

What Should You Expect From Yoga Classes

Yoga isn't about doing something artificial, taking a remedy, changing your life or forcing beliefs. It's about complementing whatever you already do to maintain your good health, and use the techniques to get more out of your life. The practice of yoga works from the inside out.

As a beginner to yoga you are probably wondering how starting a yoga practice will bring you the wonderful benefits that you have heard so much about. You may be thinking what if the postures are too hard to do, or I'm too tight and inflexible, maybe overweight or out of shape. Whatever your current physical condition is (even if you are in good shape) is where you start and from there you begin a new relationship with yourself. My father has a funny line. He says, "if I knew that I was going to live this long I would have taken better care of myself." By regularly practicing yoga postures you can maintain your current strength and flexibility and as time goes on, get stronger and increase your flexibility, leading to greater mobility in your later years. The worst reason not to start a yoga practice is that you're too out of shape, overweight, or that you don't have time because your life is too chaotic. Yoga is about mind, body and spiritual union. It's about being more alive, more aware, more present, more conscious and most of all more comfortable with yourself, and it starts wherever you are right now.

Any program that you partake in regardless of the type (weight loss, exercise, martial arts, etc.) requires discipline and patience. You can't lose weight if you stop eating for an hour and you can't get stronger or more flexible by wishing it was so. Stress doesn't just go away all by itself. Anything that you do for the first time isn't as easy as you might think. It may take a few classes before you start noticing changes in your body but you will change. Physically you'll feel better and you won't have as much stress related tension in your body. You will probably find it easier to get to sleep at night. On the day you were born your journey began. At first, you were content just being a cute baby being held all the time but eventually you wanted more. You wanted to explore new territory so you began to crawl (mobility). This crawling provided you with load bearing exercises that helped you strengthen your limbs. It took you months of this exercise to be able to stand up on your own two feet. Within a short time you fine-tuned those once useless muscles and developed a sense of balance, which led to your first step. Now you are able to walk and run around easily on these two once limp legs of yours. Yoga postures work your body in the same way. When you start using your body as a vehicle of exploration it will continue to change appropriately as a result of the physical work involved in the postures that you practice. Some of the postures are weight bearing which increase muscle and bone mass. Balancing postures teach you to concentrate and focus. Most postures help to increase joint stability and postural alignment. And of course you get stronger. All the yoga postures can be modified so that no matter what your physical condition, anyone can practice yoga. This is one of the main reasons for taking classes with an instructor. We have all heard the saying "a mind is a terrible thing to waste" but so too is a body a terrible thing to waste. Use yours and you won't be disappointed.

There are several other benefits that come from practicing yoga. You will find that you become healthier overall. You will miss less work due to colds and flu. The postures help to irrigate toxins and waste from your muscles and tissues. The postures also help to stimulate and regulate

(normalize) the function of your glands and organs and as a result your body works more efficiently.

The breathing exercises re-educate the respiratory system leading to better breathing habits which help to bring more oxygen into the blood. This effects your metabolism and immune system. The breathing exercises also teach you how to use the rhythm of your breath to stay calm while under stress and to reduce muscle tension.

The meditation practice provides you with a means to become more aware of the self that lies within; the consciousness or spirit, which is in all of us. Meditation reduces stress on a mental level, which transmits a message to the body that it is okay to relax, reducing muscle tension. Meditation is mentally, emotionally and physically calming and a sense of peace permeates your whole being.

The relaxation practice is restorative, where the true healing takes place. It is where all the stimulation and irrigation (to the glands and organs) generated from doing the postures can flow effortlessly throughout your body in its relaxed state without the blockages and other obstacles stopping the flow of healing energy, rejuvenating and healing you on all levels – mental, emotional, and physical. By practicing it regularly you will gradually decrease the level of tension in all of your activities.

Even if you only come to class weekly, in just a few weeks (maybe sooner), you will notice a change in your body's flexibility and range of motion, and a reduction in minor aches and pains. You will notice a reduction in stress, both mental and physical. You will feel more relaxed, think clearer, and sleep better. And in time you will naturally begin to practice at home on your own.

In conclusion, no matter what kind of yoga you practice, no matter how often or for how long you practice, you will benefit from it. Even the healthiest of individuals benefit from practicing yoga. Yoga has been recently popularized by the celebrities that practice it, but the simple fact remains that yoga has been around for over five thousand years and mankind has been using it as a venue for self discovery, physical health, mental peace and spiritual union all along. No matter who you are, when you're in a yoga class you are just like everyone else. We are all one in the same. We all have aches and pains. We all have stress and anxiety and we all suffer on occasion. The worst reason for not starting a yoga practice is that you're too out of shape, too stiff, too stressed, too anxious, too clumsy or too tired. If you've entertained the thought of starting a yoga practice for its proven health-enhancing benefits then you probably really should. If your body or your health is concerning you now, and you don't do something about it, it will only get worse. Don't wait several years and say to yourself "If I knew I was going to live this long I would have taken better care of myself." You've got nothing to lose and a lot to gain. Give yoga a chance to prove itself to you. It loves a challenge.

Copyright © 2004 Tony Riposo