



INTRO TO YOGA

A Detailed Guide
to Getting
Started in Yoga

BY DASHAMA KONAH GORDON

If what you are currently doing is not leading to the best, most joyful life experience, maybe its time to try something new.

This book was written for you if you are determined to find something to create **balance** in your life, **relieve stress** and maybe even help you lose weight. You are looking for a way to **improve** the quality of your life, while exercising your body, mind, and soul, right? You've heard the buzz, seen it on TV, read it in the newspaper, and perhaps even watched a few video clips on the internet. You've heard stories of people receiving great benefits from Yoga, now you are determined to try this 21st Century "Wonder Drug" for yourself.



“Yoga is not a religion. It is a science, science of well-being, science of youthfulness, science of integrating body, mind and soul.”

- Amit Ray

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

- MAHATMA GANDHI



Yoga is an ancient system that has been helping people find balance in their lives for thousands of years. Only just recently has it caught on in the Western world. Suddenly, yoga is everywhere. But when you see the women in the designer yoga outfits, with plush yoga mat carrying bags, you may immediately decide you don't fit the “yoga crowd”. I'm here to change your mind. The practice of Yoga can help everyone, no matter what is your current physical, mental, or emotional condition.

Naturally, as a beginner, you may have a few questions and/or concerns. This book will provide you with answers based upon facts, enabling you to make the best choices possible for yourself. In this book, I will dispel some common myths about Yoga in addition to providing a detailed guide to help you to decipher:

- What are your current mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional needs and goals?
- Whether Yoga can help you to reach those goals?
- What style of Yoga may be best suited for you and your goals?
- How to “find the time” to focus on yourself and practice Yoga?
- Exactly what will you need to know to get the most out of Yoga.

WHAT
are your current
needs and
GOALS?





Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Self Assessment:** What is my current physical, mental, and spiritual condition? (Overweight, not very flexible, low muscular density, high level of physical, emotional or mental stress, out of touch with my spirituality?)
- 2. Do I have any physical constraints,** such as shoulder, hip or knee injuries, that I need to take into account when choosing a yoga style?
- 3. Goal:** Am I looking to Yoga to simply reduce stress? Build Strength and Flexibility? Tone muscles? Lose weight? Get me more in touch with my spiritual side? Connect with like-minded people? Open my mind to a new philosophy of living?
- 4. Openness:** Am I resistant to the spiritual teachings that are offered in some Yoga classes? If so, is there a reason for this?
- 5. Time:** How much time do I have to dedicate to learning and practicing Yoga?
- 6. Location:** Do I want to drive to Yoga class from home before work, or from work to the class? Do I want to stop home in between work and the class? Am I willing to take weekend classes? Would it be more convenient to hire a private Yoga instructor to come to my house?
- 7. Is a private yoga teacher the best option to help me get started?** a personal Yoga trainer to get me started? Do I have the finances available to do so? Would a yoga video suffice in getting me the results I am looking for, while preventing me from injuring myself?

Some of these questions, you may not have the answer for yet. Don't worry. I will be answering all of them with you throughout this book.

1. SELF ASSESSMENT:

1. When doing a self assessment, it is important that you be completely honest with yourself. If you are overweight, admit it to yourself. If your lower back hurts from sitting all day, which could be from tight hamstrings/hip flexors and weak abdominal muscles, you need to acknowledge this too.

Your current condition does not define who you are; it is merely a reality check. And being cognizant of where you are will more effectively lead you in the best direction to where you would like to go. If you haven't spent any time connecting with your inner self, this needs to be addressed. It's like having a dog and never taking that loving animal out for a walk to get sunshine and fresh air. You must treat yourself with careful attention. Yoga can help you reconnect with your inner self, but you first must acknowledge that you are disconnected before the reconnection process can begin.





2. CURRENT PHYSICAL CONDITION : If you have had surgeries or injuries in any of your joints, there are specific classes designed for you. These classes focus on alignment and put special emphasis on the protection of your joints, to prevent injury. Also, the teacher plays a tremendous role in whether or not you will have a positive experience in the class.

It is important to find a teacher that will encourage you to listen to your body and not push you to the point of potential injury. With all of this being said, don't allow any physical conditions to prevent you from taking Yoga classes. Yoga can be performed by all people of all physical conditions; from small children 2 years and older, to the elderly and the physically disabled. It is just a matter of finding the best path for you.

If you have multiple physical constraints, it may be best for you to hire a private Yoga trainer to get started. During a private Yoga session, you can ask all of the questions you need and you get very hands on, personalized attention throughout the entire session. During a class, since there are often 20 or more students with only one teacher, it is rare to get personal attention or adjustments that you need as a beginner.

Yoga videos can be very helpful to introduce various poses to your vocabulary before you attend a class. It helps to see some of the poses and hear the names of them, so that you may recognize them during the class. This way, you can do less guessing and practice more Yoga during your session or class. I have created hundreds of yoga videos and DVDs, that you can begin your yoga practice from home. You can explore this option on my website at Dashama.com



3.YOUR GOALS :

If your goal is to lose weight, that will lead you to a very different style of Yoga than if your goal is to get in touch with spirituality. Although, there are some styles of Yoga that will provide both for you, there are also many styles that will only touch on one or the other. The same truth goes for the rest of your goals.

There are several constants in Yoga: All Yoga classes will stretch your muscles to some degree. Most classes will ask you to focus on your breath, which inevitably leads to stress relief to some extent. All Yoga classes, since they require you to take time out of your life to focus solely upon yourself, will leave you feeling rejuvenated to some extent.

Not all classes incorporate the inverted poses, and many do not incorporate spirituality into the program. Some styles of yoga emphasize the various ancient Yogic philosophies, which can be very enlightening. Some of your answers to life questions can be found in these sessions. Depending upon the style of class and the teacher teaching the class, you will notice different types of students. If connecting to like-minded individuals in your goal, it is important for you to find the class or style that best aligns with your core beliefs and values.

Where the class is located also plays a role. If you are taking a class in Central Boca Raton, FL, there will be mostly upper income, stay at home mothers. Conversely, a class located in downtown Manhattan will likely attract a very different crowd. The people you have around you during your practice impact what you get out of the class, whether you are conscious of it or not.



4. OPENNESS: Were you raised with some certain religious or spiritual beliefs? Do they conflict with what you believe the Yogic spiritual beliefs to be? What is your current understanding about the Yogic spiritual beliefs?

Yoga is not a religion. It welcomes all religions and spiritual beliefs. The word Yoga, means literally “to yoke” which translates literally “to unite”. It means to unite oneself with the universal self, or God. In Yoga, it is believed that all people are interconnected and that we are all various representations of God. The divinity that resides within you, is the same divine creation that resides within everyone on Earth. This concept of “oneness” is often foreign to most new Yoga practitioners. It is a fundamental truth, which is the cornerstone to all other Yogic spiritual truths that are taught.

That being said, most Yoga teachers do not emphasize this truth in class. Some styles of Yoga, that do incorporate the spiritual aspects of Yoga into the class may touch upon it, but it will never be forced upon you nor will you ever be judged or expected to change your current beliefs to match the beliefs of you teacher or fellow students in the class.

5. TIME: Most people spend so much time on their job, to earn money to pay bills, they leave little or no time to live their own lives or to nurture their mind, body and soul. If you are coming to Yoga, it is likely that you recognize this pattern in your life, and you are determined to change.

Everyone has the same 24 hours in each day. It is up to you to decide how you will spend, invest, waste, kill or pass this time. Your current relationship with time must be a positive one. If you have been “killing, wasting or passing” time so far, it is essential for you to change this perspective and cultivate a more loving relationship with time. To “spend or invest” your time doing something that will create positive growth in one or more area of your life is the best thing you can do for yourself. Yoga is a positive investment of your time.

That being said, how much time are you willing or able to commit to a Yoga practice? It doesn't have to be 2 hours a day 7 days a week to see a return on your investment. Dividends are paid each time you do Yoga, and they are paid that day, in full. Not only can you begin to see positive changes in your life after just one Yoga class, you will likely be able to reap the rewards for days afterwards. Sort of like the gift that just keeps on giving.

Just start somewhere. Make the commitment, whatever you are able to fit in to your schedule. As your practice evolves from one of a beginner to the intermediate and advanced levels, you will slowly reprioritize and find more time in your schedule. This usually happens as your experience with and your belief in the benefits of Yoga grows. It is alright if you can only commit to one class per week, just stick with it and if it feels right, try to incorporate more classes as you are able to.





6. LOCATION : If you live in a rural area, it is not likely you will have much of a choice, if any, as to which style of Yoga you choose to take or even how far you are willing to drive to the class. You will likely have to take what you can get. But, if you live in an urban or city setting, in America, it is highly likely that there will be many classes available within a short distance from your home or place of work.

Since there are so many options, how do you decide which location is best suited for you? Yoga classes are taught primarily in 3 settings: In a gym/aerobics studio, in a Yoga studio, or Privately (the teacher will come to your home, place of work or meet you at the beach or a local park). These days, since people generally work Monday through Friday, there are usually classes offered on the weekends. This may be a wonderful option for you, if your schedule just doesn't look like you can fit anything else in during the week.

Typically classes are held on Saturday and Sunday mornings and often in the early evening both of those days as well. This can be a very rewarding and spiritual way to "spend" an hour or two on your weekend. Just a side note: if you do this Saturday morning class, you will reap the benefits for the remainder of the weekend. If you do the Sunday evening class, it could be a very nice way to get your mind set for the positive and fulfilling week that lies ahead.

7. Question number 7 deals with the decision between taking a Yoga class, hiring a private Yoga trainer, or buying a DVD or video and attempting to practice at home by yourself.

Option 1: Attend Group Classes

Pros: Classes are great for people who have very few physical constraints. As long as the teacher speaks clearly, you should be able to perform most if not all of the poses throughout the class. Any pose that you don't feel could lead to you injuring yourself should not be attempted until you are confident that you can do it. A good teacher will encourage a new student to under achieve, and not force themselves deeper into a pose that could be compromising to you physically.

Cons: There is usually very little hands on attention in a group class. The teacher simply has too many students to give any single one of them much help personally. This can be frustrating for a new student, who isn't quite sure how they should "feel" or "look" while in each pose. Verbal cuing is often not explicit enough to enable a brand new student to completely understand exactly how the pose should be done correctly.





Group classes, since they are so much more economical, are often very crowded. This can be a little confining to some people. Often times, your mat will be lodged between 4 other mats in front, behind, and to either side of yours. Although students are generally courteous and try their best not be in your space, sometimes a stray foot or arm will find its way onto your mat and into your space.

Sometimes it can be intimidating to see what is sometimes referred to as “Urban Spiritualists” dressed in trendy Yoga garb, looking like they just stepped out of Yoga Journal magazine. As a new student to Yoga you may struggle with judgment, of yourself and of others in the beginning. Judgment is a part of life, part of existence, but in Yoga, we learn that this judgment leads to unnecessary chatter in your mind. Do not compare yourself to the students around you and you will be much more content and successful in your Yoga pursuits.

***Also, in a group class, it’s important to remember that there is usually a range from beginner to advanced students in the class.** In an attempt to create a challenge for the advanced students, while cueing the newer students to follow the directions, often there will be some poses that just seem out of your league. In this case, you should just acknowledge that your ability level is exactly where you need to be at this time and that all good things come to those who are patient and who practice with consistency. Also, if possible, seek classes that are designated as “beginner” level.

An alternative to
Yoga classes is

PRIVATE

YOGA

LESSONS.





Pros: Private Yoga lessons are great for new Yoga students. Whether you have physical constraints or not, it is very rewarding to have someone there each step of the way, working with you to make sure you are in correct alignment and not compromising yourself in any way. The teacher is also there to answer questions you have in all areas: mental, physical and spiritual.

Students who hire a private Yoga teacher tend to get much more rapid results from their practice, while minimizing their incidence of injury. Modifications are always available and can be detailed for you for each pose. This will enable you to attempt at least some level of the pose, instead of having to avoid the pose altogether, as you may have done in a group class. Private Yoga sessions are typically designed specifically for you. As you progress in your abilities, the sessions adapt to your new skill level, enabling you to grow to your maximum potential in the quickest time span possible. Each session can be adapted to how you are feeling that day as well. If you feel extra energetic or if you have low energy, your teacher can lead you through a sequence of movements and poses that will counter balance what your body is currently lacking.

Cons: This option is not available to everyone, simply due to the cost. Most people in America do not earn enough money to hire a private Yoga teacher on a consistent basis. (Prices typically range from \$60-\$100+ per session) Also, there isn't group energy, which is a nice benefit from a group class.

The third option/ or supplement to the first two: Buying a Yoga DVD/Video.



Pros: Yoga videos are great for several reasons. They can be done at home.

They are very inexpensive compared to classes or private Yoga sessions. They are very convenient, because you are able to bring the video with you on trips and you can continue your practice even on holidays when gyms and Yoga studios are often closed. Additionally, Yoga videos are great for beginners who need to see and hear the descriptions of each pose, before attending classes regularly.

If you have seen and practiced at least a few Yoga poses, your experience in class will be much more enjoyable. You will spend less time trying to figure out what the teacher is telling you to do and your neck will thank you for it! (you won't have to look around the class to find someone who is doing the pose right, during your attempt at it.)

Cons: There are many Yoga videos out on the market today, but it is not easy to select the best one for you. It is not easy to “judge a book by its cover” as they say. If you select one, and don't like it, rarely will they allow you to return it. So, you are stuck with the one you purchase, once it is opened. I have created numerous yoga videos and DVDs which are all available on Dashama.com and Pranashama.org. ' for Beginners” and the Intermediate and advanced DVDs will be available soon, so you may progress along on your practice after you have mastered that one.

Yoga videos require a TV and/or DVD player or similar equipment. This makes it less portable, if you were interested in practicing Yoga on the beach or some other natural setting on your trip. The other drawback to videos is the lack of correction.


Doing Yoga at home while watching a DVD or video is not as safe as the other two options. There is no one there to prevent you from putting yourself into a compromising position that you are not quite ready to do.

Which **YOGA**

Style is right **FOR YOU?**

Now that you have decided whether you are going to attend a class, hire a private Yoga teacher, or buy a DVD (or any combination of the 3 options), it is important to determine which style of Yoga is best going to help you to reach your goals.





"Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions."

- DALAI LAMA XIV

BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MOST COMMON YOGA STYLES.

Pranashama vinyasa Yoga: This style, developed by Dashama, is a fusion of Vinyasa, Ashtanga and power yoga, Sivananda, Kundalini and Yin Yoga, Thai Yoga Therapy, Self Massage, Partner yoga, Dance, Qi Gong and Martial Arts.

Pranashama.org

Incorporating the mind, body, spirit and emotional elements into the practice for a holistic approach to conscious human evolution and personal mastery on all levels. Available for people of all levels and abilities, this style will help you to find inner peace, open your heart more, lose weight, become stronger and more open than you may have imagined possible, while keeping the experience fun and light-hearted. With an emphasis on proper alignment, cultivating strength from within and becoming "Lighter" in your body, mind and spirit, you can begin your practice at home with instructional videos and DVDs, at a workshop, retreat or class near you. Expect to feel younger, more open, alive and aligned with each class.

Power Yoga. In 1995, Bender Birch set out to challenge Americans' understanding of what it really means to be fit with her book Power Yoga (Fireside, 1995). Bender Birch's intention was to give a Western spin to the practice of Ashtanga Yoga, a challenging and disciplined series of poses designed to create heat and energy flow. "Most people wouldn't take a class called Ashtanga Yoga, because they had no idea what it meant. Power Yoga, on the other hand, was something Americans could relate to and know that they'd get a good workout," says Bender Birch. Power Yoga's popularity has spread to health clubs across the country and has taken on a broad range of applications. The common thread is a rigorous workout that develops strength and flexibility while keeping students on the move. For specifics, consult individual instructors before signing up for a class.



Vigorous Vinyasas: Vinyasa-style yoga combines a series of flowing postures with rhythmic breathing for an intense body-mind workout. Here are a few different types:

Ashtanga: Ashtanga. The practice of Ashtanga that's getting mainstream attention today is a fast-paced series of sequential postures practiced by yoga master K. Pattabhi Jois, who lives in Mysore, India. Today, yogis continue to spread Jois's teachings worldwide, making it one of the most popular schools of yoga around.

The system is based on six series of asanas which increase in difficulty, allowing students to work at their own pace. In class, you'll be led nonstop through one or more of the series. There's no time for adjustments. You'll be encouraged to breathe as you move from pose to pose. Be prepared to sweat.

Ashtanga yoga is not for the faint at heart. Most classes that are labeled "all levels" may be very challenging for a new Yoga student, especially if you have any physical constraints. It is definitely worth trying, or even just witnessing at least once, but you may find there are other styles more fitting for you as a new student to Yoga. This style does work the muscles, however, so it is quit a workout.

“Over the course of time, students will get a broad yoga education,” Life promises. “One week, a class may focus on a particular asana, while the next week’s theme may discuss more metaphysical issues.”

Beginner classes start by emphasizing standing poses, followed by instruction on forward bends, backbends, and inversions. These classes also introduce chants. For more information on class schedules or to find a certified instructor in your area, visit www.jivamuktiyoga.com.



Kali Ray TriYoga. A series of flowing, dancelike movements intuitively came to Kali Ray (Kaliji) while leading a group meditation in 1980. In 1986, after developing these movements into seven distinct levels, Kaliji established the TriYoga Center in Santa Cruz, California, offering a system of yoga that is taught in a meditative environment. The first level is a slow, relaxing, and rejuvenating practice. The class, often accompanied by music, focuses on natural alignment and breath within the flow, and ends with meditation. A union of asana (postures), pranayama (breathwork), and mudra (seals), this practice is deeply meditative, promoting relaxation and inner peace. For more information visit www.kaliraytriyoga.com.

White Lotus. White Lotus Yoga is the collaborative effort of Ganga White and Tracey Rich, who meld two eclectic backgrounds and years of experience into a nondogmatic teaching approach dedicated to helping students develop a wellbalanced personal practice. At their 40-acre retreat in the Santa Ynez Mountains of Santa Barbara, California, this husband and wife team offers a complete yogaimmersion experience with programs ranging from weekend and weeklong getaways to 16-day teacher training programs.

White Lotus Yoga is a flowing vinyasa practice which ranges from gentle to vigorous depending on your ability or comfort level. In addition, class formats incorporate alignment, breath, and the theoretical understanding of yoga. For more information, visit www.whitelotus.org.



Attention to Detail

The following styles may be best suited for you if you have any mild physical constraints.

Iyengar. From his home in Pune, India, B.K.S. Iyengar reigns as one of the most influential yogis of his time. At 80 years old, he continues to teach thousands of students from all over the world, encouraging them to penetrate deeper into the experience of each pose. This is the trademark of Iyengar Yoga? It has an intense focus on the subtleties of each posture.

In an Iyengar class, poses (especially standing postures) are typically held much longer than in other schools of yoga, so that practitioners can pay close attention to the precise muscular and skeletal alignment this system demands. Also specific to Iyengar, which is probably the most popular type of yoga practiced in the United States, is the use of props, including belts, chairs, blocks, and blankets, to help accommodate any special needs such as injuries or structural imbalances.

“In forward bends, for example, if someone’s hamstrings aren’t flexible, he or she can use a prop to help extend the spine. The wall is often used for support in a variety of poses,” explains Janet MacLeod, who teaches at the Iyengar Yoga Institute in San Francisco. “Using props gives the student support, allowing them more freedom to breathe deeply into the pose.” For more information, visit www.whitelotus.org.

Healing Yoga Styles

The following styles may be best suited for you if you have any mild physical constraints.



Integrative Yoga Therapy. In 1993, Joseph Le Page, M.A., founded Integrative Yoga Therapy (IYT) in San Francisco. Le Page developed a yoga teachertraining program designed specifically for medical and mainstream wellness settings, including hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Two-week IYT intensives are offered worldwide, training health-care professionals, yoga teachers, and body workers to adapt gentle postures, guided imagery, and breathing techniques for treating specific health issues such as heart disease, psychiatric disorders, and AIDS.

“Healing happens through connection with the deepest part of who we are,” says Le Page. “The program emphasizes the healing process in detail by addressing all levels of the patient: physical, emotional, and spiritual. An example of this therapeutic application is to teach patients with heart disease to become more aware of themselves and their condition at all levels, using yogic lifestyle changes, breathing techniques, asanas suitable for their condition, guided imagery for the circulatory system, and meditation with a focus on healing the heart.” For more information, visit www.iytyogatherapy.com.

Viniyoga. As we travel through life, it's no mystery that we are constantly evolving on all levels: physically, emotionally, and intellectually. So why not tailor a yoga routine that will help address and integrate these transitions? Viniyoga, in fact, is an empowering and transformative practice designed to do just that.

In this gentle practice, created by T.K.V. Desikachar, poses are synchronized with the breath in sequences determined by the needs of the practitioner. According to Gary Kraftsow, owner and teacher at The American Viniyoga Institute on the Hawaiian island Maui, Viniyoga is a methodology for developing an integrated practice for each person's needs as they grow and change.

“As children, our practice should support balanced growth and development of the body and mind. As adults, it should protect our health and promote our ability to be productive in the world. And as seniors, it should help us maintain health and inspire a deeper quest for self-realization,” says Kraftsow. For more information, visit www.viniyoga.com.

Svaroop. This style of yoga teaches different ways of doing familiar poses, emphasizing the opening of the spine by beginning at the tailbone and progressing through each spinal area. Every pose integrates the foundational principles of asana, anatomy, and yoga philosophy, and emphasizes the development of transcendent inner experience, which is called svaroop by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutra. This is a consciousness-oriented yoga that also promotes healing and transformation.

Svaroop Yoga was developed by Rama Berch, who founded and directs the Master Yoga Academy and created the yoga program for Dr. Deepak Chopra's Center for Well Being, both located in La Jolla, California. Berch says teaching asanas became increasingly frustrating, because the students seemed to be trying to “impose the pose upon their body rather than unfolding it from within.” She began looking for ways to guide her students to the deeper effects of each asana, speaking of them as “angles that provide opening, rather than poses to be learned.” New students find this a very approachable style, often beginning in chair poses that are comfortable and have a deep healing effect in the spine. For more information or to find out if there is a teacher in your area, visit www.masteryoga.org

Bikram. *When you take a Bikram yoga class, expect to sweat. Each studio is designed to replicate yoga's birthplace climate, with temperatures pushing 105° Fahrenheit.*

Why the sauna-like effect? “Because sweat helps move the toxins out of your body,” explains Radha Garcia, owner of Bikram’s Yoga College of India in Boulder, Colorado. “Your body is like a sponge. To cleanse it, you need to wring it out to allow fresh blood and oxygen to circulate and keep your immune system running smoothly.”

This method of staying healthy from the inside out was designed by Bikram Choudhury, who sequenced a series of 26 traditional Hatha postures to address the proper functioning of every bodily system.

Choudhury first visited the United States from India in 1971 on a trip sponsored by the American Medical Association to demonstrate his work using yoga to treat chronically ill patients. Today Choudhury continues teaching students of all ages and abilities from his studio in Los Angeles where he also conducts a certified teacher’s training program. For more information, visit [http://www.bikramyoga.com/ Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy](http://www.bikramyoga.com/PhoenixRisingYogaTherapy).



Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy is a combination of classical yoga and elements of contemporary client-centered and body-mind psychology. It can facilitate a powerful release of physical tensions and emotional blocks. Through assisted yoga postures, guided breathing, and nondirective dialogue, you can experience the connection of your physical and emotional selves, encouraging release, personal growth, and the healing of body, mind, and spirit. For more information, visit www.pryt.com

Ease into Enlightenment

As a new Yoga student, these styles may be just what you're looking for. You will be taught each pose individually, instead of in a vinyasa, which gives you more time to focus on each pose and perfect your form.

"It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about it."

-DALE CARNEGIE



Sivananda. At its core, Sivananda Yoga is geared toward helping students answer the age-old question “Who am I?” This yoga practice is based on the philosophy of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, India, who taught disciples to “serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize.” In order to achieve this goal, Sivananda advocated a path that would recognize and synthesize each level of the human experience including the intellect, heart, body, and mind.

In 1957, his disciple Swami Vishnu-Devananda introduced these teachings to an American audience. A few years later, Vishnu-Devananda founded the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers, summarizing Sivananda’s system into five main principles: proper exercise (asanas); proper breathing (pranayama); proper relaxation (Savasana); proper diet (vegetarian); and positive thinking (Vedanta) and meditation (dhyana).

There are more than 80 centers worldwide, as well as ashrams and teachertraining programs, all of which follow a Hatha yoga practice emphasizing 12 basic postures to increase strength and flexibility of the spine. Sivananda yoga postures are performed in a specific order, with an emphasis on balancing the Chakras. Chanting, pranayama, and meditation are also usually included, helping students to release stress and blocked energy. For more information, visit www.sivananda.org.

Integral. In 1966, the Reverend Sri Swami Satchidananda introduced an entire generation of young people to his yogic philosophy: “an easeful body, a peaceful mind, and a useful life.” His goal was to help people integrate yoga’s teachings into their everyday work and relationships, which he hoped would promote greater peace and tolerance worldwide.

“Integral Yoga uses classical hatha postures, which are meant to be performed as a meditation, balancing physical effort and relaxation,” says Swami Ramananda, president of the New York Integral Yoga Institute in Manhattan. In addition to a gentle asana practice, classes also incorporate guided relaxation, breathing practices, sound vibration (repetition of mantra or chant), and silent meditation. For more information, visit www.integralyogaofnewyork.org.

Ananda. For those who aspire to loftier goals than simply building a hard body, Ananda Yoga provides a tool for spiritual growth while releasing unwanted tensions. During the 1960s, Swami Kriyananda developed Ananda as a particular style of yoga after returning to California following a period of intense yoga training under Guru Paramhansa Yogananda (author of *Autobiography of a Yogi*). “The most unique part of this system is the use of silent affirmations while holding a pose,” says Rich McCord, director of Ananda Yoga’s teacher-training program at The Expanding Light retreat center in Nevada City, California. McCord explains that the affirmations are intended to help deepen and enhance the subtle benefits of each asana, providing a technique for aligning body, energy, and mind.

In a typical class, instructors guide their students through a series of gentle Hatha postures designed to move energy upward to the brain, preparing the body for meditation. Classes also focus on proper alignment, easeful posture transitions, and controlled breathing exercises (pranayama) to facilitate an exploration into the inner dimensions of yoga and self-awareness. For more information, visit www.expandinglight.org.



Kundalini. Kundalini Yoga, stemming from the tantra yoga path, at one time remained a closely guarded secret practiced only by a select few. In 1969, however, Yogi Bhajan decided to change this tradition by bringing Kundalini to the West. Yogi Bhajan's reasoning was based on the philosophy that it's everybody's birthright to be "healthy, happy and holy," and he believed Kundalini would help spiritual seekers from all religious paths tap into their greater potential.

The practice of Kundalini Yoga incorporates postures, dynamic breathing techniques, and chanting and meditating on mantras such as "Sat Nam" (meaning "I am truth"). Practitioners concentrate on awakening the energy at the base of the spine and drawing it upward through each of the seven chakras. For more information, visit www.3HO.org.

Ishta. ISHTA, an acronym for the Integrated Science of Hatha, Tantra, and Ayurveda, is the yoga brainchild of South African native Alan Finger, who currently runs workshops at his yoga studio in Irvington, New York. Finger blends 37 years of teaching experience with his eclectic studies under Sivananda and the tantric hermit Barati, helping students of all ages and abilities to get in touch with life's boundless energy.

"The sequence of postures is designed to help students integrate their individual sensations with a life energy force that's beyond sensing and perceiving," says Los Angeles-based ISHTA instructor Rod Stryker. "It's a tool for visualization and a way to become more fully oneself."

A typical ISHTA class mixes flowing Ashtanga-style asanas with the precise method of Iyengar, while including pranayama and meditation exercises as well. Instructors begin classes with warm-up poses, and then gradually build to a more challenging practice. For more information, visit www.beyoga.com.


Kripalu. Located in the Berkshire region of Western Massachusetts, the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health has helped guide thousands of people along their path of self-discovery by teaching a system of yoga developed over a 20-year period by yogi Amrit Desai and the Kripalu staff.

During the 1970s, while studying under Indian guru Kripaluvananda, Amrit felt his body begin to move in a spontaneous flow of postures without the direction of his mind. This deep release of prana (life's energy force) brought about a profound transformation in Amrit, so he developed these movements into three stages of practice which he could then teach to others.

The three stages of Kripalu yoga include: willful practice (a focus on alignment, breath, and the presence of consciousness); willful surrender (a conscious holding of the postures to the level of tolerance and beyond, deepening concentration and focus of internal thoughts and emotions); and meditation in motion (the body's complete release of internal tensions and a complete trust in the body's wisdom to perform the postures and movements needed to release physical and mental tensions and enter deep meditation). For more information, visit www.kripalu.org

Pranashama. This style, developed by Dashama, is a fusion of Prana Flow & Asthanga/ Power Yoga styles, Qi Gong(martial arts), Dance, Core Power Functional Fitness Training and Thai Yoga Massage healing therapy.

Incorporating the mind, body, spirit and emotional elements into the practice for a holistic approach to conscious human evolution and personal mastery on all levels. Available for people of all levels and abilities, this style will help you to find inner peace, open your heart more, lose weight, become stronger and more open than you may have imagined possible, while keeping the experience fun and light-hearted. With an emphasis on proper alignment, cultivating strength from within and becoming "Lighter" in your body, mind and spirit, you can begin your practice at home with instructional videos and DVDs, at a workshop, retreat or class near you. Expect to feel younger, more open, alive and aligned with each class. pranashama.org

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is performing a backbend yoga pose on a wooden deck. She is wearing a white, lace-trimmed crop top and a white, lace-trimmed skirt. Her hands are on the deck, and her feet are also on the deck, with her back arched and her head tilted back. The background shows a sunset over the ocean with a wooden deck in the foreground.

Anusara. Anusara means “to step into the current of divine will.” Anusara Yoga is an integrated approach to Hatha yoga in which the human spirit blends with the precise science of biomechanics. It is a new system of Hatha yoga that can be both spiritually inspiring and yet grounded in a deep knowledge of outer and inner body alignment. It can be therapeutically effective and physically transformative. The central philosophy of this yoga is that each person is equally divine in every part of the body, mind, and spirit. Each student’s various abilities and limitations are respected and honored. Anusara Yoga differentiates itself from other Hatha yoga systems with three key areas of practice: Attitude. The practitioner balances an opening to grace with an aspiration for awakening to his or her true nature. Alignment. Each pose is performed with an integrated awareness of all the different parts of the body. Action. Each pose is performed as an artistic expression of the heart in which muscular stability is balanced with an expansive inner freedom. For more information, visit www.anusara.com.

Tibetan. Tibetan Yoga is a term used among Buddhists to describe a range of tantric meditation and pranayama practices. Though little is known in the West about the physical practices of Tibetan Yoga, in 1939, Peter Kelder published *Ancient Secret of the Fountain of Youth* (Doubleday, 1998), describing a sequence of postures of Tibetan origin called “The Five Rites of Rejuvenation.” In 1994, yoga teacher Christopher Kilham published a modern version of these exercises called *The Five Tibetans: Five Dynamic Exercises for Health, Energy, and Personal Power* (Inner Traditions). Composed of five flowing movements, this active workout keeps students on the move. Beginners start with 10 or 12 repetitions and progressively work their way up to the 21 repetitions of the full routine. Classes may be difficult to find.

Tibetan Buddhist monk Tarthang Tulku adapted another ancient movement practice for the modern west called Kum Nye. More contemplative in nature than the vigorous Five Tibetans, Kum Nye strives to integrate body and mind and means “interaction with the subtle body.” For more information, see Tulku’s *Kum Nye Relaxation* (Dharma Publishing, 1978) or visit www.nyingma.org.

Hatha. If you are browsing through a yoga studio’s brochure of classes and the yoga offered is simply described as “Hatha,” chances are the teacher is offering an eclectic blend of two or more of the styles described above. It’s a good idea to ask the teacher or director of the studio where he or she was trained and if the poses are held for a length of time or if you will be expected to move quickly from one pose to the next, and if meditation or chanting is included. This will give you a better idea if the class is vigorous or more meditative.



After selecting a style:

Find a Class

Once you have decided which style of Yoga best suits you, it is then necessary to find a class that will be convenient to attend. Some of the best places to look for a class are:

1. Online:

- a. Do a Google search for “Yoga classes in (insert the place you live)”
 - b. Search for local gyms, then check their class schedule on their individual website (or you can call or drive over and pick up a physical copy of their schedule).
 - c. Search for local “Yoga studios”.
 - d. Search for local studios or teachers on www.yogaalliance.com
2. Phone book/ Yellow Pages
 3. Local wellness magazines such as Natural Awakenings often have listings.
 4. Chamber of Commerce website may have some gyms and studios registered in their online directory.

Getting Ready to Attend Class:

You will need a mat: which can be purchased at many locations:

1. Online (<http://www.dashama.com>)
2. Local gym/studio
3. Walmart, Target, etc.
4. Discount stores like TJ Maxx or Marshall's generally carry them

When choosing a mat, there are several things to consider:

1. Price (typically range from \$15-\$50, depending upon where you buy it from and the Thickness (thicker mats are much more comfortable for the spine against the hard surface of the floor)
2. Color (personal preference; lighter colors look dirty faster)
3. Weight (goes along with thickness; thicker= heavier)
4. Carrying case or strap? (some mats come with a strap, carrying cases usually must be purchased separately. These just keep it neat and tidy while it's not in use and make carrying easier and more convenient).
5. Material it is made out of (this ranges from synthetic/plastic material to all natural fibers. The more natural the fibers, the price will be higher).

It's also important to determine whether or not you will be using props such as blocks and straps. These are tools that can help a new Yoga student perform certain Yoga poses, that may have otherwise not be available to them otherwise.

The blocks: bring the surface of the floor up to you. Depending upon the pose, this can be very helpful. For example, if you are supposed to reach down toward your ankle, foot or the floor, and can't even reach your hand to you shin, this would be a great opportunity for the block to help you out. By placing a block beneath your hand and the floor, you will be able to perform the pose in the correct alignment. This will reduce your incidence of injury and lead you to a more powerful Yoga practice.

The straps: act as an extension of your arms. In many poses, you may be called upon to reach your toes, while keeping your knees straight. This is usually to stretch the hamstrings, inner thigh muscles, psoas muscles or any combination of these. This is often very difficult to do if you aren't able to even bend forward without pulling the muscles tightly. The strap is placed around the bottom of the foot generally, while you hold the two free ends, one in each hand. While keeping your spine straight to avoid over exerting your lower back, you pull yourself gently forward, toward the straight leg, using the strap. There are other applications for the strap as well. It is a handy and convenient tool to help you progress in your Yoga practice.



You will also possibly want to bring/have:

1. A face towel for sweat or even a sweat head band may be useful. Depending upon which style you choose to take, you may sweat much more than you were thinking you would.
2. A bottle full of water, with tight lid. You need to stay hydrated during the practice. Drinking plenty of water is an essential aspect of the practice of Yoga and exercise in general. You will be sweating out a lot of fluids, which will be a great detoxification for your body. You need to replenish these fluids and the more water you drink will cleanse your system more efficiently. The reason for the tight lid: There's no sense in bringing a bottle of water with an insecure lid, only to have to spend half of the class moping up spilled water from around you and your mat.
3. Comfortable clothing that is easy to move in. It is not necessary to go out and purchase new trendy yoga clothing for your very first class. Just make sure your shirt is tight enough that it won't fall over your face if you go into an inverted pose like the shoulder stand. You probably won't be too happy to bare it all during your very first class. Pants or shorts, (again tight is preferable), but not too tight so you can't move easily or that they restrict your ability to breath freely. Cotton clothing are very absorbent and breathable, yet don't dry quickly. Nylon and synthetic material, such as spandex, dry quickly and tend to be very flexible, although they don't allow your skin to breathe as easily (air does not penetrate through the material).
4. No socks or shoes are preferable. There are now some "Yoga socks and shoes" available on the market, but they are very unnecessary. Yogis practiced Yoga for thousands of years with no specialized foot coverings and that same method is still the most popular. Not to mention, it is very freeing to participate in exercise while you are bare foot.

"Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile."

- MOTHER TERESA



Important points to remember:

- 1. *Yoga is not a competition.*** No one in the class is judging you. They are all so focused on their own practice and dealing with their own chaotic minds, there is not time for them to judge you.
- 2. *Go at a pace comfortable to you.*** If you find yourself in a class that is too challenging, or fast paced, it's ok to rest during the times you feel you need a rest. Child's Pose and Sivasana are designed for that purpose. It is perfectly normal and acceptable to rest at any time during the practice.
- 3. *If the class is simply too difficult for you*** to continue, it is acceptable for you to leave during the middle of class. Just be sure to be courteous to the other students, not to disturb their concentration. Leave quietly and quickly. The other option is to simply lie down in Sivasana or Child's Pose until you feel ready to continue.
- 4. *If you don't understand something, it is ok to ask the teacher.*** Although most Yoga classes offer a quiet serene environment for the entirety of the class, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the instructor if you aren't sure if you're doing a pose correctly. It's better to ask than to do it wrong and injure yourself!
- 5. *Be sure to turn off cell phones or other electronic devices that may make noise during class.*** It's very distracting and embarrassing to have your phone right in the middle of class.
- 6. *Where should you place your mat?*** When entering a class for the first time, it is up to you to choose where to place your mat. Generally there is an option to be either: **1. *near the front row:*** near the teacher or directly in front of the mirrors if there are mirrors in the room; **2. *in the middle section:*** where you can still see in the mirrors at least partially to check to see if your alignment of the poses is correct; **3. *In the back,*** far away from the mirrors and with a clear view of many other students. This may help you so you can see each pose being done around you and mimic them. Or **4. *In the side of the room somewhere,*** away from mirrors, people and in your own space. The side of the room is often the last to fill up. So, if you're running late, you may end up there anyway by default. Wherever you choose to place your mat, remember that the practice of Yoga comes from within. It is your connection with your inner self that will ultimately lead to the sense of peace and happiness that you are seeking.

- 7. *No one is judging you.*** This is important for you to know. As a new Yoga student, you may feel like the other students will be judging you based upon your clothing, your level of ability or lack thereof and other such reasons. This is simply not true. Most people are so preoccupied by their own personal judgment, they simply don't have time or energy to spare to judge you. They are more concerned with their practice, their personal issues and how they look.
- 8. *During class, it's ok, and even encouraged, to breathe loudly.*** When you breathe, inhale and exhale through your nose. Deep, cleansing Yogic breathe all the way to the lower abdomen. When you exhale, draw your lower belly in until all of the air comes out. During each pose, you can gage whether you are going too deeply or putting yourself into a compromising position by your breathe. If you find yourself holding your breathe or taking short quick breathes, it is likely that you are pushing yourself too far. Ease up a little until you are able to breathe slow, deep, rhythmic breathes that will bring rich oxygen to your blood, organs and entire circulatory system. If your nose is congested, make sure to cleanse your nasal passage way before the beginning of class. If you still can't breathe through your nose, you can breathe through your mouth if you absolutely have to, or skip class that day until you no longer have any obstruction to your breathing.
- 9. *Be sure to stay hydrated.*** Yoga is not only great exercise, but it can act as a cleanse for your entire body. As you sweat out the toxins from inside you, you will need to replenish the liquids you are losing. Don't wait until you feel thirsty before you reach for some water. Drink often and continuously.
- 10. *Mantras*** are short phrases or words that have great meaning and are generally repeated over and over either verbally or in your mind. They can be very helpful in dealing with every day issues. Yoga should be a time of concentration and peace for your mind. As thoughts from your day drift into your mind, you can slowly eliminate them by thinking of the following mantra: "let go". Inhale the word "let" and exhale the word "go". This mantra works wonders and can help you work through all sorts of issues you may be dealing with. As you begin to let go of the mental chatter in your mind, your Yoga practice will prove to be more and more rewarding each time you step onto the mat.



- 11. The teacher you choose will play a large role in the course of your Yoga experience.** Make sure that the instructor is encouraging, but not pushy; knowledgeable, but not overwhelming; and most importantly mentally present in the class. It is easy to become distracted as a Yoga teacher. They often teach several classes each day and the poses all start to run into each other if the teacher doesn't remain present with each individual class, your experience will suffer because of it. Also, many teachers choose to use the Sanskrit words for the poses. This is nice if you know the translation and can perform the pose from the cueing in Sanskrit. To start, you may want to choose a teacher who uses English words for the poses to start, and slowly integrate the ancient language into your vocabulary as you progress to higher levels.
- 12. Namaste** is a Sanskrit word with many variable definitions. However, the basic meaning is the same for all. It means, "The divine light within me, recognizes and acknowledges the divine light within you." This is often how teachers will end the class, usually with a gesture of their hands in prayer position by their heart center.
- 13. Om** is the universal mantra. It means from the beginning to the end and everything that lies between. (Pronounced A-U-M). When chanted either mentally or out loud, can bring peace to your mind and connection to universal oneness.
- 14. When meditating in Sivasana, focus on the point between your eyebrows at the center of your forehead.** This is called the Ajna Chakra or at your heart center. It will help keep your mind from wandering and give you something to concentrate on. Concentration is the first step toward true and deep meditation.

As you can see, Yoga is a very complete system designed to help in all areas of your life. The more you learn about Yoga and its various aspects, the more you will realize there is more to learn. Don't allow this to overwhelm you. The journey to your healthiest, happiest existence in this life begins with your desire to feel better and more balanced on a regular basis. Yoga will provide that for you. As you begin to cash in your daily dividends, many doors may open up for you that will lead you in the direction you are most suited to follow. Be sincere in your pursuits and you will be successful. The law of attraction states that whatever you believe you can have, you will have. So, set your intention in a positive direction with continual growth and happiness as a goal. All good things will come to you. You are a magnet for divine prosperity. Open your heart and allow the treasures to be revealed to you.



For a more in depth journey into understanding Pranashama Yoga, we have many options available for you.

Start with one of my yoga DVDs or read my book Journey to Joyful (available on Amazon.com).

Start a daily yoga practice with me from home with the 30 Day Yoga Challenge videos, audios and ebooks at 30DYC.com.

Become a yoga teacher or advance your certification level: train with me online or live in Bali or somewhere around the world at one of our 200/300 hour Yoga Teacher Trainings or retreat programs. More information is available at Pranashama.org



*"We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."*

ARISTOTLE