

Before You Begin Yoga Practice

Love the idea of doing yoga but just not sure where to begin? Join the club! Here are a few important ways to prepare your mind and body for this ancient practice.

There is so much to benefit from the practice of yoga in every aspect of life. It is as much a mindset as it is a physical practice. But where do you begin? And what important things do you need to consider? Here are a few tips on beginning yoga practice.

1) If you're a newbie yogi, get as much information as possible on the practice of yoga. Knowledge is power, and will only increase the benefits of your practice. These beginner yoga exercises will help you learn some basic aspects of Yoga that will give you a good foundation once you decide to begin the practice.

2) A basic yoga session includes opening poses, standing poses, sun salutations, shoulder and hip exercises, back and forward bends, inversions, twists, and finishing poses. Check with your physician before beginning a yoga practice and make sure you have no contraindications for these poses.

3) Make certain your yoga instructor is certified by a reputable fitness organization.(AFAA, Les Mills, ACE are all good organizations) and that their certifications are current.

4) One of the most important steps is learning how to relax your body and mind. Once you enter the studio and place your mat on the floor, this

becomes your sanctuary and time devoted to yourself. No cell phones, no troubleshooting that problem at the office, no mental list-making of school supplies or homework for the kids. You deserve an hour and half of simple solitude.

5) Sometimes, if you've had a particularly stressful day, it helps to sit quietly before going into class and listening to ambient music just to prepare your mind to relax! Focus on the flow of the breath. Once you are on the mat, inhale and exhale deeply. Allow the stressful moments of the day to melt into the floor. Most classes begin with a brief meditation segment. Make the most of this time: focus, breathe and get in the flow.

Now, relaxation is a learned practice as much as the physical practice of yoga itself. This can't be stressed enough. If your mind isn't at rest, your body will be tense and tight and that defeats the entire purpose of yoga. In beginner groups instructors usually introduce everyone to the five fundamental Principles of Yoga: proper relaxation, exercise, proper breathing, diet and meditation or positive thinking. When all of these five elements are working in sync yoga is most beneficial. And the other side of this statement is that if one of the elements is out of sync, you don't get all the benefits.

Interestingly, relaxation often turns out to be the hardest thing in yoga practice. Our minds are so cluttered and overscheduled, it's like we're on constant "fast forward overdrive." Especially in today's technological age, everything we need is at the click of a button, push of an app, or just a keystroke away. So we just go faster and faster.

So pause for a while. Once you make a commitment to the practice, don't forget to pay due attention to the practice of relaxation techniques. Only then will you be able to fully appreciate and understand the true meaning of yoga and what it can do for your mind, body and spirit. Breathe deeply, quiet your mind, and get ready for a long journey.

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