

Presentation of Yoga at English Ltd.
March 18, 2008

What is Yoga?

The Sanskrit definition of yoga is literally “to yoke” or “to unite,” a “union.” Thus, the goal of yoga is to become one with yourself, to come back to yourself, etc. Yoga is used to calm the mind and depending on the style of yoga, it can also be extremely challenging and a great way to get in-shape.

Physical Benefits

Flexibility: Stretching your tight body in new ways will help it to become more flexible, bringing greater range of motion to muscles and joints. Over time, you can expect to gain flexibility in your hamstrings, back, shoulders, and hips.

Strength: Many yoga poses require you to support the weight of your own body in new ways, including balancing on one leg or supporting yourself with your arms. Some exercises require you to move slowly in and out of poses, which also increases strength.

Muscle tone: As a by-product of getting stronger, you can expect to see increased muscle tone. Yoga helps shape long, lean muscles.

Pain Prevention: Increased flexibility and strength can help prevent the causes of some types of back pain. Many people who suffer from back pain spend a lot of time sitting at a computer or driving a car. That can cause tightness and spinal compression, which you can begin to address with yoga. Yoga also improves your alignment, both in and out of class, which helps prevent many other types of pain.

Better Breathing: Most of us breathe very shallowly into the lungs and don't give much thought to how we breathe. Yoga breathing exercises, called Pranayama, focus the attention on the breath and teach us how to better use our lungs, which benefits the entire body. Certain types of breath can also help clear the nasal passages and even calm the central nervous system, which has both physical and mental benefits.

Mental Benefits

Mental Calmness: Yoga asana practice is intensely physical. Concentrating so intently on what your body is doing has the effect of bringing calmness to the mind. Yoga also introduces you to meditation techniques, such as watching how you breathe and disengagement from your thoughts, which help calm the mind.

Stress Reduction: Physical activity is good for relieving stress, and this is particularly true of yoga. Because of the concentration required, your daily troubles, both large and small, seem to melt away during the time you are doing yoga. This provides a much-needed break from your stressors, as well as helping put things into perspective. The emphasis yoga places on being in the moment can also help relieve stress, as you learn not to dwell on past events or anticipate the future. You will leave a yoga class feeling less stressed than when you started.

Body Awareness: Doing yoga will give you an increased awareness of your own body. You are often called upon to make small, subtle movements to improve your alignment. Over time, this will increase your level of comfort in your own body. This can lead to improved posture and greater self-confidence.

Types of Yoga & Your Personality

There are many types of yoga, some slower and more relaxing, others very dynamic that require more physical strength and stamina. So, how do you choose a yoga that suits you?

I like to take it easy.

Hatha yoga by definition is any type of yoga with an asana practice or movements. But, often people say hatha yoga to mean a more soft yoga. Hatha yoga is the most traditional one and good for people who like to take it easy, people who are mellow. It builds strength, flexibility, and calmness though will not get your heart-rate up long enough to be considered a way to lose weight.

I need to move, get in-shape and get my heart-rate up!

I like change in my life. The unpredictable is fun!

Vinyasa Flow (or dynamic yoga) uses a flowing style of practice, in which you move from one pose to another in sequence while focusing on the breath. This type of yoga can bring your heart rate up and provide a nice cardio-vascular work-out. This type of yoga almost always begins with some variation of Sun Salutations, a flowing sequence that is repeated several times to warm the body and raise the heart rate. The routine changes from class-to-class but always is a challenge and great for building long lean muscles, flexibility and strength.

For classes in Vinyasa Flow: www.AsanaYogaStudio.com

I like routine and have lots of self-discipline. I don't like change or the unpredictable.

I need to move, get in-shape and get my heart-rate up!

Ashtanga Vinyasa is similar to **Vinyasa** except for it has a very specific series of positions that do not change. The routine is always the same. Like Vinyasa, it has a flow that gets your heart-rate up, builds muscle, strength, and flexibility. If you like routine, have self-discipline and prefer the predictable, then Ashtanga is for you.

I am meticulous and detail-oriented. I like to know things on a deep level.

Iyengar focuses on precision and detail. If you are a meticulous person who likes details and going in-depth then Iyengar is great for you. It is also good for building muscle since you hold poses for a long period of time and focus on precision. This means each class is very different and uses lots of props such as belts, bolsters, blocks, blankets, and the wall to achieve perfect alignment. One class might only focus on a couple poses, but goes into precision. This type of yoga can only help you lose weight if combined with another exercise such as running, biking, etc.

I'm looking for a spiritual experience. I like singing, chanting and music.

I'm interested in the chakras and mantras.

If you are seeking spirituality or enjoy singing, **Kundalini** is a yoga that uses lots of breathing exercises, repetitive movements, chanting and music. It also focuses on the chakras. Lots of chanting in Sanskrit is applied and different classes may have different themes in respect to the chakras or the time of year, etc.

Home Practice

Once you start practicing yoga in a class and you feel comfortable doing certain poses by yourself, you can practice at home. When practiced regularly, even if for 15 minutes a day, great benefits are to be had. Yogi masters often say that practicing every day for 10-15 minutes a day is better than practicing for 1-2 hours once a week

Yoga is about listening to your body, accepting it at that present moment. It is not meant to be competitive. The goal is to do things at your own pace and to find your own limit. It is important to stay with your breath and your body and experience each moment in the present. When you can concentrate on this, your daily worries of life have no room and you naturally begin to relax.

A yoga practice without a period of relaxation at the end is not yoga. Therefore, at the end of each practice, it is important to relax by lying down and letting go of all your tensions, worries, thoughts. So, get your mat out and see where your body leads you!