths.

To continue with the Three Part Breath, restart with the belly breath. With practice, you'll be able to transition smoothly between each type of breath in this pranayama without pausing. This method of breathing is something most people can use and is especially helpful when first starting a new yoga workout.

## **9. A Strong Foundation: Beginner Poses in Yoga**

Like many things in life, yoga poses are cumulative. Beginner poses provide a foundation for later yoga poses. Though the only way to adequately learn a pose is from an instructor, although some can be described as examples.

The base for all standing poses is the "Mountain Pose," which strengthens your thighs and improves your posture. Stand with your big toes touching and evenly distribute your weight throughout your feet. Press your feet into the floor, while tightening your thighs to raise them. Draw in your belly, tuck in your tailbone, stack the shoulders above the pelvis, and widen your collarbones. You might want to practice against a wall to feel how the pose aligns.

The "Staff Pose" is the foundation for all seated poses and can be thought of as a seated version of the Mountain Pose. This pose strengthens legs and improves bodily alignment. Sit with your legs straight in front of you, engage the thighs, and flex your feet (your heels might leave the floor). Lengthen your spine and stack your shoulders over your hips. You might want to start while sitting on padding, and if your hamstrings are too tight, you'll have to bend your knees some.

Besides these two base poses, a common intermediate pose to transfer you into another pose is the "Downward Facing Dog." This pose strengthens and stretches your entire body, and it's also used as both a resting and standing pose. (It's a mild inversion, so it should be avoided during pregnancy or menstruation.) From a crawling position (wrists beneath the shoulders and knees beneath the hips), curl your toes under and push back while raising the hips and strengthening your legs. Spread your fingers and press from the forearms into the floor, with your upper arms rotated outwards to widen your collarbones. Shoulder blades should be geared downwards, and you should engage your quadriceps to take pressure off the arms. Rotate your thighs inwards to keep the tail high and let your heels to the floor; though if you're not yet flexible enough for your heels to touch the floor, don't step forward so they do.

Most if not all yoga routines end with the "Corpse Pose," the traditional pose of resting and rejuvenation. With your eyes closed, lie flat on your back, with feet and arms falling out to either side, slightly separated from your body, with your palms up. Relax your entire body, face included, and breathe naturally (you should feel heavy). When leaving the pose, begin by deepening your breathing. Move your outer extremities and draw the movement inwards, bringing the knees to the chest and rolling over. Slowly sit up before opening your eyes.

## 10. A Teaching Approach: Iyengar Yoga

Developed in the 1930's by a yogi who wanted to improve his health despite his tuberculosis, malaria, and typhoid, Iyengar yoga gets its name from its creator, B.K.S. Iyengar. B.K.S. Iyengar was born in 1918 and suffered from numerous ailments when he was younger. He now teaches yoga (though over 80 years old) at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune, India, which he initiated in honor of his wife. Two fellow world-renowned yoga experts assist him: Geeta, his oldest daughter, and Prashant, his son. B.K.S. Iyengar has taught such notables as the Queen mother of Belgium, as well as having taught special classes for military academies and commandos.

His writings are considered amongst the top yoga texts, especially his work *Light on Yoga*, first published in 1966 and now translated into 18 languages. This man's methods are so prevalent that most other forms of yoga will include elements of Iyengar, like a Hatha yoga lesson that lets a beginner use props. Props in general are a modern addition to yoga, from the Iyengar influence.

Iyengar as a modern form of Hatha yoga uses a countless number of props to assist the yogi in reaching different poses, lending itself to beginners not used to exercise and to people with back and joint problems, though that doesn't mean this type of yoga is easy. Progression from pose to pose is slow, making proper alignment critical in each pose. This type of yoga is meticulous, for every detail of bodily position must be correct. Even yoga students advanced with other types will learn Iyengar to correct their incorrect alignment.

Proper alignment is the number one focus of Iyengar yoga, for it declares that there is only one proper way to do each pose, which a student will learn through practice. Props are used as needed to enable a student to reach proper alignment. Iyengar stresses certain classical poses, making it a useful foundation for people who might want to use it as a method to jumpstart into other methods.

Iyengar yoga tones muscles, easing tension and chronic pain in the meantime. Nonetheless, it has no flow from pose to pose. Between each pose, the yogi rests in Corpse or Child's pose. This lack of flow makes it less of a cardiovascular workout than the other forms of yoga, though its use of props makes it more attainable for a wider population. If you are looking for a program to begin a yoga regimen, try this form to learn correct alignment and start slow, working up to more difficult forms of yoga.

## 11. Better Your Heart and Brain Power: Yoga as Meditation

Yoga developed as a worldview, as a lifestyle. It integrates the asanas (bodily poses) and pranayamas (breathing exercises) with the concept of meditation to make the yogi at peace with the world.

Meditation comes from intense concentration, where the individual focuses so thoroughly on a single object that he or she thinks of nothing besides his or her awareness of that object (Some religions may find that their idea of prayer could fall under this definition). Yoga takes that further, making meditation the highest element of the Eight Limbs of Yoga.

These "eight limbs" define Yoga as a lifestyle: your attitude to the world around you is followed by your attitudes towards yourself, physical posturing, breathing exercises, withdrawing

the senses, concentrating, contemplating, and finally enlightenment. Enlightenment, better known as a state of bliss, comes only as a result of full use and development of the other seven. Meditation combines withdrawing the senses, concentrating, and contemplating to be the final state that can be accomplished before bliss.

At any rate, meditation calms the mind and offers a number of health benefits even before enlightenment. Regular meditation can help reduce anxiety and stress, lowering blood pressure and decreasing risk of heart attack. It can improve concentration, clarity of thought, and release your creative side.

Some research suggests that meditation with yoga increases matter in the brain's cortex, specifically in the areas involved in processing cognitive, emotional, and sensory data. Meditation may also slow natural shrinkage of the frontal cortex due to aging. The 20 participants on average meditated for 40 minutes a day. Most change happened in their brains' right hemispheres.

That's not to say that meditation is easy. Clearing the mind of extraneous thought is difficult, and all thought even more so. Learning to meditate will take work.

To start, sit comfortably somewhere with your back and head straight. You may find a basic breathing exercise useful to help. Close your eyes, breathe through your nose, and focus on that breath. Cool air enters; warm air leaves. Keep your focus on your breathing, redirecting wandering thoughts that way. Start with short meditations of a few minutes and work your way up to longer. Beginners might find it easier to start with an intermediate method of counting their breaths, counting to four before restarting.

## **12. Breath-Synchronized Movement: Vinyasa Yoga**

Like the term "Hatha," Vinyasa Yoga can be used to refer to a number of class types. As a specific type of yoga, it refers to yoga with poses that flow into each other consistent with the breathing. This breathing-oriented flow of poses makes it swift and vigorous in most cases. This is included in Ashtanga yoga (better known as "Power yoga").

In reference to poses, Vinyasa can describe the poses performed between repeats of "Downward Facing Dog" in a Sun Salutation: Plank, "Four Limbed Staff", and "Upward Facing Dog".

To enter the Plank pose from Downward Facing Dog, bring your torso forward until your body is straight and your shoulders are directly over your wrists (comparable to a push-up position). Press down firmly through your forearms and hands, widen your shoulder blades, and press back through the heels, regardless of whether your heels touch the floor or not. Make sure your neck stays in line with your spine. Once you've mastered it, you can try performing the pose with one leg lifted at a time.

From Plank, enter the Four Limbed Staff by bending your arms straight back, hugging your upper arms to your sides. Lower yourself to the floor until your forearms and upper arms are at a right angle, keeping your body level throughout. Push back on your heels while pressing into your palms. (Beginners can leave their knees on the floor until they build the strength to hold up their bodies.) Once you've mastered this pose, you can try shifting into this pose while leaving one leg up from the advanced Plank pose.

To progress into Upward Facing Dog, tuck in your toes to roll over your feet as you come forward. Don't let your thighs touch the floor. Keep the legs tensed and off the floor, pressing into

the floor with the tops of your feet and with your palms. Make sure your shoulders remain over the wrists, and drop your hips. Beginners might find it easier to transition by dropping their thighs to the floor, flipping their feet over one at a time, then raising their legs again to move into Upward Facing Dog.

These beginner yoga poses require concentration to master. Many beginners find it difficult to master these poses, much less to do them swiftly in time to breathing, which is where the difficulty in Vinyasa Yoga arises.

### **13. Bun in the Oven: Practicing Yoga While Pregnant**

Yoga students who have recently found out they are pregnant may still practice this form of exercise, contrary to myths that it will harm the baby to work out. In fact, exercise does just the opposite—when done correctly, it creates a healthy environment for your baby. Therefore, you can begin yoga for the first time if you are pregnant as well. There are certain poses to avoid and things to consider, so carefully learn about prenatal yoga before you begin or continue practicing this form of exercise. Your pediatrician may be able to direct you to yoga classes specifically for women who are expecting. Be sure that whatever you are doing is safe for you and the baby.

Yoga is beneficial because it is a mental exercise as well as a physical one. Those who practice yoga can easily relax and control their breathing. This will help you during labor, especially if you are opting to give birth without the use of drugs. It can also help you stay calm in the later stages of pregnancy, when many soon-to-be mothers become easily frustrated.

There are, however, some rules you should know if you are practicing yoga while you are pregnant. First, stay hydrated, stopping often for water breaks. If you get too overheated, your core body temperature rises even more, which can harm the baby. For this reason, “hot” yoga is dangerous and should be avoided while you are pregnant. Also take in extra calories—remember you are eating for two, and exercise takes away calories from both you and your baby.

There are certain poses you should avoid, as they are not safe for your baby. Lying flat on your back, for example, can cut off blood flow to your brain and to the uterus, making you dizzy and causing developmental problems for your baby. After the first trimester, this is not safe. Also skip positions that are inverted, or those which require great amounts of balance. Remember that your stomach is growing every day, so you will never be able to fully get used to your new shape and stay balanced. Falling can hurt you and your baby. If the position includes major twisting or stretching in the abdominal region, they may also not be best for you and your baby. Finally, avoid transitions in which you must stand quickly from a laying or sitting position, since this can be uncomfortable and cause you to be dizzy, as well as restrict blood flow to your uterus.

A number of positions, however, can be very helpful. Most pregnant women, even if they do not practice yoga, like to stretch using a squatting pose, for example. A yoga instructor can recommend other positions that will make labor less strenuous as well. Speak with your doctor, as always, before beginning a new exercise routine, but consider yoga to help you and your baby stay healthy.

## 14. Detox by Sweat: Hot Yoga

Properly named "Bikram yoga" from its creator, Bikram Choudhury, this type of yoga gets its nickname from it being practiced in rooms of 95-105 °F (or 35-41 °C). High humidity is also common. This heat increases bodily flexibility, lowering risk of muscular injury. The profuse sweating brought on by room temperature and the yoga session detoxifies the body. Hot temperatures also develop muscle tone, increase the probability of weight loss, and strengthen the immune system.

Bikram Choudhury's Hot Yoga method includes a set series of 26 poses, including two breathing exercises. Each breathing exercise is performed twice per 90-minute class. The classroom includes carpet and mirrors. It's a very intense, highly physical workout. Regular practice of Bikram yoga has been proven to relieve chronic pain and disease symptoms.

Since this yoga master, born in 1946, is still living, he can file lawsuits. And he does. He refuses to allow his name to be attached to generic yoga practiced in a hot room, demanding that instructors of Bikram yoga follow his proscribed yoga methods and be properly certified from his institute, the Yoga College of India, founded in 1974. He has tried to copyright his series of 26 poses and tries to claim rights over all sequences that have substantial similarity. His methods of self-expansion (like seeking to open a franchise of yoga studios) bother some people. He teaches at Yoga College in Mumbai, India, as well as other worldwide locations.

Thus, the term "Hot Yoga" also comes into use to avoid lawsuit. Any yoga that takes place in a hot room might be called Hot Yoga; it may or may not precisely follow Bikram Choudhury's precise proscribed methods. If you want to take a Bikram yoga class, make sure the studio you choose for your class is certified to teach the method.

When taking a Hot Yoga class, you must have your own mat and towel to handle the profuse sweat. Most students also choose to wear little clothing, to avoid overheating. Drink plenty of water before and after the session (not caffeinated beverages), and avoid eating for two hours prior to the class. You should drink well over eight glasses of water on days you have Hot Yoga classes.

Pregnant women should not practice Hot Yoga. It raises the core body temperature. The individual who attempts Hot Yoga must have a high heat tolerance and be somewhat accustomed to exercise and yoga. Beginners often find the environment difficult to learn in.

## 15. Drishti: A New View on Yoga

Yoga is a form of exercise that stems from Eastern religions based on mediation. Because of yoga's origins, many of the words used in atypical yoga session are Sanskrit, and beginning yoga students may have a difficult time remembering their meanings. One such word is "drishti" and as you become a more advanced student, you will learn the power of drishti, or view. Most yoga teachers stress that drishti can help improve your posture during poses, and it can also help you with your meditation practices as you learn to use yoga for this purpose. By understanding the power of drishti, you can better understand how yoga works on both physical and spiritual levels.

Ancient yoga teachers and practitioners found that wherever your gaze lies, your attention follows. Have you ever heard the expression, "Keep your eye on the ball"? This is the same principle. In yoga as a religious practice, as well as to benefit our health, the ultimate goal is to calm the mind. Yoga seeks to relieve the stress of your mind by helping you focus and thinking more

clearly. By fixing your gaze on a single point (a drishti), you can hone the skills you need to bring your mind to a single point as well. Drishti seeks to block out external distractions so that the mind is wholly focused on itself.

When meditating, a good drishti would be your breathing. If you keep your eyes open as you meditate, you can also use an outside source, like the tip of your nose or the flame of a candle. When practicing yoga, simply choose a point in the room on which to fix your gaze and your mind. Choose something you can naturally see as you do the pose. This can be very helpful when holding poses for an extended period of time. For beginning students, the drishti will be the instructor. Remember that as you advance, your understanding of the use of drishti will advance as well.

Drishti should not strain the eyes or interfere with your pose or routine. If you are religious, a religious symbol, such as a picture of a Hindu God or the Christian cross can be effectively used as drishti. Some types of yoga have specific drishti that are used for specific poses. For example, during downward facing dog, you would fix your gaze upon your navel. Your instructor should be able to further explain the use of a drishti and give you recommendations on what to use for specific poses.

## **16. East Meets West: Yoga and other Forms of Exercise**

Yoga is a type of meditative exercise that has roots in the Far East religious traditions—Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. Today, many people have dropped the religious aspects of this art of the body and simply practice yoga techniques for health benefits. The various stretches and strength-building exercises done in yoga can build muscles, increase flexibility, and help you burn fat. Yoga can also be used in conjunction with traditional Western forms of exercise. In fact, by combining yoga with cardiovascular and/or weight training, you can help your body be the healthiest it can possibly be.

Yoga is traditionally seen as a routine of exercises that will rejuvenate the body. That is, although yoga is a difficult workout, it should make you energized as opposed to draining your body and making you feel tired. Therefore, when pairing yoga with other forms of exercise, do yoga first. Many people like to use yoga as a way to warm up the muscles before running, lifting weights, biking, or doing other cardiovascular or strength-training exercises. Warming up is an important step, and yoga is a great way to do this.

Yoga can also teach breathing to prepare you for other exercises. In yoga classes, students must often learn breathing techniques that help calm the spirit and focus the mind. These techniques allow you to breathe fully, allowing more oxygen to reach your brain and other parts of your body. By practicing yoga, you will be able to do cardiovascular exercises for a longer period of time, since you will not be so quickly out of breath.

Because yoga helps you increase flexibility, this can also help you prevent injuries when doing other forms of exercise or when playing sports. Many athletes learn early on to stretch their muscles before a game or practice—yoga can be viewed as an entire exercise regimen focused on stretching muscles. It also helps minimize and prevent injuries because yoga allows you to find your limits. This is important when practicing any sort of physical activity.

As always, speak with a doctor or other health care professional before you begin participating in a new kind of exercise routine. Yoga is safest when practiced in a class setting with a certified instructor. Ask your class's teacher for tips on how to incorporate yoga into all of your other exercise routines as well, because this will help you to get the most benefit possible out of any

workout session.

## **17. Eight Limbs: Ashtanga Yoga**

Ashtanga means "eight limbs" in Sanskrit, a reference to eight elements that define as a lifestyle. These "limbs" cover your attitudes towards the world around you, your attitudes towards yourself, the poses, breathing exercises, the withdrawal of the senses, concentration, contemplation, and enlightenment.

As a type of yoga, Ashtanga is better known as "power yoga." This specialized form of Hatha yoga (which uses the third and fourth of the eight limbs, poses and breathing exercises) provides an intense workout. Six series of poses within Ashtanga yoga allow for steps of progression in skill, strength, and flexibility. After learning the order of poses from an instructor (the first series includes 75 poses and can take two hours to complete), students often practice Ashtanga independently. This allows them to progress at their own pace to master each series before attempting to learn the next.

With 75 poses in the first series alone, Ashtanga yoga can be difficult to learn, especially with the Sanskrit names.

Many athletes prefer Ashtanga yoga because of its vigorous full-body workout. With meditation downplayed and the poses emphasized, "power yoga" focuses on building flexibility, stamina, and strength, tied into breathing control, with breathing synchronized with the poses. Each breath correlates with one pose. The focal point of the eyes is also controlled, to create a unified control of the looking point, the breathing, and the bodily position.

"Intense" describes Ashtanga yoga as a whole. This type of yoga stresses the synchronized breathing and vigorous poses to produce intense internal heat and to detoxify the body (organs and muscles) by profuse sweating. Make sure you have time for a shower after the Ashtanga yoga lesson! The results include improved circulation and a body that's both strong and lithe.

A warm environment best suits Ashtanga yoga to comfort the muscles and ease their flexibility. A proper warm-up and relaxing session are required for this form of yoga to avoid harm. The demands of these exercises make caution necessary, as an individual can overdo the workouts, overstrain his or her muscles, and do physical damage. People not used to exercise definitely should not start with this form of yoga.

## **18. Family Time: Yoga for Parents and Their Children**

Yoga is an energizing exercise that many people find easy to fit into their schedule. There are many benefits to doing yoga—you will feel less stressful, you will sleep better and longer, you will lose weight, and you will become stronger and more flexible. Many parents, however, are looking for activities to do with their children in their free time, rather than spending this time exercising. Good news: Yoga can be fun and beneficial for children as well. Although your child will probably not be able to do all of the same moves you can, this is a great way to get your children away from the television or computer and moving!

Your child may not have the attention span for a full class or routine, but allow him or her to

join in when they want to have some fun. Children love the different skills they learn, such as balancing, and being upside down is always fun. Be prepared for them to add their own spin on things—at a young age, form is not the concern; it is simply important to get them interested at this age level.

Your local yoga center or gym may offer classes for your children, as they grow older. In these classes, they will learn much of the same things you learn in a beginner's class. If your child is mature enough, consider bringing him or her to your adult class. However, remember that it may not be appropriate if the class has members of both sexes. It's a judgement call here, but if your child is yearning to start learning yoga, try your best to include him or her in a class.

Children can also benefit from yoga at home. There are books and videos specially made for children and young adults to learn yoga as well as meditation. Always monitor your child to be sure he or she is being safe, and talk to your child's doctor to be sure the yoga routine is appropriate for your child's physical well-being. Speak with other parents in your own yoga circle of friends—if there is much interest among the children in this group, perhaps a new class could be started for them.

Doing yoga together is a great way to get to know one another and to become a teacher and friend to your child. Yoga is a healthy activity and as your child grows, even if he or she does not stick with yoga, the healthy kind of lifestyle will hopefully remain with them.

## **19. Send in the Stork: Yoga for Infertility**

Every day, millions of couples in America and around the world struggle with infertility. Modern medicine is coming up with new ways to help would-be parents conceive, but there is still only about a 50% success rate, and many women will not consider methods unnatural to the body. Your doctor may have suggested therapies that can increase your fertility, such as changing your diet. Another thing you can do if you are struggling to have a child is practice yoga.

Fertility depends on a number of factors. Poor diet, smoking, stress, and overworking your body can all lead to infertility. Yoga is a healthy kind of exercise, but it is also a way of life. Many yoga students give up unhealthy activities such as the use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes and opt for a healthy vegetarian diet. Your doctor and yoga instructor can recommend changes in your life that will make a yoga routine more beneficial and, in turn, increase your chances of conception. This is true for both men and woman, so yoga can be done as a couple. Because attempting to get pregnant and failing can be stressful, it can take a toll on your marriage. Couple's therapy is an option, but try simply spending more time together in a peaceful atmosphere—taking a yoga class together is a perfect option.

For women, certain poses can also increase strength of reproductive organs and help balance hormones. This is especially important for your fertility. Hormone deficiencies create an environment that is not conducive to bearing children and these deficiencies can also make you feel sick or tired. This may also be the case for men to some extent. Positions that you may wish to try include ones in which you are belly-down, bending your back, and stretching your hips. Use poses that focus on long-held postures and focus on your breath as well to help regulate your hormones and create inner peace.

Although most infertility problems occur in a relationship due to a woman's body, it is important for men to practice yoga with their wives as well. Your doctor should be able to point you

towards a couple's class and give you more tips on how to live with a new healthy lifestyle. Communicate to your teacher why you are taking the class, because he or she may also be able to give you more fertility tips and, once you become pregnant, recommend prenatal yoga poses you can use to be sure that your baby stays as healthy as you are.

## **20. Stress Relief by Relaxation: Yoga as a Help for Insomnia**

Most of us experience or have experienced insomnia, commonly due to anxiety. Yoga's focus on peaceful relaxation can be used to overcome that, whether you're an occasional or chronic insomniac. Insomnia interferes with our health, our concentration, heightens our stress levels, and worsens our moods.

In general, insomnia follows one of two patterns: difficulty in falling asleep or difficulty in remaining asleep, though an insomniac can easily suffer from both. Yoga can be used as help for insomnia, though it might not have the immediate effects of medication. Some of the techniques take practice for them to accomplish their goals.

If you're having trouble falling asleep, try a relaxation pose such as the "Corpse Pose". This pose involves lying on your back with your eyes closed, your feet and arms slightly separated from your body. Gradually tense and relax each part of your body individually to relax your entire body. If that doesn't work, you can also try imagining yourself falling through the bed or floor as you exhale. This or another relaxation pose can help relieve the tensions and tense muscles you've built up throughout the day or week, easing your way into sleep and hopefully keeping you there.

If you have trouble staying asleep, when you wake up in the middle of the night, practicing the Complete Breath can help you fall back asleep. It's a rhythmic and gentle breathing cycle, so it guides you into sleep with minimum effort. This technique can also be used during the day to interrupt your stress.

Some people find that yoga meditation (or prayer, depending on your religion) contributes to falling asleep, because it clears the mind of clutter and worries, and focuses it on relaxing. Given practice, you learn to keep your mind devoid of clutter, or to at least clear it at will.

Daily practice of a 15-30 minute yoga routine can also minimize an insomniac's symptoms. The physical exercise stretches and relaxes the muscles for stress reduction, while contributing to bodily health. Yoga also stimulates the brain, allegedly increasing blood flow to the brain and decreasing sleep requirements because of its rejuvenating properties. At any rate, less sleep will be needed if you practice yoga because it'll make what sleep you do get more restful. Other stress-reduction methods can also be used, like a warm shower or lavender bath, to help in conjunction with yoga in battling your insomnia.

## **21. "Sun-Moon": Hatha Yoga**

Though used as a general term to refer to the physical element of yoga, Hatha as a type of yoga is a very mellow form, ideal for relaxation. Hatha seeks to unify opposite pairs, notably the positive and negative, as its name demonstrates by unifying the positive "sun" with the negative

"moon" in Sanskrit. Its common vague meaning probably comes from it being among, if not the best-known type of yoga in the Western world.

Hatha yoga, as a particular type of yoga, is what most people mean when they use the term "yoga." It focuses on developing comfort in at least one pose to allow meditation. The focus on the asanas also seeks to energize the body and to make it healthy. Mastering breathing patterns and techniques is essential to this form of yoga. Most of the other styles of yoga are derivatives of this style.

Yoga has "eight limbs" that define it as a lifestyle: your attitudes to the world around you, your attitudes towards yourself, physical postures, breathing exercises, withdrawing the senses, concentration, contemplation, and enlightenment. Hatha yoga uses the third and fourth of the limbs: poses and breathing exercises.

The asanas, or poses, were originally developed for meditation, to position the body in orientation to divinity (Asana is Sanskrit for "seat"). Pranayama comes from the Sanskrit for "energy source" or "life force" (prana) and "to control" (ayama). Of old, the mastery of Pranayama was thought to unlock the ability to control one's mind. Pranayama allows the individual to clear the mind, if only because he or she has to concentrate on the breathing rather than what will be eaten after class.

Most people practice Hatha yoga solely for the health benefits. It's a solid means of exercise, building strength, flexibility, and energy levels. It also promotes relaxation in the modern stress-filled world, lowering risk of heart attack and other stress-related health problems. Transition between poses is slow, with yogis (those who practice yoga) progressing at their own pace between the poses.

Few people practice the meditation element of Hatha yoga, which seeks to fuse the infinite life with the finite individual life. Approaching Hatha yoga from this perspective is to focus on purifying the physical body (through the poses) in order to guide the individual into purifying the mind. Some individuals substitute the meditation element of yoga with prayer to their deity or deities.

## **22. The Deeper Side: Yoga as a Religion and Philosophy**

Yoga is a great form of exercise, especially for beginning students. However, many people in the Western world overlook the fact that yoga has a deeper spiritual use for many traditional practitioners. Yoga is an integral part of many Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. If you practice the exercise we know as "yoga," you are only just scratching to surface to the deeper meaning. By learning the philosophy of yoga, you can improve your practice, even if you do not wish to convert to a different religion.

Yoga teaches that there is nothing existent beyond our own mind. There are five states of mind--disturbed, stupefied, distracted, concentrated, and the absolutely balanced state of mind. The last two are the most peaceful states of mind and can be found through meditation and yoga. Most of the time, our minds are in one of the lesser states, because the outside world seeks to disturb, stupefy, and distract the mind, preventing inner tranquility.

Yoga also teaches how we can achieve this inner peace in our minds through yoga and meditation. Living in a lesser state of mind causes five negative things—ignorance, egoism, attachment, hatred, and the want for self-preservation. What blocks our way from breaking through

a lesser state of mind? Sickness, incompetence, doubt, delusion, fatigue, overindulgence, confusion, lack of perseverance, and regression. These cause negative thoughts and sorrow in our minds and do not allow us to find inner peace of mind.

Practicing yoga can be beneficial to your body in many ways. If you follow the spiritual paths of yoga and do meditation as well, you can gain mental benefits too. Yoga makes you more self-aware, and patients suffering from depression are often helped by yoga. Pride, knowledge, and mental ability can also be positive side effects of practicing yoga. For those following Eastern religions, yoga brings a person closer to the Divine and Heaven. This can work for Western religious followers as well. Meditation can be seen, in some ways, as a form of prayer.

If you want to learn more about the spiritual benefits you can gain from practicing yoga, along with the various physical health benefits, it is best to find a yoga instructor. This person can become your guru, the person who will teach you the path of yoga. By learning yoga, you can achieve great things with both your mind and body, overall putting a positive spin on your life.

### **23. Untapped Spinal Energy: Kundalini Yoga**

Kundalini yoga includes breathing control with a focus on the effects of the breath on each pose. "Kundalini" in Sanskrit refers to untapped energy at the base of the spine that can be tapped and drawn upwards through the body to awaken each of the seven chakras.

The seven chakras are the Root (between the tailbone and pubic bone), the Belly (two inches below the navel and also called "sacral"), the Solar Plexus (two inches below the breastbone), the Heart (behind the breastbone), the Throat (in the nook between the collarbones), the Third Eye (in the forehead's center), and the Crown (just behind the skull's top). Each chakra is also associated with certain gemstones, and having a chakra out of balance allegedly has emotional effects. The poses seek to free this trapped "kundalini," drawing it upwards through the body to heal and "purify" the body, emotions, and mind.

Though an ancient form of yoga, Kundalini yoga has only been introduced to the Western nations within the past half century. Yogi Bhanjan founded the 3HO (the Healthy, Happy, and Holy Organization) in 1969 to introduce it to the public.

Mantras (or chants) are common, with teachers often calling out a mantra and the class responding. This type of yoga is precise, combining certain postures, sounds, and breathing for specific results. People overcoming addictions have found Kundalini yoga particularly helpful to them in managing that.

Movements are most often swift and repetitive, contrary to some other forms that hold positions for a long time or work through a large number of poses. Each pose series has a specific breath associated with it that intensifies the poses' effects. The Kundalini yoga sequences can involve using the correct breath with some rapid, repeated asanas, or a sequence could be a lengthened time in a pose while breathing in a certain way.

Kundalini yoga classes usually involve a spine-stretching warm-up that also improves flexibility. The bulk of the class is spent in a kriya, a specific sequence of poses focusing on a particular area of the body and in meditation, including chanted mantras, breathing control, and hand positions that focus the energy of a yoga pose or meditation.

Though one of the more spiritually-oriented types of yoga, Kundalini yoga is extremely

intense physically. By its emphasis on breathing, chanting, and meditation, it appeals to people who like both mental and physical challenges.

## **24. The Next Step: From Student to Teacher**

If you truly enjoy every aspect of yoga and feel as though no challenge is too hard, you might want to consider moving on from student to teacher. Of course, no one ever stops learning, but sharing your joy for yoga can be very rewarding on many levels. One of the aspects of yoga is “service” and by teaching yoga to others, you are partaking in service.

Teaching yoga is also a great way in which you can more deeply understand your own practice. Students will undoubtedly approach you with questions you have never considered or viewpoints you could not see before becoming a teacher. As a teacher, you routinely go over the basics as well, meaning that they will never be far from your mind when you are doing your own routine of more difficult poses.

If you become a yoga instructor, you also have the opportunity to make some extra money. Teaching yoga is a great job for those seeking part-time work or a career change. The extra money can be used to purchase more yoga-related tools, such as better mats, advanced props like ropes and slings, and the latest yoga books and videos. With the extra money you earn from yoga, you may also be able to quit your normal job or decrease your hours, which further reduces the stress in your life.

Becoming a yoga teacher is not an easy undertaking. First, you must thoroughly study yoga as a student, because as a teacher your skill level and knowledge will need to be very high. Because of the nature of yoga, there are not international guidelines for certification of yoga instructors. However, there are schools in place that offer certification. Research these programs to make sure you will get the best instruction possible and be an accredited teacher at the end of the training.

There are other things involved with becoming a yoga teacher than simply knowing how to perform the poses. You must also be instructed in teaching the methods so that you can best serve your students. It is important too to learn business management, since yoga instructors will essentially own their own businesses. Business matters such as attracting customers, doing taxes, and knowing liability laws can be difficult, and classes on these matters can help ensure that they are not too frustrating. Another option is hiring a business manager to do this part for you so you can focus purely on teaching.

When you teach yoga, you share a piece of yourself with others. Begin with a small business, doing a single class or privately instructing a single student and work up to doing more advanced and a higher number of classes. Consider teaching if you feel you have something more to share with the yoga world.

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