

Learn Yoga

Practice and Improve your Fitness and Flexibility
In Just 2 Weeks!



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Chapter 1

Introduction to Yoga

Tranquility. Peacefulness. Wholeness. These are things we lack in our busy, bustling lives and yet, these are things we find ourselves longing for. Unfortunately, our busy lives don't often give us time to stop and enjoy just being alive. Yoga is a practice that, if studied and persisted with, can bring back some of the tranquility we hope for. Through the simplest and most serene of movements, those who do yoga gain physical strength flexibility and emotional wholeness.

Yoga is the most commonly practiced form of exercise in the world. Because yoga is just between you and yourself, it doesn't require that you believe in anything. Yoga is not a religion but a practice which varies depending upon the type of yoga you practice. In general, most people feel more serene and peaceful after practicing yoga. It seems to improve one's ability to cope with daily activities and feel generally better. Let's look at the health benefits of practicing yoga.

Health Benefits of Yoga

Yoga has multiple health benefits attributed to it. Some of these benefits include:

1. **Healing:** Yoga has helped heal conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, cancerous conditions, constipation, heart problems, high blood pressure, acid stomach, menstrual pain, insomnia, weight problems and sinus conditions, among others.
2. **Anti-Aging:** Yoga helps improve spinal flexibility, removes bodily tension, strengthens stomach muscles, improves muscle strength and helps skin tone.
3. **Mental health:** Yoga improves mental health by reducing nervousness, irritability, depressive symptoms and emotional fatigue.
4. **Weight reduction:** Practicing yoga helps you increase your body metabolism, lower the amount of fat and get your metabolism glands going at a better rate.
5. **Sexual health:** Yoga improves your sexual vitality and is known to help you control your sexual activities, making them more enjoyable.
6. **Strength:** The movements of yoga improve the strength of your muscles as well as your body flexibility.

The best part of this is that you don't have to be a yoga master to achieve these benefits. In fact, if you decide to practice yoga in the best way that you can, you will achieve benefits without doing it perfectly.

History of Yoga

Yoga was developed in approximately 4000 BCE. Its origins reach as far back as the civilization living in the Indus Valley, located along the ancient Indus River and the Ghaggar-Hakra River. This region spans what are now the country of Pakistan as well as the northwestern section of India. This civilization is also sometimes referred to as the Harappan Civilization for the city of Harappa, excavated in this area.

The Vedic civilization, dating around 1500 BCE, in the earliest Hindu texts, the beginnings of yoga can also be found. Yoga was absorbed into the Buddhist and Jain philosophies and has evolved further since that time.

There is some evidence to suggest that yoga in some fashion existed before these times and that it may go back at least 8000 years. Nevertheless, its first written account dates from Hindu religious texts of approximately 4000 years ago. The oldest Hindu text itself speaks of yoga “yoking our mind and insight into the bright Son of Truth. Other texts of Hinduism comment on yoga and specifically define the concepts thereof, particularly the thirteen primary texts of the Vedanta, which comprise all of Vedic philosophy.

For example, in a Hindu text from 200-300 BCE, yoga is spoken of with regard to the practice of Shadanga Yoga as the unifying practice of combining six limbs:

1. Meditation
2. Breath Control
3. Concentration
4. Examination
5. Sensory Inhibition
6. Ecstasy

The Yoga Sutras

Around 200 BCE, a physician known as Patanjali was able to systematize and catalog yoga as a science in a text known as the Yoga Sutras. This text identified the eight basic principles of yoga, also known as the “limbs of yoga”. These involve the most simplistic beliefs of yoga practitioners:

1. Niyama: Be good. This means that one practices self-study, self-awareness, awareness of the spirit and chastity.

2. Yama: Be good. Do not lie, steal or be overly possessive of things.

3. Pranayama: Live well. Have vitality and a long life through conscious breath control. There is a link between breathing and your mind and body.

4. Asana: Feel well. Practice yoga postures (asanas) which creates things in your life through which the spirit can more naturally flow.

5. Dharma: Have one-pointedness. Maintain a sharp inner concentration.

6. Pratyahara: Keep an inner focus. Be aware of self control and use meditation to focus intently in order to keep your mind quiet.

7. Samadhi: Absorption. This involves an ecstatic way of being that allows you to be spiritually awake and absorbed into the Infinite.

8. Dhyana: Deep meditation. This encourages a type of meditation that is without focus and which gives you a deep awareness.

Westernized Yoga

Outside of the confines of Hindu culture, the western world came to see a version of yoga known as **Hatha Yoga**. Hatha yoga is also known as Hatha vidya, a version of yoga first introduced in the 1400s in India by the Yogi Swatamarama. In his works, he describes Hatha yoga as being a stairway to the heights of Raja Yoga, or a preparation that brings the physical body to the heights necessary for practicing higher meditation. "Hatha" is a

A Yogi is a male student of Yoga who is accomplished in the art.

A Yogina is a female who is accomplished in the art of Yoga.

A Swami is a title reserved for a special spiritual master in Yoga.

compound word of the root words meaning Sun and Moon. This refers to the subtle energy channels throughout the body that must work well to achieve the highly prized state of dvana or samadhi. It is also a Sanskrit word meaning “violence” or “force”. Hatha Yoga is what westerners think about when they see the term yoga.

The fundamental text of Hatha Yoga is called the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, which was written by the Yogi Swatamarama. This book lists the primary **asanas**, **mudra**, **pranayama** and **bandha** most yoga practitioners recognize. We’ll look more at these later. The basis of Hatha yoga is the withdrawing of the mind from physical objects using physical exercises (asanas) and controlled breathing (pranayama). Through this type of yoga, you will learn to improve your balance, strength and poise and will maximize your body’s physical health with a clear mind that prepares you, through meditation, for enlightenment. When you balance the mind’s currents (the ida) and the body’s currents (the pingala), the current that is the Self will rise.

Branches of Yoga

There are seven different branches of yoga besides the most common Hatha yoga. These are described as follows:

1. **Hatha yoga:** This branch uses the typical physical poses and postures you think of when you think of yoga. The exercises are supposed to act on the body which, in turn, acts on the mind. From it, you will gain bodily relaxation, mental clarity and calmness and greater awareness of yourself in your surroundings.

2. **Karma yoga:** Karma is a word that means “right or proper action”. If you are one who serves others without thought of reward, you are already practicing Karma yoga.

Guru - One who takes you from
Darkness into Light.

A spiritual master or teacher.

3. **Bhakti yoga:** This involves sharing devotion and selfless love. When you love, you want to help people in a selfless fashion and you feel the devotion and pure love of that action.

4. **Jnana yoga:** Jnana yoga is all about the attainment of wisdom and about knowing what is real versus what isn't real. Wisdom brings you the ability to see life as a spiritual being.

5. **Mantra yoga:** This is the yoga that involves the use of sound. The word stands for "mind projection" and is a method of using sound patterns by chanting or recitation which helps focus the inner self.

6. **Tantra yoga:** Tantra is the place in yoga where opposites come together to become one. Often associated with sexual union, it also deals with the idea that the infinite and the finite can come together. This form of yoga is complex and is often used by trained masters.

7. **Raja yoga:** This is also called classic yoga and involves training the mind through meditation to serve the spiritual self. The practice of Raja yoga generally begins with a course of Hatha yoga to prepare the body and the mind for this kind of meditation.

Simple Yoga Definitions

1. **Asanas:** The poses often used in Hatha yoga to prepare the body for meditation.

2. **Pranayama:** The practice of controlled breathing used during the expression of Hatha Yoga.

3. **Mudra:** A symbolic hand or finger gesture often used along with the Asanas.

4. **Bandha:** The internal contraction of body muscles that lock and generate internal heat and help control the vital life force (prana).

The Modernization of Yoga

Yoga came to the West at the time the British began to colonize India and read some of the ancient Yoga texts. Yoga did not come to the US until the middle of the 19th century when some writers discovered the practice through the writings of several famous authors, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In 1893, The Swami Vivekananda arrived in Chicago and made a big impression on the Americans he taught. He was instrumental in teaching and promoting Raja yoga in the US.

Hatha yoga came to New York around 1920 through the arrival of the Yogi Mastamani and the Indian spiritual leader Paramahansa Yogananda. In around 1925, Paramahansa Yogananda started the Self Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles, which further promoted yoga to the US. Hatha yoga hit mainstream when Hollywood starlets and actors began to practice the movement in the late 1940s.

Yoga hit television in 1961 with the Richard Hittleman's yoga program. This program showed the viewing public some of the simpler exercises, standardized to the Western world. This later was followed by Liliya Folan's public television series on Hatha yoga.

In this Book

In this book, we will further discuss the benefits of yoga and begin to study the different styles of yoga. We will help you begin the practice of yoga and learn the different poses attributed to Hatha yoga. You will learn breathing and meditation techniques and how they are beneficial to you. Finally, you will see how yoga can be applied to your daily life. In the end, you will be a well-practiced student of yoga.

A word of Caution

Yoga is generally a safe form of exercise. Nevertheless, if your health is a factor, always share your intent to start yoga with your physician to make sure you don't have a condition that prevents you from participating in yoga.

Important points to remember:

1. *Yoga has many health and mental health benefits.*
2. *There are many types and practices of yoga.*
3. *Yoga originated at least 6000 years ago.*
4. *Yoga is the most commonly practiced form of exercise in the world.*

Chapter 2

The Many Benefits of Yoga

We've talked a little bit about a few of the health benefits of yoga. In this chapter we will look at the subject in a little more depth.

Why Yoga?

Yoga is a form of exercise and relaxation that almost anyone can do. While the first thought in some people's minds is that of thin men and women in tights and gymnastics outfits, yoga can work for children, older people and those who may be overweight. The poses we will show you in this book are the ideal way they should look. You need only to strive to do the best you can to mimic them. If you put your whole body and soul into yoga, it can provide you with the benefits of pain relief, stress relief, emotional strength and vitality.

Body Toning

Yoga creates a flexible body with muscles that can be as toned as if you were lifting weights. It doesn't build muscle mass, in most situations, but it does tighten and strengthen your muscles, giving you a sleeker look. Your posture is improved and your metabolism increases. Stress in your body is turned into energy and you feel energized instead of exhausted.

Let's try one simple pose that will stretch and tone your muscles so you can see how this works. The pose is called the forward stretch.

Forward Stretch

1. Sit with your legs straight out in front of you on the floor or on a mat. Keep your spine straight and your arms at your side.
2. Take a few deep cleansing breaths and exhale slowly and with as much control as you can.
3. Then bend forward, bringing your head and arms toward your feet. Grab your knees or ankles and hold the pose for a few breaths (about 30 seconds).



4. Slowly bring your head to an upright position and bring your arms to your sides. Keep your posture so that your back is comfortably straight and take a few more slow, deep, controlled breaths.
5. Repeat this exercise for a total of five times.

Do you see where your muscles get a satisfying stretch and how you use your abdominal muscles to maintain the pose? That's toning your abdominal muscles while stretching the backs of your legs and your spine. When you breathe slowly and with purpose, you blow away the stress and tension in your muscles and in your life.

The Value of Peace of Mind and Awareness

Prana is the life force or energy you breathe in when you take in each breath.

Apana is the exhaled energy or waste that you breathe out during an exhalation.

Yoga can bring to you a conscious peace of mind—a freedom from the unconscious stressors you carry with you. When you practice controlled breathing (discussed below), you are able to blow out emotional tension, leaving you with a peaceful state of being.

Yoga will also teach you a sense of heightened awareness. Your senses will be enhanced and you will be more aware of the sights, sounds and scents around you. Even your sense of taste and touch will be enhanced.

The Benefits of Conscious Breathing

Most people have little awareness of their breathing. It's only during times of stress or excitement that we find ourselves holding our breath or breathing too quickly. In yoga, a primary aspect of this practice is that of controlled, conscious

breathing. The yogis of old discovered the deep connection between the mind and the breathing. When one controls the breathing, you control the mind, which, in turn, controls the breathing—a sort of loop pattern that allows the brain and the breathing to be intimately connected.

Let's look at a simple breathing lesson that demonstrates how you can control your breathing. When you breathe in and out, do so only through the nose.

Breathing Exercise

1. Lie on your back against a firm surface. Bend your knees slightly up and keep your feet on the floor. Tilt your pelvis so the small of your back is pressed against the floor as much as you are able. Let your arms rest at your side.

2. Begin taking in a deep breath very slowly so that your belly expands. Keep your arms straight and bring them up above your head as you breathe in a deep breath. When the breath is at its deepest, your arms should be above your head.



3. Begin to slowly exhale from the top of your lungs downward while slowly bringing your arms above your head to your side. Finish the exhale with your arms at your side again.



Notice that when you inhale, you fill the bottom of your lungs first and then the top. The reverse is true when you exhale. This kind of breathing should give you a deep sense of relaxation and peace.

Relaxation in Yoga

Yoga enthusiasts commonly say that yoga helps them feel relaxed. Yoga's natural relaxation and breathing brings in prana to our bloodstream and circulates oxygen to all parts of our body. We do this best when we are fully relaxed.

Let's look at a simple relaxation exercise often used in yoga.

Relaxation Exercise

This relaxation exercise is also known as the "corpse pose". It is deeply relaxing and involves the expending of very little energy.

1. Lie on your back with your head, feet and arms on the floor. Place your legs straight and slightly apart from one another. Lay your arms slightly away from your body with your palms up.



2. Use your breathing techniques to breathe deeply. Imagine ocean waves rolling into the shore on your deep inhalation and rolling out from the shore during exhalation.

3. Relax all of your muscles, beginning at your feet and moving upward. Continue breathing deeply. Finish by relaxing your hands and fingers, followed by your neck and head muscles.

4. When all is relaxed, inhale and tense your entire body at the same time. Hold your breath and then relax during exhalation.

Relaxation provides you with the ability to release the nerve chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins help you feel good and are the chemicals released during activities like running or bicycling. Through the release of endorphins in the above exercise, you feel a natural sense of euphoria, which heightens your state of relaxation.

Relaxation can help you get through the rough spots in your day and can even help you cope with things such as a trip to the doctor's or dentist's office. Even in a dental chair, you can use your breathing to calm your body and your mind. This has the effect of creating a much less painful and calmer situation.

Yoga and your Health

As noted, in chapter one, yoga offers many health benefits, partly through the use of practiced breathing, toning and making the muscles more flexible, and relaxation. Let's look at how yoga fits with modern medicine today.

Yoga is a portion of alternative medicine, the part of medicine used by about two-thirds of the world's population. Alternative medicine stands out from conventional medicine by its focus on disease prevention. Much of conventional medicine carries a focus on treating diseases that have already occurred and on things like emergency medicine and surgery.

Yoga is sometimes prescribed by healthcare practitioners as a therapeutic measure for patients who have weight problems, anxiety disorders, high blood pressure or heart problems. It is felt that, through yoga, some potentially serious health conditions can be averted.

Homeostasis

Homeostasis is a state of balance within the body and is considered a healthy state to be in. Yoga works to bring the body into homeostasis or balance, which affects overall health. One of the well-known therapy programs using yoga was developed by Joseph Le Page and is a program that individualizes a yoga program to apply directly to the needs and goals of each student/patient. Each person has an individual therapist that guides the student according to age, physical challenges, religion and health conditions.

How does Yoga Approach Healing?

The way yoga approaches healing is called Sat Nam Rasayan. Rather than being a technique of sorts, this involves discovering how to arrive at a natural state of heightened awareness and homeostasis while holding on to an intention or desire to heal. In this space, time and space have no relevance. Some call it the "sacred space" or the "nonlocal mind" in which all healing is able to happen. This can involve the healing of yourself, the healing of someone you are close to, or even the healing of the world.

How to Practice Yogic Healing

The practice of yogic healing (Sat Nam Rasayan) is not difficult. It involves putting your mind into a specific state of awareness so that you are in your neutral or meditative mind. You will be able to experience deeper and more blissful meditations so that you feel more aware and more sensitive and loving in all aspects of your life.

Yogic Healing Exercise

1. Sit cross-legged with a straight spine.
2. Gradually make yourself aware of whatever sensations are going on in your body at that very moment. Pay attention to your breath and feel the air on your skin. Take your time to allow more inner sensations to come into your reality.
3. Gradually combine all your different awarenesses into one. Try to put all your awarenesses into a single diffuse awareness. Select a single awareness out of all possible choices that is the most uncomfortable at the moment. Allow that sensation to be there without completely concentrating on it. Continue doing this until the discomfort stops.
4. If you have a partner, follow the first three steps with a partner in your presence. Have the partner lie down beside you. When you have completed the first three steps, gently touch your partner lightly on the arm. Notice as you touch your partner that you will feel new sensations—those that arise between you and your partner. Do not focus strongly on these sensations either. Resist the temptation to try and understand your partner. Allow the new sensations to blend in with the others and not dominate one over the other.
5. It is the process of entering this space that healing begins. As you practice this, the internal state you generate is a space of unconditional, healing love.

Working with a partner in healing is called “healing with your presence”. It takes time to practice and learn well.

The Potential of Yoga

Work is currently being done to combine Eastern and Western medicine. In a program called “Reversing Heart Disease”, Dr. Dean Ornish has used meditation, yoga and other Eastern medical techniques to uncover a 91% average reduction in chest pain in those with heart disease. Dr. Ornish has studied the Integral yoga method and uses it as a key component in his program. Other things used include visualization, meditation, a low fat vegetarian diet, group support meetings and stress-management techniques. In some areas, Medicare is now paying for this program for certain patients.

Important things to remember:

1. *Relaxation brings about emotional healing.*
2. *Controlled breathing allows vital energy to enter the body and waste to leave the body.*
3. *Yoga tones the muscles of the body.*
4. *The use of yoga programs have led to a reduction in heart disease symptoms.*

Chapter 3

The Hidden Energy Centers of the Body

Eastern medicine and yoga, in general, is based on the principle that the body is made up of different fields of energy known as **chakras**. Chakras are invisible areas of high energy, each with its own color that are constantly changing into complex patterns. The chakras are supposed to be the organs that take in the universal life force that surrounds us. The chakra is the nexus of biophysical energy within the human body.

The word, Chakra, comes from the Sanskrit language meaning “circle” or “wheel”. Each is sometimes referred to as the “wheel of life”. The word is pronounced like *chuhkruh*, rather than the commonly used pronunciation of *shockrah*. The chakras are said to be aligned in an ascending column that begins in the base of the spine and reaches up to the top of the head. Depending on the type of Eastern practice you subscribe to, the chakras have different features associated with specific physiological functions and a different color. In some circles they are seen as lotus flowers with each having a different number of petals.

A healthy chakra is thought to revitalize the physical body and is believed to be associated with the different interactions of the physical body, the emotional body and the mental body. They are the center of **chi** or **prana**, which flows among them along specific pathways called **nadis**. The chakras role in all of this to spin around and draw into itself this vital force energy and to keep our spiritual, emotional, physical and mental parts of the body completely balanced.

The New Age movement has shown a great interest in Chakras and there are those that believe the chakras are associated with parts of the body. They feel that there are other chakras other than the original seven chakras, such as the “thyroid chakra” or the “ear chakra”.

History of Chakras

Chakras were first mentioned in the Hindu scriptures called the Upanishads. These parts of the Hindu scriptures deal with aspects of philosophy, the nature of God and meditation and form the core of the spiritual basics of Vedantic Hinduism. These texts were written over several centuries, beginning in the 8th century BCE. The Brahma Upanishad and the Yogatattva Upanishad contain the first mention of chakras.

The 8 main chakras known in the Western world arise from the translation of two Indian texts called the Sat-Cakra-Nirupana and the Padaka-Pancaka. The translation of these texts were very complicated and were later developed into the commonly-held Western view of Chakras.

The Eight Chakras

Each chakra is important in its own right and is important for your health. The first three chakras are also sometimes called the “lower” chakras. They deal primarily with the physical needs of the body and with the needs of the mind. The last five chakras deal with your psychological and spiritual self.

The First Chakra

The first chakra is located near the rectum at the base of the spine where thousands of nerve endings come together. This is your basic survival chakra. When the first chakra is out of balance, you end up feeling anxious, fearful and insecure. When it is working well, you feel grounded, self-assured and confident.

The Second Chakra

The second chakra is located just above the pubic bone. It controls sex, reproduction, creativity and emotion. If your second chakra is out of balance, you become obsessed with sex or engage in unhealthy indulgence of yourself or in fantasy. If your second chakra is well balanced, you become imaginative, adaptable and creative. You also have a healthy sex life.

The Third Chakra

The third chakra is located just above the navel. It handles your identity, judgment and domain. When the third chakra is out of balance, you become excessively greedy and carry a huge drive to have personal power. You are also more prone to illness if your third chakra is out of balance. A healthy third chakra brings you good physical health and the courage to accomplish your goals.

The Fourth Chakra

The fourth chakra is also known as the heart chakra. It is located in the middle of the chest. An imbalance of the heart chakra will make you seem cold-hearted. You will be unable to express yourself in love and you will become more selfish. A healthy heart chakra will bring you true love. The fourth chakra is the center of all kindness, compassion and giving selflessly. It is through this chakra that you connect with those you love.

The Fifth Chakra

This chakra is located in the area of the throat. It is associated with the thyroid gland and with the function of the lungs. An imbalance in the fifth chakra causes you to become overly blunt and opinionated. Sometimes you may be unable to express yourself at all. The fifth chakra is concerned with taking personal

responsibility over your needs. When you are in balance with your fifth chakra, you are true to yourself and compassionate.

The Sixth Chakra

This chakra is located in the middle of your forehead. It is sometimes known as the “third eye”. It is the chakra associated with the all-important pituitary gland, the Master Gland of the body. The sixth chakra is associated with your intuition and your capacity to understand concepts. It governs how you see the world and how you want the world to respond to you. When it is out of balance, this chakra keeps you from being based in reality. A healthy sixth chakra allows you to share visions that benefit everyone.

The Seventh Chakra

This chakra is located at the top of the head, near the crown. It is associated with the pineal gland in the brain. It is involved with the connection between your personality and spirituality. If the seventh chakra becomes out of balance, you may not be connected to your spirituality or to what people are talking about when they speak of spiritual experiences. A strong seventh chakra means you will have a strong and powerful spirituality.

The Eighth Chakra

The eighth chakra is also known as the aura. This is the lustrous energy field that surrounds our entire body. This is the protective shield that encloses all of the other chakras. The aura protects you from negativity and from catching physical diseases. It also gives you the mental ability to take your vision and turn it into reality. Your aura can change colors depending upon your thinking, your physical and emotional health and your feelings.



Each Chakra possesses its own color. The Eighth Chakra surrounds the Body.

Yoga and your Chakras

Everyone operates out of one or perhaps two chakras at a time that can change, depending on your mood or the situation. Yoga helps you put energy and balance into all your chakras by increasing the circulation and prana into the nerves of the chakras. You can also sensitize yourself to your own energy field by becoming aware of and feeling the space around you.

Important points to remember:

1. The term "chakra" dates back to the 8th century BCE.
2. A chakra is a source of energy within your body and the place where we draw energy into us from the outside world.
3. There are 8 different chakras in the body.

Chapter 4

Discovering Hath Yoga

Hatha yoga is the type of yoga most commonly practiced in the Western world. Let's take a look at how to prepare yourself for yoga, how to warm up and learn some aspects of this type of yoga.

Prepare yourself

You'll want to be comfortable and have the right equipment available to you when you begin your yoga practice.

1. Clothing should be loose and comfortable. Leggings or knit pants with an elastic waist and a T shirt may be completely perfect. Remove any jewelry that might get in the way of your practice of yoga.
2. Mats should extend the length of your body. Yoga mats should be somewhat sticky so that when you plant your feet, your feet will not slip. Some yoga classes use a felt-like blanket that cushions your body when you lie on it.
3. For sitting or meditation, a pillow can be used along with a light blanket or shawl. After you do the poses, you can become quite warm. The cool down during meditation can result in you feeling chilled if you don't cover yourself.
4. Do not eat within a couple of hours of doing yoga. It is perfectly okay to drink plenty of water before yoga and to bring a bottle of water along with you during your yoga session.
5. Know your body. Always put your best effort into doing a pose but know that you can be injured if you fail to know what your body can handle. Believe it or not, your flexibility will gradually increase as you practice this art.

6. Be mentally relaxed. If you are in a class, do not try to compare your performance with others. Stay focused on your body and yourself with a peaceful mind.

7. Consider having gentle and relaxing music playing during yoga. There are relaxation music tapes available just for doing yoga and meditation.

Warming Up

Like any exercise, warming up is important to improving your overall experience. Let's look at a common warm up routine.

1. Sit with your legs crossed and straighten your spine. Relax your shoulders and look straight ahead. Close your eyes and exhale all your breath out of your lungs. Relax and breathe deeply.
2. Grab your ankles and flex your spine forward so your spine is rounded. Continue breathing and focus on rocking back and forth on your pelvis. Feel each of your vertebrae as you flex the spine.
3. Now sit up and twist your spine. Put your hands on your shoulders and slowly twist your spine from one side to the other, continuing your breathing. Inhale as you twist to the left and exhale as you twist to the right. Do this several times for approximately a minute.
4. Shrug your shoulders. Place your hands on your knees and straighten your spine. Now shrug your shoulders, inhaling during those times you shrug your shoulders up and exhaling as you relax your shoulders. Do this for about a minute.
5. Neck rolls. Roll your neck in a circular direction using a single continuous movement. Time your breathing so you inhale as you bring your head to the right and exhale as you bring your head to the left. Do this for about a minute.

6. Leg stretches. Sit with your legs out in front of you. Take a deep breath and during the exhale, bend forward and attempt to touch your toes. Stretch your arms as far forward along your legs as you can. Inhale and sit up. Repeat this for about a minute.

7. Spread stretch. Spread your legs straight and as far out to each side of your body as you can. Take a deep breath, and on the exhale, spread your arms out to touch your toes or as far down your leg as possible. You will need to bend over a little bit to do this.

The Basics of Hatha Yoga

The simplest technique of Hath yoga is that of breathing. Most people breathe very shallowly—filling only the upper part of the lungs with air. In Hatha yoga, you'll want to learn the art of breathing deeply and using your diaphragm and abdominal muscles to get in a deep breath.

Deep Breathing Exercise

1. Sit with your legs crossed and your hands covering your upper and mid abdomen.
2. Begin by exhaling all of the breath out of your lungs and relax your abdominal muscles.
3. Now take a deep breath in, filling your lungs from the bottom to the top. Hold that breath for a second or so.
4. Exhale, letting air out from the top of your lungs to the bottom. Your abdominal muscles will push the diaphragm up higher in the chest cavity.

Try this around 8-10 times, taking care to pay attention to each breath as it comes. It's okay to wait a second at the time of an exhale before you begin inhaling again.

Asanas

Asanas are the poses one does in the practice of Hatha yoga. Each of the over 200 poses will help to stretch, strengthen or tone a specific body area. Remember to remain relaxed and move slowly into each pose. Do not stretch further than is comfortable for your body. Remember always to breathe and hold each pose for a minute or so. After practicing your asanas, relax by doing the corpse pose on your back for several minutes.

Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

The mountain pose is the easiest asana to learn for beginners. It is the starting pose for many other yoga poses or series of yoga poses.

1. Begin by standing with your feet together (or slightly apart). Don't put unequal weight on either of your feet.



2. Your knees should be straight but not locked. Slightly suck in your belly.

3. Relax your shoulders and arms at your sides, looking straight ahead. Elevate your breast bone slightly in your chest wall.

4. Relax the muscles of your face and around your eyes. Breathe naturally for about one minute.

Open Angle Pose (Upavista Konasana)

This is a sitting pose that helps stretch the spine. This pose promotes peaceful sleep and keeps your blood pressure normalized. You will find that the hamstring muscles in the backs of your legs will be nicely stretched as well.

1. Sit with your legs spread widely apart in front of you. Do not lock your knees.
2. Place your hands at your sides and lift your buttocks slightly off the floor. This helps lengthen the spine.
3. Now exhale and bend forward as much as you are able, with your hands reaching out to touch your toes or as far down your legs as possible.



4. Breathe deeply and with each deep breath, try to reach further down your legs until you have reached as far as you can go. Do this for about a minute.

Legs up the Wall Pose (Viparita Karani)

This is a reclining pose and helps open up the pelvic bones and to strengthen the back, arms and legs.

1. Lie on your back so that your buttocks are up against a wall. Extend your legs so they are straight and together up the wall.
2. Place your hands at your sides with your palms on the floor.

3. Breathe deeply for about one minute, feeling the stretching of your back and legs.



Bridge Pose (Setu Bandhasana)

This is one of the backward bending poses that energizes and opens up the body, especially the anterior (front) part of the body. Backward bending poses tend to be helpful in improving the nervous system and the digestive system.

Do not do backward bending poses if you have knee problems, heart disease or if you are pregnant or menstruating.

1. Lie on your back with your knees up and your feet on the floor. Begin with your hands at your sides and your palms down.

2. Press your feet into the floor and begin to lift your pelvis off the floor, keeping your neck and head on the floor. Eventually you will tuck your chin toward your chest.



3. Arch your back as much as you can, using your hands to hold your back up as arched as possible. Hold this pose for as long as a minute.

Downward Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Savasana)

This is one of the inverted poses that helps improve the circulation to the head and to the heart. It also helps improve depression, anger, sleep problems and stress. Physically, your hamstrings and arms are stretched.

1. Start on your hands and knees. Bring your knees up off the floor and straighten your knees so your buttocks are up in the air.
2. Leave your arms straight so you look like you are in an upside down V-pose. Try to move your feet as close to your hands as possible (narrowing the V shape).



3. Breathe in this position for about one minute.

Spinal Twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana)

This is one of the twisting poses, which are deeply cleansing poses that energize the body while improving flexibility of the spine. They should not be performed by pregnant women.

1. Sit on the floor with your spine straight and your legs crossed.
2. Raise one knee with your foot on the floor. Leave the other leg as it is.
3. Place your opposite arm to the outside of the knee and lower leg, twisting your body so you look behind you. Balance yourself with the other arm.
4. Repeat, using the opposite side of the body to stretch the spine the other direction.



Tree Pose (Vrksasana)

This is one of the balancing poses that give you a sense of lightness as well as strength. You will experience increased muscle tone, better coordination and improved concentration.

1. Begin standing in the Mountain Pose with your arms at your sides and your feet together on the floor.
2. Grasp your left ankle as you bend one leg up and place it on the inside of your other leg. You will be balancing on one foot at this time. Try to bring your foot as high up on the inside of your standing leg as you can.
3. Now bring your hands up into a prayer pose (like you are praying).
4. When you feel very steady, extend your hands up to meet high above your head with arms straight.



5. Breathe and hold this pose for about a minute and then relax down into a Mountain pose again.

Child's Pose (Mudhasana)

This is a pose commonly used to relax and rejuvenate after a series of rigorous asanas. The child's pose is the most commonly used relaxation pose.

1. Kneel down and sit on the backs of your heels. The tops of your feet should be on the floor.
2. Bend forward so that your forehead touches the ground. Your arms should face backwards so that your hands are resting near your feet.



3. Breathe deeply in this pose and feel your chest expand and contract.

4. In some cases, people stretch their arms straight out in front of them during this pose.

Things to remember:

1. *Asanas are the poses used in yoga.*
2. *There are poses used to energize you and poses which relax you.*
3. *You should only do a pose the very best you can and not so much that you hurt or strain your muscles.*

Chapter 5

Classical Yoga: Sivananda Yoga and Integral Yoga

A Look at Sivananda Yoga

Sivananda yoga is one of the largest branches of yoga in the world. It involves following a specific series of actions which are:

1. Pranayama
2. Asanas
3. Meditation
4. Healthy Living

It was begun by the swami Sivananda and brought to the US in the 1960s. The motto of this type of yoga is “simple living and high thinking”. As the body is the window to the soul, one should take care of the body. The believers of this type of yoga followed five points that tell us what our body needs:

1. Cooling System. Complete relaxation cools and recharges the body.
2. Electric current. Yogic breathing, also called pranayama, increases electric energy or prana inside the body.
3. Lubrication. The asanas provide lubrication and flexibility to the body. The muscles and joints run smoothly and circulation is increased.
4. Good driver. This refers to meditation that quiets the mind. When you meditate, your mind will become much clearer, more intelligent and more peaceful.
5. Fuel. This involves eating a healthy vegetarian diet to get the maximum benefit from the fuel the earth and sun gives us.

Warming up Exercises

In addition to the warm up exercises listed earlier (breathing, neck rolls, corpse pose, etc.), there is one more warm up exercise to consider:

Eye Exercises

Eye exercises allow you to move the muscles of your eyes.

1. Sit with your head looking forward and do not move your head during the exercise.
2. Look up as high as possible for a few moments and then look down as low as possible. Repeat this ten times and then close your eyes and rest them for 30 seconds.
3. Now, look as far to the right as possible and then as far to the left as possible. Do this ten times. Then close your eyes and rest them for about 30 seconds.
4. Look up to the right and then down to the left. Repeat this for ten times. Then close your eyes and rest them as much as possible.
5. Repeat the above exercise, looking up to the left and down to the right. Repeat this exercise ten times and then rest your eyes by closing them for about thirty seconds.
6. Make big circles with your eyes about ten times, moving your eyes in a clockwise direction. Repeat this for the counterclockwise direction.
7. Relax your eyes and rub your hands vigorously together so that the palms of your hands are warm. Gently cup your hands over your eyes and warm them without touching them. Hold your hands there and breathe deeply for about 30 seconds.

Asanas

The following asanas can be added to your regimen of asanas used in Hatha yoga. You can, in fact, decide what asanas work the best for you.

Sun Salutation (Surya Namaskar)

The sun salutation is one of the most popular of yoga asanas. It is often used as one of the warm up asanas. The sun salutation is a twelve step asana that lubricates nearly all the major joints and increases the flexibility of the spine.

1. Stand with your head looking forward and hands in the praying position. Relax and breathe deeply.



2. Take a deep breath in and lean back and raise your arms up and behind your head in a fully extended position. Point your elbows out to the sides. Stretch your spine in the extended position as much as you can.



3. Exhale and bend forwards, touching your hands to the floor as much as you can. Keep your head tucked in toward your knees. It's okay to bend your knees slightly if you cannot touch the floor.



4. Keep your hands on the floor, inhale and stretch out your right leg back as much as you can. Keep looking forward.



5. Now bring your left leg back to match your right leg. Your toes and your hands should be on the floor and you should be looking at the floor with both arms and legs straight.



6. Exhale and drop down to the floor so your toes, knees, chest and hands are on or near the floor. Bring your chin or forehead to the floor as well.



7. Now inhale and arch your back upward with your lower body on the floor. Keep your hands on the floor. You should be looking in an upward direction.



8. Now position your feet flat on the floor and, as you exhale, bring your hips up so that you are in a downward dog position (an inverted V-shape).



9. Inhale and bring your right foot next to your right hand. Drop your left knee to the floor and look straight ahead.



10. Exhale as you bring your feet together with your buttocks in the air and your hands on the floor.



11. Now stand up and arch your back with your straightened arms above your head as you did in step two.



12. Exhale as you return to a standing position with your hands at your side and your eyes facing forward.



Tension and Relaxation

With this exercise you will be in a lying relaxed position (the corpse pose) but will tense and relax the basic muscle groups. Start tensing and relaxing your lower legs, then your thighs, abdomen, arms and neck. Finally tense all your muscles and relax them at once. Finish with complete relaxation.

Integral Yoga

Integral yoga is another of the classical yoga types. It was founded by the Swami Satchidananda. He was one of the few Yogis to teach yoga at the original Woodstock Festival in 1969. One can learn this type of yoga in a place called Yogaville in Virginia. The **ashram** or spiritual center there teaches the ways of eating healthy, chanting and asanas commonly used in Integral Yoga. The Swami Satchidananda has a well-used saying: "Yoga is to be easeful, peaceful and useful."

The poses used in Integral yoga include the sun salutation and the exercises common to Hatha yoga. Many of the poses attempt to derive the most benefit out of the least amount of poses.

Cobra Pose

The cobra pose begins with you lying face down with your legs slightly apart.

1. Put your palms down on the floor next to or beneath your shoulders with elbows in the air.



2. Stretch out your chin and raise your head, neck, and chest off the floor.

3. Arch your back and look toward the ceiling for about 30 seconds. Then exhale and return your body to its previous position.

Half Locust Pose (Ardha Salabhasana)

This pose is good for strengthening the muscles of the back. Begin on your mat lying prone (on your stomach).

1. Tuck your arms beneath your body and bring your chin to the floor.
2. With your legs together, inhale and raise up your right leg as high as you can. Feel your back muscles tighten and keep your weight centered on both hips. Extend your foot out behind you.



3. Hold for 10-20 seconds and breathe throughout. Lower your right leg down to the mat.

4. Repeat the process with your left leg.

5. Relax on the mat with your head to one side.

Locust Pose (Salabhasana)

This is more difficult and strenuous than the half locust pose but continues to tighten and tone your back muscles. Your buttocks muscles are toned as well.

1. Begin the same way as the half locust pose with your arms straight and tucked beneath you.
2. Take a big breath in and stretch/raise both of your legs, pointing your toes away from your body.



3. Hold for 10-15 seconds before slowly exhaling and lowering your legs to the ground.

4. Rest with your head to one side.

Bow Pose

This asana is primarily for flexibility, reducing abdominal fat and improving the function of the pancreas, necessary for blood sugar regulation and digestion.

1. Lie face down with your forehead on the mat. Take your arms and, while bending your legs toward your buttocks (at the knees), grasp your ankles.
2. Slowly inhale and, with your arms straight, raise your head, chest and thighs off the floor so that your back is arched and your chest is as much off the mat as you can get it.



3. Look up. Keep breathing and hold the pose for 15 seconds. Then exhale and lower your body to the floor. Rest with your head to one side.

Head to Knee Pose (Janusirshasana)

This pose stretches the back of the thigh and your back muscles.

1. Begin seated on the mat with your legs stretched out in front of you. Sit back and rest your body on your sitting bones.

2. Bring your left foot up along your right leg until it rests against the inner right thigh.



3. Raise your hands up straight above you, inhaling as you do so.

4. Exhale and bend forward, reaching to touch your right foot and attempt to put your nose or chin on your right knee. Hold that pose for 10-15 seconds.

5. Sit up and then lie back to rest in the corpse pose for a few minutes.

Forward Bending Pose (Paschimothanasana)

The forward bending pose is excellent for stretching the back and leg muscles. It is used to prevent or treat constipation, sexual problems, menstrual problems and for reducing abdominal fat.

1. Sit on the sitting bones of your buttocks with your legs stretched out together in front of you and your hands at your side.
2. Inhale and raise your arms straight above you.
3. Exhale and bend forward, attempting to grasp your feet with your hands. If you can't get that far, place your hands as far down on the tops of your legs as possible.



4. Relax your back and your legs and focus on stretching and lengthening the spine. Hold for about one minute.
5. Inhale and sit gradually up. Tuck in your chin and slowly lower yourself so that you are lying on the mat. Focus on lowering yourself one vertebra at a time. Then rest in the recumbent position for a few minutes.

Shoulder Stand (Sarvangasana)

This is a very common pose. It is sometimes used with a small folded-up towel or blanket placed beneath the shoulders. This pose helps improve the function of the thyroid gland and the sex glands. It is helpful for those with asthma, liver problems, intestinal disorders and heart problems. Its name literally means “a beneficial pose for the whole body”. **It is not recommended for those who are pregnant or menstruating. Do not do this pose if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure, hiatal hernias, neck injuries or headaches.**

1. Lie flat on your back with your hands alongside your body. Begin by raising your legs up ninety degrees (straight up).
2. Now raise the trunk of your body, using your arms to support your back. Your elbows should be on the floor.
3. Gradually walk your hands toward your shoulder blades so that more and more of your trunk is in a vertical position. You should be resting on your elbows as well as on your shoulders.



4. Relax and breathe, holding the pose for at least a minute.
5. Slowly lower your trunk and then your legs so that you are relaxing on your back. Rest and breathe on your back for several minutes.

Fish Pose (Matsyasana)

This is a pose which is considered complementary to the shoulder stand pose because it stretches and tones the opposite muscles to the previous pose. This pose allows your chest to expand to its greatest capacity and is good for the prevention of asthma.

1. Lie on the mat with your hands palms down and tucked beneath your buttocks. Rest the bulk of your weight on your elbows.
2. Raise your head and the trunk of your body off the floor with your legs still on the floor.

3. Tilt your pelvis forward and arch your back so that your head rests back on the mat. Your hands should still be under your buttocks. Feel the stretch across your chest.

4. To reverse the pose, lift your head off the floor and slowly bring your back down to the floor, one vertebra at a time.

5. Rest and relax on the mat for several minutes.



The Yogic Seal (Yoga mudra)

This pose strengthens the stomach muscles and the nervous system. It also helps you develop personal inner awareness.

1. Sit cross-legged on the mat with your eyes closed and your spine straight.
2. Place your hands behind you and clasp one hand around the opposite wrist. Inhale and sit up as straight as you can.



3. As you exhale, bend forward and bring your chest as close to the mat as possible. Allow your head and neck to relax as you stretch forward.
4. Breathe and hold this pose for about thirty seconds. Pay close attention to your breathing as you rest in this position.
5. As you inhale, slowly bring yourself to a seated position, moving one vertebra at a time.

Important points to remember:

1. *Classic yoga and integral yoga practice common and well-known poses.*
2. *Integral yoga teaches peace and leading an easy, useful life.*
3. *Poses require stretching, toning, breathing and relaxation.*

Chapter 6

Iyengar Yoga and Anusara Yoga

These two schools of yoga are put together because they both focus on the physical alignment of the body and on the alignment of the spirit. Of the two, Iyengar yoga is more traditional and is one of the most widely practiced forms of yoga in the world.

Anusara yoga is a more contemporary form of yoga that also focuses on body alignment. It is similar yet distinct from Iyengar yoga and teaches you the basics of body biomechanics in yoga poses.

Iyengar Yoga

This form of yoga was inspired by a man named BKS Iyengar. He gained popularity when he came from India to the US in 1974 and now has several thousand students in hundreds of yoga centers throughout the world.

The primary focus in Iyengar yoga is that of aligning the body precisely and in the use of props to aid in performing the asanas. The goal is to achieve the precise alignment of the body parts in the pose and is less focused on moving from pose to pose. Sometimes only a few poses are performed in a yoga class but they are done with the greatest of intricacy.

Iyengar yoga classes are filled with the use of props—everything from chairs to wooden blocks that help you maximize your alignment. Folded blankets are sometimes used as well.

Triangle Pose (Uttihita Trikonasana)

Think about every move you make and keep all your joints precisely straight unless otherwise stated.

1. Stand erect in the mountain pose with your hands at your sides.
2. Take a deep breath and jump so that your legs are about 4 feet or 1.2 meters apart.
3. Raise your arms straight out to the sides at shoulder level.

4. Turn your right foot outwards to 90 degrees to the right. Slightly turn in your left foot to maximize the pose. Balance equally between the two feet.

5. Take a deep breath in and, as you exhale, bend your trunk to the right so that the palm of your right hand is on the floor near your right foot. Use a block if you cannot reach the floor. Your left arm should be completely vertical above you. Look upwards.



6. Hold the pose for about thirty seconds and then lift your right hand off the floor. Return to the position with both arms straight out to the side.

7. Repeat with the left side.

8. When you are finished, jump back to the standing (mountain) pose.

Warrior Pose II (Virabhadrasana)

This helps strengthen the leg muscles and removes cramping in the calves and thighs. Your back and legs become more flexible and your abdominal muscles are toned.

1. Stand in the upright mountain pose.

2. Take a deep breath and jump to spread your legs apart about 4 feet or 1.2 meters apart. Raise your arms so they are straight out from your shoulders.



3. Turn your right foot out 90 degrees and turn your left foot slightly inward.

4. On a deep exhale, bend your right knee so that there is a right angle between your thigh and your calf.

5. Shift your arms so that your right arm extends long and straight over your right leg and your left arm extends straight out behind you. Keep looking straight ahead at your right hand.

6. Hold the pose for about thirty seconds.

7. Reverse the steps above until you finish in the standing mountain pose.

Anusara Yoga

Anusara yoga was founded in 1997 by a long time yoga instructor, John Friend. Its roots are founded in Iyengar yoga but elements of other schools of yoga have been introduced into it as well.

Anusara yoga is primarily based on the idea that the body, mind and spirit should be equally honored as each is divine. The three A's of Anusara yoga are **Attitude, Alignment** and **Action**. This type of yoga stresses the importance of a focal point—the point in the body which is the focus of the power in any asana. The focus of power is seen as a small ball of energy that is closest to the weight-bearing part of the pose.

Camel Pose (Ustrasana)

This is a complicated pose, so watch the steps carefully.

1. Kneel on a blanket with your knees and feet the same distance apart as your hips. Put your toes straight to the back and put your hands on your lower back and upper buttocks.



2. Roll your thighs inward so your sacrum opens up in your lower back. Tighten your buttocks and suck in your stomach.

3. Inhale and begin to bend backwards, opening your chest and looking toward the ceiling. Press your shoulders toward the back.



4. Reach your hands back and put them on the backs of your heels. Your upper arms should be turned out so that your elbows are to the inside. Use a block to support your hands if they cannot reach your feet.



5. Hold the pose for about 30-60 seconds and allow yourself to breathe deeply. Make sure your spine is extended and stretched tall. Let your heart lift toward the sky as you look behind you.
6. To get out of the asana, push down your hands on your feet to help you lift your trunk and head to a vertical position.
7. Crouch forward into the child's pose to rest and breathe for a few minutes.

Important points to remember:

1. *Iyengar yoga and Anusara yoga are all about the alignment of the body which is felt to align the spirit.*
2. *Iyengar yoga is a traditional form of yoga.*
3. *Anusara yoga is a modern school of yoga.*
4. *Both schools of yoga stress energy and precision movements.*

Chapter 7

Kripalu and Viniyoga Schools

The above schools of yoga focus more on the individual and on his or her progression from one stage into another. Both allow the person to build a yoga practice that is safe, progressive and practical.

Kripalu Yoga

Kripalu was founded and inspired by an Indian Swami named Kripalvananda. A large center known as the Kripalu Center exists to serve more than 20,000 students in Massachusetts.

Kripalu yoga comes from the term “kripal”, which a Sanskrit word for mercy or compassion. In fact, compassion is the primary focal point of Kripalu yoga. In Kripalu yoga, the focus is as much on how you are feeling emotionally as it is on how you are feeling physically. There is emphasis on looking within the self at your physical and emotional sensations.

Three stages of progression dominate this type of yoga. The three stages include:

1. Express a willingness to move your body into the various asanas, paying attention to the alignment of your body and trying to see how far you can safely take yourself in each pose.
2. Become attuned to the presence of the life force (prana) that helps the mind and body to function. You become the witness or observer of yourself, watching what is going on inside of you and feeling a strong presence of yourself in each posture.
3. Begin to open up your own intuitive wisdom and ask yourself, “What feels good at this moment?” Life energy fills you completely and you may feel the instinct to move from one position to another. This is called “meditation in motion” in Kripalu yoga.

Simple Pigeon Pose (Kapotasana), Stage One

Each pose in Kripalu yoga involves beginning with the first three steps: (1) Breathe, (2) Relax, and (3) Feel. Feel all sensations that arise within you as you relax for 10-20 seconds.

1. Begin on your hands and knees. Slide your right knee forward so it lies between your hands.
2. Push your left leg back and shift your foot so you are sliding along the top of your foot. Extend your Leg so it is straight behind you.
3. Lower your pelvis to the floor so your right foot comes in contact with your pubic bone. Stretch your arms forward slowly so that they become straight out in front of you.
4. As you breathe, rock your hips from side to side to release tension you may feel in your hips.



Stage Two

Hold the above pose for up to 20 seconds and be aware of everything that arises from within your body or mind. Be a compassionate witness to this experience and be fully present as you do the pose. Slowly slide your hands back to your right knee and gradually reverse the pose.

Stage Three

While on all fours, pay attention to what would feel good to do next. Would it be something like the downward dog position or the child's pose. Any pose you choose goes with your natural instinct to perform it without judgment.

Proud Pigeon Pose

This is a slightly more pose than the simple pigeon pose but, as your spine becomes more flexible, feel free to try it.

1. Start in the simple pigeon pose and take a deep breath inward.
2. As you breathe out, draw your hands toward your body with your elbows on the floor. Lift your head up and flex your back so that you are looking as far upward as possible.
3. Hold the pose for up to 20 seconds and breathe.
4. Reverse the pose by drawing your left leg into your body again and resume the hands and knees position.
5. Repeat the pose with your left leg forward and your right leg behind you.



Viniyoga

Viniyoga is perfect for those who are just starting out or who have limits in flexibility and other physical limitations. The term “vini” means that this is a type of yoga that meets the needs of the individual student. Viniyoga recognizes that each of us is a unique being and that we can all make use, to some degree, of the asana, the mantra, the meditation and the pranayama involved in yoga. Viniyoga is very gentle and relaxing but still provides you with a reasonable workout.

In Viniyoga, you need to recognize the point you are at in the beginning and work from there. Postures are progressively done so you can go as far as you are able. Special attention is paid to the linkage of breathing and movement in this form of yoga. The general rule is that, when the body is contracted, you exhale and, when the body is expanded, you inhale.

In Viniyoga, you also need to pay attention to the prana (life energy) you draw into your body when you take in a deep breath, as well as the apana (waste) that leaves as you exhale. Take care to exhale slowly and completely so that the time to inhale is only about half the time to exhale.

Upward legs and Arms Stretch

1. Lie on your back on the mat. Have your hands at your side.

2. Exhale and bring your knees forward and cup your hands around your flexed knees.



3. Inhale and raise your arms above your head and your legs straight up so that your legs are together and perpendicular to the floor.



4. Repeat these steps for a total of three times.

Bridge Pose

1. Lie down on your back on the mat. Draw your feet toward you with your knees bent about 90 degrees in the air.
2. Take a deep breath in and raise your arms above your head so they are straight and above the top of your head.



Knee to Chest Pose

1. Lie with on your back. Exhale and bring your knees to your chest. Place your hands on your knees and hold for a few seconds.

2. Inhale and push your knees away from you but only about a foot further. Keep your hands on your knees or shins.

3. Repeat this movement for a total of four times before resting in the corpse pose for a few minutes.

Important points to remember:

1. *Kripalu and Viniyoga attempt to adapt poses to whatever your body can do.*
2. *Both approaches have somewhat of a psychological and introspective aspect.*
3. *Kripalu yoga encourages you to become a compassionate observer of what we do.*
4. *Viniyoga pays particular attention to each unique individual and his or her capabilities.*
5. *In Viniyoga, the inhalation and exhalation of the breath should come at specific points in the pose.*

Chapter 8

Ashtanga Yoga: Power Yoga

Are you interested in a serious yoga workout—one that will get your heart pumping and burn as many calories as any aerobic workout? Try the power of Ashtanga yoga. This form of yoga is incomparable in its ability to provide you with flexibility and strength.

Ashtanga yoga has its origins in the early 1900s and was originally taught by K. Pattabhi Jois an Indian yoga master. Jois named this form of yoga Ashtanga, which means “eight limbs”, because he believed that all eight limbs of yoga are used in Ashtanga yoga.

In Ashtanga yoga, the focus isn't so much on what you do as it is how you do it. There are some important features of Ashtanga yoga to consider:

1. Heat up the room or area to between 70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit or 21 to 24 degrees Celsius. This keeps your joints and muscles limber and allows for more fluidity in the body movements.
2. Follow the Vinyasas in order. Vinyasas are specific yoga techniques that involve synchronized breathing and movement. The practice of Ashtanga yoga begins with the sun salutation and then moves into a series of postures called the Primary Series. Considerable practice of this kind of yoga will yield the practice of the Secondary Series as well.
3. Apply subtle muscle contractions, also known as body locks, during the execution of the movement. These static contractions, even though they have little actual movement involved, use energy and generate heat. The heat that is generated detoxifies the tissues and organs of the body and will make you sweat, allowing for more waste to leave the body.
4. Expect to use your energy to jump in and out of the various postures. This uses extra calories as well as increases sweating.

Breathing

In Ashtanga yoga, you need to pay attention to your breathing. You need to use your abdominal muscles, your diaphragm and the intercostal muscles (the muscles between your ribs) whenever you breathe. Your intercostal muscles are a lot like an accordion. Every time you exhale, you push your ribcage toward your back and contract the muscles between the ribs.

Bhandas

Bhandas are the body locks used in Ashtanga yoga. There are three basic locks which can be used separately or together. **As a note, you shouldn't practice body locks if you are pregnant or if you have high blood pressure.**

Bhandas require your complete attention while you are doing them. You will combine the prana (vital energy) that comes with the inhalation and the apana (waste) that moves upward and out ward through the action of the body lock. In the end, the body locks provide you with vitality and health.

The Three Body Locks

1. **The Root Lock:** This involves contracting and lifting the perineum and particularly the perineal muscle, which is located between the genitals and the anus. This often closes the vaginal and anal sphincter muscles at the same time. When you attempt to perform this lock, it is best done at the endpoint of a deep exhalation. The abdominal muscles may also be involved. This is the most commonly used lock in Ashtanga yoga.
2. **The Diaphragm Lock:** This involves drawing in the navel and lifting it upward. It is usually done at the end of the exhalation. It works best if you tip the bottom portion of your ribcage toward your spine as you exhale. In some cases, it can be performed during inhalation.
3. **The Neck Lock:** This lock is performed by drawing the chin slightly toward the throat while keeping the spine in its normal straight position. It may feel as though you have a lump in your throat. This lock is usually performed at the end of a deep exhalation.

4. **The Great Lock (Maha Bhanda):** The word “Maha” means “great”. This applies to doing all three locks at the same time. It is generally done at the end of exhalation and is released when you inhale.

The Sun Salutation in Ashtanga Yoga

This series of postures has been addressed before but, in Ashtanga yoga, you will be focusing on adding the root lock and on paying particular attention to your breathing.

1. Begin in the mountain pose and have your arms at your sides.



2. Inhale and bring your arms straight up over your head. Lift your kneecaps by tightening the front thigh muscles.



3. Exhale and bring your palms to the floor. Look toward your knees and press your head into your knees. It's okay to bend your knees if you need to.



4. Inhale and look as far up as you can with your hands on the floor.



5. Exhale and slowly walk your legs back so they are straight out behind you. Your hands and feet are to be about the same distance apart. Look forward. Attempt the Root Lock if you feel comfortable with doing it.



6. Point your feet so that the tops of your feet are on the floor. Arch your back and look upwards.



7. Turn so your feet are flat on the ground and push your bottom up so you are in an upside down V position. Take five deep breaths in this position.



8. Inhale and return to the position outlined in step 4. You should be looking down.



9. Exhale and return your head so it rests against your knees.



10. Inhale and lift up to where your spine is straight and your arms are straight above you.

11. Exhale and return to the mountain pose. Employ the Root Lock again for a few seconds and then relax.



The difference between this sun salutation and that of Hatha yoga, for example, is that it is done very quickly and the first body lock is employed at exhalations as they seem appropriate. In addition, you will do the sun salutation at least three times in a row before lying in the corpse position for a few minutes.

Important things to remember:

1. *Ashtanga yoga is also called power yoga and is an athletic form of yoga.*
2. *Ashtanga yoga employs a progression of poses called vinyasas that are associated with timed breathing.*
3. *Body locks increase the energy expended and the heat generated in this form of yoga.*

Chapter 9

Kundalini Yoga

Kundalini yoga is one of the more exotic forms of yoga. The word Kundalini is derived from Sanskrit and means “the lock of the hair of the beloved”. The uncovering of the “hair” is described as the awakening of the Kundalini energy—an unlimited power that exists in everyone. This power is also known as “serpent power”.

The basis of Kundalini yoga is the belief in the universal Spirit or God Spirit. The spirit needs to uncoil itself to be realized in a process known as kundalini. You are the force behind awakening your own spirit energy.

Kundalini yoga is sometimes referred to as the “mother yoga”. This is because it embraces and utilizes aspects of all other forms of yoga. It uses the Eight Limbs of Patanjali and the seven branches of yoga. It also links breathing and movement as well as chanting and mantras. The chakras are focused on and there is an emphasis on moving and stimulating the energy in the various chakras.

History

Kundalini yoga has been practiced for many thousands of years in secret, with the teachings of the Master passed down from Master to an individual student felt to be worthy and pure enough to receive the information. This form of yoga became known to the Western world in 1969 when the Yogi Bhajan came to America to teach yoga openly to the “children of the 60s”. He founded a worldwide non-profit organization called 3HO, which stands for “Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization, in New Mexico.

Kundalini Energy

Kundalini energy is located physically in the spine. There are two nerve channels called **nadis**. These channels intertwine around the central canal of the spinal column, where the spinal cord is. The nadis are known as the Ida (negative energy or lunar energy) and the Pingala (the positive energy or solar energy). The Ida is the left nerve channel and the Pingala is the right nerve channel. The central column in Sanskrit is called the Shushmana. The spiraling of the Ida and Pingala are often described as serpent-like. These nerve channels are the main conductors of kundalini energy and feed the body’s immune system.

By practicing Kundalini yoga, an individual can stimulate untapped energy which can rise from the first chakra up the spine until it reaches the top of the head. This activates the secretion of the pineal gland, a gland felt to be important to

practitioners of Kundalini yoga. It is felt that the pineal gland vibrates with energy and controls the cells of the rest of the body. Raising Kundalini energy activates healthy chemicals in the brain so that we experience an awakening of sorts.

Approaching Kundalini

Kundalini yoga begins by focusing on a mantra or sound that feels comfortable to you. The most commonly used mantras in this type of yoga is “Ong Namoh, Guru Dev Namoh”. Then you proceed to warm-up with basic yoga poses and then a specific set of yoga asanas. You finish with a prolonged relaxation phase in the Corpse pose and a period of time doing meditation.

The mantra described above should be repeated three times during a deep inhalation. It means, “I call on the infinite creative consciousness. I call on the divine teacher within and without.” When saying the mantra, sit with a straight back and have your legs crossed. Push the palms of your hands together and rest your thumbs on your sternum (your chest).

Strong Breathing

Kundalini yoga emphasizes the strong breath. This is one of the specific trademarks of this type of yoga. One of the breathing techniques is called Breath of Fire—a type of breathing that is supposed to increase your energy level and clear your lungs of old waste.

The Breath of Fire is best done with your hand on your abdomen so you can feel the inward force of the abdomen during inhalation. As you exhale, you push the air out by pulling your navel and abdomen in toward your spine. During inhalation, you release the pull on the navel and allow it to return to its normal position.

Each breath is done fairly quickly at a rate of once per second. Try to work up to two to three breaths per second. There is no pause between inhalation and exhalation and all breaths are done through the nose. The Breath of Fire is said to be a continuous breath flowing through the body.

The Stretch Pose

This is a warm up pose done at the beginning of a set of yoga poses. In Kundalini yoga, a set of poses is called a **kriya**. Kriyas are designed to work toward a specific beneficial outcome, such as balancing the heart, the mind, the digestion or the spine.

1. Lie on your back and stretch out your legs, placing them about shoulder width apart, and point your toes.



2. Stretch your arms above your head and stretch out lengthwise.

3. Then, drop your hands to your sides, put your feet together and lift your feet and legs a few inches off the ground. Raise your head about 6 inches (15 cm) off the ground as well. Hold this position for about 30-60 seconds and then relax.



Ego Transformer

This exercise will energize the entire body. It involves a hand position (described below) that represents the ego or the personal psyche.

1. Sit with your knees tucked up to your chest and wrap your arms around your legs. Rock on your spine a few times.

2. Sit cross-legged on the floor or sit on your feet. Raise your arms about 60 degrees from the horizontal. Stretch your thumbs upward and curl your fingers into the palm of your hand.

3. Do the Breath of Fire for up to one minute.



Lower Spine Flex

1. Begin sitting cross-legged on the floor. Grab your ankles and, while inhaling, flex your spine forward with your chest out and your shoulders back.
2. Exhale and slump your body forward so that your shoulders are forward and your spine is rounded.
3. Rock your pelvis forward and back and move the upper and middle spine along with it. Do this with increasing rapidity for about a minute.



Upper Spine Flex

1. Begin by sitting cross-legged on the floor. Grasp your knees with your hands and straighten out your arms.
2. Take a deep breath inward and stretch your body forward so that your shoulders will drop and your upper spine is flexed.
3. Exhale. Then slump your spine forward as much as possible, keeping your arms straight. Rock back and forth, feeling your vertebrae flex for approximately one minute.



Arm Twists

This helps balance the heart and the head or the “logic” and the “feeling” parts of you. It allows you to be more graceful, aware and loving.

1. Sit in a cross-legged position with your arms straight out to your sides. Pretend you are pressing your palms against two walls on either side of you.

2. Exhale and rotate your arms so your fingers face forward.

3. Inhale again and return your hands to the original position.



4. Exhale and twist your arm so that your palm and fingers are facing backwards.

5. Exhale and return your hands to the original position. Make each movement distinct from the other and allow your elbows to rotate.

6. Do a position every second so that a set takes 4 seconds. Do this for about 2-3 minutes.

The arm twist activity helps create changes in the chemistry of the brain fluid.

Arm Arcs

This is thought to stimulate the thymus gland and to activate the heart center. It also activates the higher centers of the brain and stimulates the pineal gland.

1. Sit still in a cross-legged position and extend your arms out straight to the sides with your palms facing outward.
2. Inhale and raise your arms above your head so that your palms cross each other like a ballerina.
3. Exhale and return your arms to your sides. Repeat this in a powerful fashion for about 1-2 minutes.



Crow Squats

1. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart. Raise your arms above your head and allow your palms to cross each other above your head.
2. Exhale and squat down as low as you can. Put your arms straight out to the side with your palms pressed as if pushing against a wall.
3. Inhale and stand up again in the first position. Repeat this activity as quickly as possible for 1-2 minutes.



Important Points to Remember:

1. *Kundalini yoga involves awakening the God energy within you.*
2. *Kundalini yoga uses all of the features of other types of yoga.*
3. *The Breath of Fire is a well known trademark of this type of yoga.*

Chapter 10

Meditation and Yoga

Meditation is all about awareness—awareness of your inner self. It is unique to each person. Doing yoga and meditation can lead you to an awakened self and a higher quality of life.

Meditation means something different to every person. If you are a Zen practitioner, it means you are entering a place of “sacred emptiness”; if you are religious, meditation could mean contemplating God in a form of prayer. If you practice transcendental meditation, you would be undertaking the mental repetition of a sound. In other words, there are a lot of ways to meditate and it is up to you to identify a way to meditate that feels right for you. Meditation takes a great deal of time to learn—often more than a year. A good daily effort will bring you a welcome change in your life.

Zen Meditation

This is the type of meditation associated with Zen Buddhism.

1. Sit in a comfortable position, on your heels or cross-legged. Keep your spine upright yet relaxed. This allows vital energy to flow through your spine. Tuck your chin in a bit to keep your neck in alignment with your back.



2. Place your hands on your knees or in your lap so that your shoulders don't slouch. Don't round your body forward.

3. Begin by counting your breaths in your mind. During each inhale, count one and during the exhale, count two. On the next inhale, mentally say “three” and continue until you get to ten.

In this activity, you are asked to quiet your mind and do basically nothing but turn your mind slowly off until all your focus is on your breath. If thoughts arise that cause you to lose track of your breaths, let the thought go and start the count over. Have no judgment over what you are doing and let yourself be focused and spontaneous. Eventually you will reach a point where you can easily get into a meditative state without much difficulty.

At the end of your meditation time, make sure you relax completely and stretch out your body. You may meditate as long or as short as you would like. In many cases, some of your meditating state of mind will stay with you throughout the rest of your day.

Stress Relief

Stress, unfortunately, is part of our everyday lives. It has been a part of the human condition since prehistory. Even today, we operate out of a “fight or flight” response whenever we experience a stressor. This is a result of the release of adrenalin or “epinephrine” from our adrenal glands. When adrenalin is released, our heartbeat gets rapid and we breathe more rapidly in preparation for whatever stressor, real or imagined, that we face.

There are several aspects of both yoga and meditation that help us deal better with stress and its effects. Let’s look at the other things that will help us relieve stress:

1. Yoga or other form of regular exercise.
2. Set aside some time to relax and meditate each day.
3. Be aware of your body in space and notice if there are any tense areas.
4. Pay attention to how your emotions are affecting you and the people around you.
5. Use healthy ways to express your emotions.
6. Stay positive-minded and enjoy your life.
7. Be patient with the things in your life that you cannot change.

Helping Meditation Happen

Meditation cannot be forced if your mind and body are not ready for it. If you try to push it, it will push away from you. When you practice meditation, you are making it easy for meditation to happen and you are not forcing things.

Think about a time when you were singly focused on a project. Remember how intently you focused on getting the project done. With yoga, you take that same intensity and focus it inward, toward yourself. This focused energy will serve to recharge you mentally, spiritually and physically.

Two important techniques for helping you focus in such a way as to bring on meditation are:

1. **Tratak.** This is a technique for improving concentration that requires that your eyes be partially closed and that they gaze at an object intensely for a period of time. Gazing at the flame of a candle will focus concentration. After you have looked at the candle flame for a brief period, close your eyes and visualize the candlelight in your mind.

2. **Using mandalas.** These are colorful, complicated designs that attract the eye to the center of a circle. You look at it in order to strengthen awareness and concentration. Certain cultures of yoga followers employ mandalas as symbolic art. They can also be used in the practice of meditation.

Your Spine and Meditation

It is vitally important to maintain the proper spinal alignment during meditation. This is because our Prana (life force) can be cut off by kinking the spine during meditation.

The proper positioning of your body and spine should follow these simple rules:

1. Sit on the floor with your legs crossed so you have a triangular base for your body. This allows for more energy to be drawn into the body during the meditative process.
2. Try to place your knees lower than your hips. If you can't do this, place a cushion under your buttocks to raise it about 3-4 inches off the floor.

3. Place your upper body and shoulders directly over your hips and pelvic area.

4. Rest your hands on your knees.

If you can't sit cross-legged, you can sit on a meditation bench or a thick cushion that is placed between your calves and your buttocks. Don't forget to keep your spine straight and vertical.

Chanting

Mantras are mind-guiding sounds that serve two practical purposes. The first is to give your mind something to focus on. The second purpose is more complex and relates to those mantras that are said in the original Sanskrit. Chanting the specific vibratory Sanskrit is the fastest way to unite yourself with Universal Consciousness.

Some types of meditation employs the silent chant that is heard inwardly and is associated with the breath. Other types of meditation use a vocal chant. When we vocalize the chant, it evokes the positive energy within the sounds and allows us to breathe more fully as we say the mantra out loud.

A mantra can be as simple as the sound, "Ohm" or a Sanskrit phrase. It also can be something calming that you speak in your own language, like the words, "peace" or "calm". These affirming mantras generate a strongly positive energy.

Hand Positions

The various hand positions are called "Mudras". They are based on the mapped meridians or nadis that have been worked out over several thousand years ago. Each mudra provides a clear message to the energy system of your mind and body. Each finger relates to a planetary energy and to the quality each planet possesses. The thumb represents the personal self or psyche. When you touch the thumb to one of the fingers, it creates a specific resonance to which the brain responds.

1. **Gyan Mudra (passive mode):** This is for the attainment of wisdom. It uses the index finger (the planet Jupiter or "the planet of expansion"). This is a commonly used mudra and involves passively touching the tip of your thumb to the tip of your index finger to form a circle. This mudra helps provide you with wisdom, receptivity and a sense of calmness.

2. Gyan Mudra (active mode): This mudra involves curling your index finger so that the fingernail of the index finger comes in contact with the pad of the thumb. This mudra does much the same as the passive Gyan Mudra but imparts a more active, projective energy.

3. Shuni Mudra: This mudra uses the index finger touched to the tip of the thumb. It is used to impart self-discipline and patience. The mudra is represented by the planet Saturn, which is the planet of responsibility.

4. Surya Mudra: This involves touching the tip of your ring finger to the tip of your thumb. It is used to bring on creativity and energy. The ring finger represents the planet Uranus.

5. Buddhi Mudra: This mudra involves touching the tip of the little finger to the tip of the thumb. It is used to impart better communication. This mudra is represented by the planet Mercury, which is the planet of mental power and communication.

The Use of Focal Points in Meditation

Using focal points is a common tool in meditation. There are several focal points you can choose.

1. One of the most common focal point is that of the sixth Chakra or the third eye. You focus on this by rolling your eyes inward and looking in the direction of the place on your face between your eyebrows. This helps you focus and also stimulates the sixth Chakra, which is your center for intuition.

2. Another strong focal point involves opening your eyes a little bit and staring at the tip of your nose. If you can't see it, touch a finger to the tip of your nose and look at your finger. Remove your finger without changing your gaze. This will help you create a relaxing feeling in your body and will activate your pineal and pituitary glands.

3. Another focal point is the heart chakra. To do this, you place your hands in the prayer pose, pushing your thumbs into the sternum. Alternatively, you can place your hands crossed upon your chest. When you have your thumbs or hands pressed against your heart center, you open up your heart meridian.

Prayer and Meditation

When you meditate, there are those who tell us it is as if God is talking to you. When you pray, it is as if you are talking back. God, in this sense, is whatever it means to you personally. In yoga, prayer and meditation work within all types of faiths and religions. When you pray, you are getting in touch with who you are and are putting forth of yourself to the Universal God.

Prayer can be very powerful. In studies of patients who were ill, the researchers asked that half of the patients be prayed for and the other half was not. The study revealed that the patients who were prayed for did much better and had a better outcome than those who were not prayed for.

Give Blessing to Yourself

This is an exercise recommended for the mornings and evenings. It is a blessing that was originally written by Yogi Bajan. Other than mornings and evenings, you can use it whenever you need to feel deeply relaxed.

1. In the morning, during the first three minutes after awakening, bless your head, your nose, your ears, eyes and mouth. Then bless your throat, your chest, your arms and your abdomen. Touch each area as you bless it.
2. Bless your pure thoughts and talk to your soul. Feel your soul and thank it for being there.
3. In the evening, take about five minutes to bless your fingers and toes, your earlobes and the tops of your ears. Touch each area as you bless it.
4. Bless the good deeds you did during the day and feel everything inside you feeling moved by your spirit. Talk to your spirit and make it a friend to you.

As you pray, think about affirmations you can make. Maybe you will say, “I am at peace,” or “I am at one with the Universal God”. Almost anything can be an affirmation if it is positive and meaningful to you. When you feel most overwhelmed with stress and anxiety, use your affirmations to pull you out of that feeling. The affirmations must be very positive—the opposite of worrying. It is said that worrying is the same as praying for something you don’t want, which will attract the very thing you aren’t wanting.

Toning

Toning represents the beginnings of chanting. When you undertake toning, you begin by saying each of the vowels in turn, like “a, e, i, o, and u”. Use these sounds to relax yourself and try toning a vowel on each single breath. Say each sound a total of three times. The tones will vibrate and trigger energy in different parts of the body. Pay attention to where in your mouth and throat you feel each sound.

Other sounds are releasing sounds that let out tension in your body. One of these sounds is the sound, “hmmm” or the sound, “aaahh”. Try doing one of these sounds on an exhale and then try the sound, “shhhh”. Play with the sounds that make you feel the most relaxed and at your best.

Naad Yoga

This is a type of yoga that pays special attention to sounds and how they affect our mind, body and spirit. It is based on the belief that sound is the basic nature of the universe. In Naad yoga, it is said that the universe was created through the use of primal sound.

The first chant from Naad yoga that we will discuss is called “Hari Om”. It follows the tradition of Integral yoga. The word Hari consists of two syllables. “Ha” requires you to contract the solar plexus so that it adds energy to this area of the body. When you say “Ri”, you relax the solar plexus and contract the throat, bringing heat into the mantra.

Finally, you add the “O”, which opens the throat and allows energy to rise up from within the chest and lungs. When you say the sound “Mmm” at the end, you close the mouth and allow the energy to travel up into your head.

Repeat “Hari Om” as many times as you feel like it. Try it at different rates of speed and different pitches. When you are done, sit quietly for awhile.

The Sa Ta Na Ma Mantra

This type of mantra comes straight out of the Kundalini yoga tradition and is a very important mantra. It is said that if you can completely master this mantra, you will be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. It is considered a very powerful mantra and is compared to the energy of the atom. Like the atom, it cannot easily be divided from its basic components.

The Sa Ta Na Ma mantra uses the voice, the movement of the mouth, your mental projection and hand movements to put you into the meditative state. In fact, you use three “voices”: (1) Your chanting out loud human voice, (2) the voice of the beloved (whispering), and (3) your inner voice (silent repetition of the mantra). The pattern of chanting is to start out loud for 3 minutes, say it in a whisper for three minutes and then say it silently for three minutes before reversing the order.

The mouth movements involve touching your tongue on your upper palate and, in the process, stimulating many nadis on the upper palate. This activation releases subconscious mind patterns and activates higher brain functioning.

The hand movements go very specifically with each sound:

1. Sa: Touch the tips of your thumb and index finger together.
2. Ta: Touch the tips of your thumb and middle finger together.
3. Na: Touch your thumb and the tips of your ring finger together.
4. Ma: Touch your thumb and your little finger together.

Although this mantra requires that you remember a lot, you will eventually arrive at a place where it is second nature to follow each and every step. You can begin with just the vocal parts and then add the hand movements when you feel comfortable.

So Ham Meditation

This is a type of meditation that emphasizes the natural sound of the breath. “So” represents the sound of a natural inhalation, while “Ham” (pronounced “Hum”) is the sound of a natural exhalation. It means “I am that which I am” and places an emphasis on arriving at a deep affirmation that accepts you for who you are. It helps you create a relaxing relationship between you and your inner self.

1. Sit cross-legged or on your feet. Keep your spine as straight as you can.
2. Pay attention to your breathing and feel the breath going into and out of your nostrils.

3. As you inhale, mentally think the word “So”. As you exhale, mentally think the word “Ham”.

4. Transfer your awareness to the words your mind is thinking and away from your breathing. Allow your breath to flow naturally with minimal awareness that it is occurring.

Important things to remember:

1. *Mantras help you build energy into your body and aids in relaxation.*
2. *Meditation is a part of almost every aspect of yoga.*
3. *There are many different mantras for you to consider using as a part of your meditative process.*
4. *Keep a straight spine so the flow of energy moves easily up the spine.*

Chapter 11

Practicing Yoga through Healthy Living

Yoga practice isn't just about poses; it's about life and healthy living. There are many ordinary aspects of life that can be made better if you stay centered, balanced and relaxed. Your eating habits will change when you practice yoga. You may find yourself attracted to the feel and flavor of healthier foods which will, in turn, help you bring more peace and serenity to your practice of yoga.

Eating Habits

Why do you eat what you eat? Do you eat whatever tastes good without regard to the food's health benefits? It sounds like a good idea, but eating whatever tastes good can adversely affect your health and cause you to lose vitality. Let's look at some yoga guidelines for healthy eating.

Ayurveda System

The system of Ayurveda has been practiced for almost 5,000 years and began in India. This system places an emphasis on health as a being a holistic, healthy functioning of the mind, body and spirit. In Ayurveda, there are three forces in play in the world, two of which are opposite forces. The opposite forces are called **rajās** and **tamas**. There is also a balancing force called **sattva**. There are foods related to all three forces.

1. Rajastic foods. These should be avoided as much as possible because they overstimulate the body and mind. Rajastic foods include chocolate, refined sugar, chili, heavily spiced foods, soft drinks, tea, coffee, fast foods, snacks, and salty foods. Too much of these foods will cause mental and physical stress as well as restlessness.
2. Tamastic foods. These include meat, fish and alcohol, as well as eggs, drugs or anything that is fermented, burnt, barbecued and fried. Tamastic foods produce feelings of dullness, heaviness and lethargy. Eating too much of this food will cause a person to become lazy, depressed and dull.
3. Sattvic foods. These are the calming foods of the yogic diet. They help you feel balanced and nourish the body and mind. These foods include fresh fruits, dried fruits, nuts, seeds and vegetables. Your energy level will increase and you will be able to achieve your yoga postures with better synergy.

Simple Guidelines

There is a lot to know about food and eating in yoga. Nevertheless, there are simple rules that are important to follow.

1. Drink plenty of water. As two-thirds of our body is water, water is very important to our health. Without water, we would die within a few days. It is recommended that you drink about 2 quarts or 2 liters of water each day as a baseline. Drink more if you are exercising, working up a sweat or need to calm yourself. Water is the only liquid that really quenches your thirst. Do not drink water with a meal as it will dilute the digestive juices.

2. Eat foods in their natural, organic state. These are foods that have never been processed and therefore have not lost their nutritional value.

3. Eliminate meat and eggs from your diet. Limit your intake of dairy products to use only organic products. You can substitute soy, rice or nut milk products. Organic dairy products come from grain fed animals that are fed grain that is grown without pesticides. The animals should be raised without grown hormones or antibiotics. Most yoga practitioners do not believe in harming animals and, instead, practice **ahimsa** or non-violence to living things. If you become a vegan, make sure you take a vitamin B12 supplement so you won't become deficient. According to the World Health Organization, the human only need around 40 grams of protein per day. The average American consumes three times that recommendation. Vegetarians get plenty of protein through their diet.

4. Read labels. If an ingredient is unpronounceable, it probably isn't organic and has some kind of processing done to it. Most of them are additives and preservatives, which really aren't healthy for you nor do they provide any nutritional value. This means avoiding fruits and vegetables that aren't labeled as organic.

5. Eating tips. Chew each bite about twice as long as you think you should. This stimulates the digestive process. Don't eat past the point of being full. Try to fast for a day on occasion. Drink only water and eat only fresh fruit and vegetable juices. Try to build this up to once every 1-2 weeks. Eat raw foods as much as possible. When you are eating, take the time to

simply eat. Don't talk on the phone, read a newspaper or walk around while you eat. Your food will digest much better if you concentrate on eating.

6. Try cooking with tofu. It is a healthy source of nutrition that can easily be adapted to other recipes as it takes on the flavor of whatever you are cooking it with.

Eating healthy is a big part of the practice of yoga. Take the time to sing or chant while making food in order to infuse it with peace and vital energy.

Food as Medicine

Long before medicines were available, people used food to help cure illness and maintain health. Some foods that are used to heal include onions, garlic and ginger. They can be used separately or can be combined into a **masala**, which is a sautéed blend of onions, garlic, ginger, rice and vegetables. The word, masala, means “blend”.

Rice dishes are also important in yoga. Basmati rice is particularly thought of as a sacred food in Asia. It is easy to digest and contains lots of B vitamins, iodine and protein. A specific food, called **Kicheree**, involves the combination of rice and mung beans and is believed to help build strength following an illness.

Turmeric is a ground root that is bright yellow in color. It is one of the major ingredients in curry powder and may be helpful in the prevention of diabetes and cancer. Turmeric also acts as a lubricant for the joints and is healthy for the skin and mucus membranes. You can make a drink with turmeric called golden milk, which involves mixing honey, raw almond oil, turmeric, milk and a little bit of water.

A healthy tea can be made from several healthful ingredients, such as black peppercorns, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and ginger. These act on different parts of the body and are steeped together with water. Milk is added to improve digestion of the spices. You can add a bit of honey to make it taste sweeter.

The Benefits of the Cold Shower

Believe it or not, cold showers are one of the best things you can do for yourself, especially if you take one once per day. Cold showers are said to keep you younger and more energetic. When the cold water hits your skin, your blood rushes out in an attempt to warm you. All of your capillaries open up and toxins are released from your bloodstream. This blood then goes back to your organs and flushes them out. Your flushed-out organs secrete more hormones and your

entire body is revitalized. When you first get into a cold shower, you will feel the cold. After about a minute, your capillaries open and you will no longer feel so cold.

To prepare yourself for a cold shower, massage your body with oil such as almond oil. This will provide a protective covering to your skin. Use a pair of knee-length underwear or shorts while in the shower. This protects the femur bone which controls the balance of Calcium and Magnesium in the body. A cold shower is best taken in the morning.

As you shower, let the water hit your feet, followed by the rest of your body. Wash your face but do not wet your whole head. Allow water to hit the lymph nodes beneath your arm pits. This serves to prevent colds. Women should allow water to reach their breasts and massage the breasts to keep breast cancer away. Breathe deeply and chant a mantra to keep yourself going until you can stand at least one minute. When you dry off, rub your skin vigorously.

Yoga on the Go

In your busy life, it seems there is not enough time to do the things that help you stay healthy. Fortunately, yoga is a very portable exercise. You can do yoga while waiting for an appointment, sitting on the bus or just relaxing. There are many yoga techniques you can use to help you pass the time in a healthy way.

1. Practice the eye exercises—looking in all four directions and in the diagonal directions.
2. Roll your tongue around your teeth with your mouth closed for a few times and then circle around in the opposite direction. This will allow you to relax your jaw.
3. Practice listening to your breath and lengthen out the exhalation to rid your body of more waste.
4. Listen in your mind to a mantra while you breathe.
5. Improve your digestion by taking in a deep breath, holding it, and pumping your navel toward your spine about five times. Exhale and repeat the first steps.
6. Inhale and shrug your shoulders upward. Exhale and relax your shoulders. Do shoulder rolls, rolling them in a circular motion forward at first for a few times and then backwards.
7. Roll your wrists and ankles in both directions, about five times in each direction.
8. Use yoga to stretch your entire body in the back of an airplane as much as possible. Try to do this for at least 15-30 minutes.
9. To increase energy, use the force of your breath in the Breath of Fire to rid the lungs of stale air and to fill them with fresh oxygen. Try to do this with a very straight spine and concentrate on your sixth Chakra (third eye) as you do this exercise for about 2 minutes.

10. Practice right nostril breathing. As the left side of the body is felt to be the moon side, the right side is filled with sun energy and the warmth and masculinity it brings with it. Breathing through the right nostril will energize you as you draw the air in. Close the left nostril as you breathe through the right nostril. Breathe through the left nostril to relax and cool the body.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

This is a breathing technique that provides balance to your body. It is one of the first pranayama (breathing exercises) taught in yoga classes. It allows you to harmonize the moon part of you and the sun part of you and will help you prepare for meditation.

1. You need to sit with your spine straight. Using your right hand, extend your thumb, ring finger and little finger so that only the index and middle finger touch the palm. This hand position is called the Vishnu mudra. Place your left hand on your knee.

2. Use your right thumb to block your right nostril and inhale with the left nostril.

3. Bring your ring finger around to hold your left nostril closed. Hold both nostrils closed for a few seconds.

4. Lift your thumb off your right nostril and exhale through it. Empty your lungs as much as possible.

5. Inhale through your right nostril again and then close it with your thumb.

6. After holding it for a few seconds, exhale through your left nostril.



You can repeat this several times to balance your sun and moon energies.

Important things to remember:

1. *A healthy diet is important to the practice of yoga.*
2. *Cold showers cleanse your body on the inside by opening your capillaries.*
3. *Yoga can be practiced in many parts of your life using simple yoga measures.*
4. *Alternate nostril breathing balances your sun and moon energies.*

Final Thoughts and Blessings

Although the practice of yoga is fairly new to the Western world, its origins run thousands of years back in Asia. It has gone from a practice of yoga masters to something that can be practiced and enjoyed by almost anyone.

The benefits of yoga have been understood for a long time. Through the use of poses, mantras and meditation, the energy of our body is enhanced and elevated from the lower to the upper Chakras. The poses, or asanas, energize the body and prepare it for meditation. Pranayama or breathing exercises go hand in hand with the asanas.

In meditation, you become awakened to your inner being and continue to focus on your breath and on every part of your body and mind. Praying is a form of meditation directed outward to whomever you believe is the Universal God or the Universal Consciousness.

There are several schools of Yogic thought and practice. Some schools are energetic while others are more relaxing or are catered to the individual's skills and abilities. Many schools of yoga overlap one another or practice some poses nearly the same but with different areas of focus. Choose the yoga practice that feels the most comfortable to you.

Yoga is not just the practicing of poses. It is a way of life that includes eating healthy foods and avoiding foods that take your energy away. You can also practice yoga in your busy life by using some of the breathing techniques as well as those techniques that you can do sitting up or standing. These techniques—taking yoga with you—will serve to relax you and to bring yoga into your entire life as you are living it.

Feel comfortable with yoga and eliminate all desire to perform it perfectly when you first begin. Yoga is intended to be performed with a joyous heart. The perfect asana will come to you as you practice. Be joyful!



Joanne Delaine

