

The Yoga Beginners FAQ

How do I prepare for my first yoga class at a yoga studio?

How often should I go to a yoga class?

Do I need a yoga mat?

What does Om mean?

How do I OM?

Should I feel sore after a yoga class?

Will Yoga improve my posture?

Why do we lie on our right side after *savasana* corpse pose?

Will yoga help stabilize loose joints?

Can I practice yoga with a physical limitation?

Can I practice yoga and enjoy a glass of wine?

Q: How do I prepare for my first yoga class at a yoga studio?

A: Shower before practice, and be sure you arrive on an empty stomach. Arrive ten minutes early so that you can sign in, fill out the paper work and empty your bladder before you begin your practice. Do not wear any cologne or perfume. Remove bulky or distracting jewelry and take off your watch. Be sure to completely turn off your technology before entering the yoga studio.

Q: How often should I go to a yoga class?

A: New students can begin to go to a group class at least twice a week. Guaranteed, the more you practice, the more you experience a lightness around your heart. That freedom around your heart will lead you to practice more

frequently over time. Eventually you will begin to develop a home practice in addition to your group classes. Ideally with compassion you will do less yoga and be more yoga.

Q: Do I need a yoga mat?

A: The main purpose of a sticky mat is to prevent you from sliding on the wooden or marble floors. When I began yoga there was only one kind of mat, a thin blue sticky mat. It was very simple. Today shopping for a yoga mat can be overwhelming for a beginner due to the many choices out there. Yogis love their yoga mats. Ask a seasoned yogi in your class which mat they prefer and where they purchased it.

Q: What does OM mean?

A: Many yoga classes open with the chanting of OM (also spelled AUM). It is written that OM can be broken down into four syllables, A-U-M- and the fourth syllable is the sound vibration of G-d.

"A" represents the first letter in the alphabet of many languages (English, Sanskrit, or the Aleph in Hebrew). "Ah" also represents an innate feeling one gets when they sigh or while holding a newborn when they are crying. The "U" sound or "oo" represents the continual rhythm of creation or preservation. The "M" sound represents the end or dissolution. The fourth syllable is considered the vibrational sound of life, often referred to as G-d. The fourth syllable is described well in an interview with Mother Theresa. The reporter asked Mother Theresa what she says when she prays to G-d. Mother Theresa's answer was "I don't say anything, I listen". Then the reporter asked, "What does G-d say to you?" Mother Theresa's response was "G-d does not say anything, he listens".

Q: How do I OM?

A: A few tips to the OM ... Think of your OM as a sound from your heart center ringing out to the world. Know that there are some practices where holy men and women chant OM all day long. Your OM, your sound waves go beyond the walls and join their OM to create one omnipotent sound, the sound of OM. Settle into the omnipresent moment after your OM. Savor your OM experience as long as you can.

Q: Should I feel sore after a yoga class?

A: Yoga is sometimes uncomfortable. However, it should not create additional pain, strain and suffering. There are so many types of soreness. Sometimes when you wake up sleeping body parts in yoga, the next day or two, you are tender. That healthy soreness is felt in the belly of your muscle, or detailed little muscles in your back or even the skin over your muscles themselves feel tender to touch. Also if your diet is toxic, you will be more sore after a well rounded yoga class. Lack of water can cause additional soreness.

If you are aching, burning or sensitive around a joint or in the joint itself, rest. That is a clear communication that you are over straining during your yoga practice or daily activities. If your soreness interrupts your sleep, stop doing what you are doing and seek medical guidance.

Q: Will Yoga improve my posture?

A: Yoga will not actually make you grow taller, but will simply make you feel taller. Practicing yoga regularly (two to three times a week) will guide you to your perfect posture designed for your gifted body type by birth and life style.

In general, people have a tendency to slouch. They are over worked, over stressed and plain old tired. Modern society spends long hours in a curved back position working on a computer, or driving a car or even pleasurable activities like holding babies or reading a book.

Yoga practitioners look taller without having to gain a single inch. As you line your bones up evenly with the earth's axis, you will begin to breathe more easefully. Your level of self-confidence, self acceptance and compassion will also expand with the extension of your spine and breath. Your presence will be projected as having a bigger appearance. Over time with a regular yoga practice, you will increase self confidence and ultimate acceptance modeling greater stature on earth (stat•ure (stäch'er)... From Old French, from Latin statūra. 1. The natural height of a human or animal in an upright position. 2. An achieved level; status.

Q: Why do we lie on our right side after *savasana* corpse pose?

A: Rolling to the right side relaxing in fetal pose takes the pressure and heavy weight off your rested heart. Secondly, laying on your right side allows your natural blood pressure to reach it's potential homeostasis. And lastly those precious mindful breaths in fetal pose mentally harmonizes your mind's attention on your balanced energy flow.

Now my dear and respected friend and yoga teacher Arun who comes from a more traditional background said "Rolling to the side, either side is for yoga wimps and promotes *tamas*. Instead, stretch, re-engage your mind and breath, come up strong and THEN see how your day goes! In fact, come up strong, do some *kriya* and *pranayama* and then you can actually say you practiced Yoga! Plus, rolling to the side to come up misaligns your balance...)"

Q: Will yoga help stabilize loose joints?

A: Yes over time with regular practice. What comes to my mind is alignment, engagement and anchoring. Proper alignment is essential in each *asana*. Line your bones up with the earth's axis! This will educate your complimentary and opposing muscles to maintain their proper balance in each *asana*. For complete stability root down as you reach out. Get creative and root not only to the floor but use the wall and other surrounding props too.

The Iyengar School of yoga is vey beneficiary to loose jointed students. You will learn proper usage of props including blocks, blankets and straps first hand with an expert teacher to provide ongoing guidance and expertise.

Q: Can I practice yoga with a physical limitation?

A: Yes. The yoga is designed to begin where ever you are as long as you are open to learn. The practice of yoga is different for each student and when taught properly, it will help you to accept and even apply your limitation with a positive spin. A person in his or her 90's cannot expect to do the same postures they mastered in their 20's ... at least not without some adaptations. My dear friend Catherine used to tell me about a bald reclusive monk with no arms and no legs living in a cave high in the Himalayans. His daily practice included a headstand in the snow every morning. You may want to experience several one-on-one lessons before you join a group class to gain some extra tools and knowledge how to navigate your way.

Either way, always begin with your breath. <http://www.yogaeverywhere.com/breathing/index.html> Start practicing five minutes a day for twenty one days straight. As it becomes easier and stress reducing, increase your time to ten minutes daily for another twenty one days. Eventually increasing to twenty minutes a day or even twice a day. By the way, there are some great yoga sites out there with delightful breathing exercises once you are ready to graduate YogaEverywhere's Breathing Exercises to pepper up your practice. I highly recommend Light on Pranayama BY Mr. B. K. S. Iyengar a fantastic resource once you have become a seasoned practitioner and confident of you strength and commitment to the yogic path.

An experienced Iyengar teacher or Desikachar lineage would be a good match for you. Iyengar style yoga is the science of yoga which often instructs with props and adaptations of the postures. The Desikachar lineage is the heart of yoga adapting the *vinnyasas* to your specific needs and limitations. They both can tailor the yoga to meet your needs.

Don't give up if the first teacher is unable to tailor their class to your needs ... it takes a more mature and clever teacher to teach a group class with students possessing different abilities and limitations. Your goal is a good one ... keep seeking until you find a teacher to give you a supportive launch into the practice of yoga.

Q: Can I practice yoga and enjoy a glass of wine?

A: The modern man/woman applies daily moderation in a world of chaos. It might be worth it to you to meditate, journal, investigate or even ponder the following questions ... How does red wine effect your physical body? Your energetic body? Your intellectual body? Your emotional body? Your spiritual body? Is "enjoying" a glass of red wine causing conflict with your family? Your belief system? Does it deter you from your yoga practice?

If you sip wine make it organic. Recent studies have shown that drinking one glass of red wine every day may actually have health benefits including a positive effect on cholesterol levels and blood pressure and the reduction of lung tissue inflammation in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Research also indicates that moderate red wine consumption may help protect against certain cancers and heart disease because of a compound found in red wine

(resveratrol found in seeds and skins of grapes). However, you don't have to drink red wine to get those benefits as peanuts, blueberries and cranberries also contain resveratrol.