

# Yoga 101

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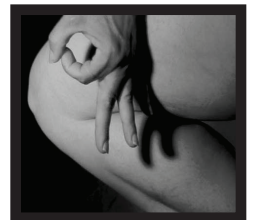


Answers  
to your  
questions



A guide  
to inform

follow the guide, ride the river



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# 1 The Faces of Yoga

## HATHA

Hatha is a very general term that can encompass many of the physical types of yoga. If a class is described as Hatha style, it is probably going to be slow-paced and gentle and provide a good introduction to the basic yoga poses.

## VINYASA

Like Hatha, Vinyasa is a general term that is used to describe many different types of classes. Vinyasa, which means breath-synchronized movement, tends to be a more vigorous style based on the performance of a series of poses called Sun Salutations, in which movement is matched to the breath. A Vinyasa class will typically start with a number of Sun Salutations to warm up the body for more intense stretching that's done at the end of class.

## ASHTANGA & POWER YOGA

Ashtanga, which means “eight limbs” in Sanskrit, is a fast-paced, intense style of yoga. A set series of

poses is performed, always in the same order. Ashtanga practice is very physically demanding because of the constant movement from one pose to the next. In yoga terminology, this movement is called flow. Ashtanga is also the inspiration for what is often called Power Yoga. If a class is described as Power Yoga, it will be based on the flowing style of Ashtanga, but not necessarily keep strictly to the set Ashtanga series of poses.

## IYENGAR

Based on the teachings of the yogi B.K.S Iyengar, this style of practice is most concerned with bodily alignment. In yoga, the word alignment is used to describe the precise way in which your body should be positioned in each pose in order to obtain the maximum benefits and avoid injury. Iyengar practice usually emphasizes holding poses over long periods versus moving quickly from one pose to the next (flow). Also, Iyengar practice encourages the use of props, such as yoga blankets, blocks and straps, in order to align.

## ANUSARA

Founded in 1997 by John Friend, Anusara combines a strong emphasis on physical alignment with a positive philosophy derived from Tantra. The philosophy's premise is belief in the intrinsic goodness of all beings. Anusara classes are usually light-hearted and accessible to students of differing abilities. Poses are taught in a way that opens the heart, both physically and mentally, and props are often used.

## JIVAMUKTI

This style of yoga emerged from one of New York's best-known yoga studios. Jivamukti founders David Life and Sharon Gannon take inspiration from Ashtanga yoga and emphasize chanting, meditation, and spiritual teachings. They have trained many teachers who have brought this style of yoga to studios and gyms, predominantly in the U.S. These classes are physically intense and often include some chanting.

## FORREST

Headquartered in Santa Monica, California, and gaining popularity around the U.S., Forrest Yoga is the method taught by Ana Forrest. The performance of vigorous asana sequences is intended to strengthen and purify the

body and release pent-up emotions and pain so that healing can begin. Expect an intense workout with an emphasis on abdominal strengthening and deep breathing.

## KRIPALU

The name Kripalu is associated both with a style of hatha yoga and a yoga and wellness center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Both were founded by yoga guru Amrit Desai, who came to the United States from India in 1960. Kripalu is a yoga practice with a compassionate approach and emphasis on meditation, physical healing and spiritual transformation that overflows into daily life. Kripalu also focuses on looking inward and moving at your own pace.

## INTEGRAL

Integral yoga follows the teachings of Sri Swami Sachidananda, who came to the U.S. in the 1960s and eventually founded many Integral Yoga Institutes and the famed Yogaville Ashram in Virginia. Integral is a gentle hatha practice, and classes often also include breathing exercises, chanting, kriyas, and meditation.

## SIVANANDA

The first Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center was founded in 1959 by Swami Vishnu-devananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda. There are now close to 80 locations worldwide, including several ashram retreats. Sivananda yoga is based upon five principles:

## ANANDA

Ananda Yoga is a classical style of hatha yoga that uses asana and pranayama to awaken, experience, and begin to control the subtle energies within oneself, especially the energies of the chakras. Its object is to use those energies to harmonize body, mind, and emotions, and above all to attune oneself with higher levels of awareness. One unique feature of this system is the use of silent affirmations while in the asanas as a means of working more directly and consciously with the subtle energies to achieve this attunement. Ananda Yoga is a relatively gentle, inward experience, not an athletic or aerobic practice. It was developed by Swami Kriyananda, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, author of the spiritual classic, *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

## KUNDALINI

Kundalini yoga in the tradition of Yogi Bhajan, who brought the style to the West in 1969, focuses on the controlled release of Kundalini energy. The practice involves classic poses, breath, coordination of breath and movement, meditation

## VINIYOGA

Viniyoga is not so much a style as it is a methodology for developing practices for individual conditions and purposes. This is the approach developed by Sri. T. Krishnamacharya, teacher of well-known contemporary masters B.K.S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois and Indra Devi, and continued by his son, T.K.V. Desikachar. Key characteristic of the asana practice are the careful integration of the flow of breath with movement of the spine, with sequencing, adaptations and intensity dependent upon the overall context and goals. Function is stressed over form. Practices may also include pranayama. Given the scope of practice, the inherent therapeutic applications and the heritage of the lineage, the training requirements for teacher certification are extensive.

## 2. Why Breath?

The breath is the heart and soul of yoga practice. Whether or not you are aware, your breath affects every instance of your movement, attitude function and life! We are fueled, driven, animated by the miraculous breath.

Pranayamic breathing relies on the abdomen to inhale and exhale air, thus not filling the lungs shallowly, but with the deep cleansing breaths that bring fresh air in and expel old impure air out. This deep breathing increases and purifies the circulatory system, allowing the body to continue to renew itself.

Pranayama consists of several specific techniques. You will most likely learn them in your yo-

goga class. They do take some practice and it's always wise to learn from a qualified experienced teacher.

Though breathing seems like such a passive act that we usually don't pay much attention to but is actually quite powerful.

Specific breath includes:

- Ujjayi Pranayama: victorious or ocean sounding breath.
- Kapalabhati: skull shining breath
- Nadi Sodhana Pranayama: to balance left and right, ida and pingala, solar and lunar
- Deergha Swasam: Three-Part Deep Breathing

Practice under the guidance of an experienced teacher and be amazed at the subtle changes that come from focused breath.

# 3. Can I Meditate?

Meditation. The word itself can be intimidating, conjuring images of robe laden Yogis on mountain tops. You needn't worry, that's the whole point.

Meditation can and does take many forms. Its benefits are numerous and complete the circuit between body and mind. Meditation lowers the blood pressure and regulates the heart rate. With accompanying deep breathing, it purifies the blood. Meditation allows the practitioner the chance to see inside of oneself, to experience an inner guidance system you may not be aware you possessed.

One of the keys here is to ward off your body's natural reaction to stress, and to fend off the mind's ability to carry you over the edge. Regular practice of meditation can teach you to:

- 1) **Stop**
- 2) **Look at the thought for what it is**
- 3) **Put it into perspective**
- 4) **Plan the next move**

All without raising your pulse

**So, how to begin? Simple.**

- 1) **Find a quiet place.**
- 2) **Get comfortable.**
- 3) **Use a focal point or white noise.**
- 4) **Relax into yourself. Breathe normally, yet remain aware of the breath.**

Remember to enjoy yourself. Just allow this quiet focus a chance to become a part of you. Allow yourself to listen to your own body and let your thoughts flow in and out. If you find yourself distracted or annoyed by particular thoughts, try repeating a word over and over. Say "peace" or "I am well" or another affirmation that comforts you. Meditation is a place in time where you meet yourself. Give yourself this gift and experience all that it has to offer. And the next time a situation begins to take a turn towards chaos, you'll have the tools to look inward for the solution.

## 4. What About Headstand ?

So you want to know if you'll have to do a headstand (sirsasana). And the answer to that is...maybe, when you're ready, if you'd like to.

Although it may seem like the ultimate yoga thing to do, headstand is certainly not necessary to the completeness of your practice. The benefits of standing on your head are pretty numerous and it is truly an empowering asana. But, not a requirement to be a yogi.

For that matter, the same goes for other challenging postures such as pincha mayurasana (peacock feather) and tittibasana (firefly). A yoga practice may include these asanas, but it doesn't have to be *your* practice.

Be sure to honor your own body's needs while practicing. You never want to push, pull or force yourself into anything. And if you have a teacher who thinks you should... find another teacher.

The beauty of yoga is its ability to teach us how to handle our fears and doubts while on the safety of our mats. Once you've learned how to breathe through a tough pose, you'll apply it to the challenges off your yoga mat.

So don't be surprised if in one of those classes you find the time is right to rise up into a grand sirsasana and watch the world upside down. Talk about changing your point of view!

# 5. I'm Not Very Flexible...

Where do you suppose flexibility comes from? Is it something we are born with? Or is it only available to gymnasts and trapeze artists? The truth is, flexibility comes from practice, commitment and persistence. It is something that develops over time, as you work towards its advantage.

Flexibility not only lengthens the muscles, tendons and ligaments, it increases range of motion through a joint. As we age, agility becomes less common yet remains an ability we consciously strive for. It is completely within our grasp.

So the response to the cry “I’m not flexible” is how do you get flexible? You have to begin somewhere, why not begin on your yoga mat?

We have to remember too, that things take time. As human beings we seek and expect instant results. When we don’t see them, we may become discouraged and give up. We need to continue to strive forward and meet small goals we set for ourselves. The next thing you know, you’re touching

your toes.

Remain compassionate with yourself and take the small steps that add up over time. There is always a new place to go on your journey, be sure to enjoy the view