



yoga
for life

**Questions and Answers
Booklet**

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“WHAT IS...?”

Defining basic concepts

What is Yoga?

Yoga means ‘Union’.

Union between the Universal Self and the Individual Self.

There are paths or limbs to help achieve a Yogic state or Union. The most common ones would be the Yoga poses, the conscious breathing techniques (or Pranayama) and meditation, although there are more paths, such as moral restraint, contemplation and mindfulness.

Most of us take up Yoga for a little bit of stretching in order to develop strength and flexibility, but then become hooked with all the other limbs of Yoga, which, together with the Asanas (poses), help us get the most out of Yoga practise.

However, always keep in mind that it’s not absolutely necessary to undertake things such as meditation, or become a vegetarian in order to practise Yoga, so don’t feel pressed to commit yourself to anything other than what you are looking for.

What is Asana?

Asana is the reason why most people join Yoga. Asanas refer to the actual physical poses; there are many different ones, and they are practised sitting, standing, prone, and supine, among others.

Asanas have different levels of accomplishment, and there is always an option for beginners.

Don’t try to attempt advanced poses in the beginning. Just close your eyes and try to feel alignment from within; your body will start to progress on its own... Let your body be the guide of your personal Yoga.

What is Pranayama?

Pranayama is usually part of a Yoga class, and it involves conscious breathing. It starts by your becoming aware of your natural breathing and then progresses to one of many different Pranayama practises. Don’t be afraid to try; some of the practises might make you feel a bit awkward, but after a few breaths you will start feeling the benefits, such as calm, soothing sensations, mindfulness and stillness of the mind.

The benefits are numerous; to name a few, you will increase lung capacity, be able to balance your breath among both sides of your nose, all your organs and parts of the body that the breath touches, and you will definitely achieve pure, simple calm and ease.

What is Vinyasa?

Vinyasa refers to any sequence of Asanas; they are very dynamic, aesthetic and harmonic. They are my personal favourite way of practising Asana.

Vinyasa style Yoga synchronises movement, rhythm and breath.

The most famous vinyasa would be the 'sun salute'; it's a sequence of Asanas that involve most parts of the body and muscles, and it's usually practised as part of warm-ups.

What is Shavasana?

Shavasana is what we all know as deep Yogic relaxation; it translates into English as the 'corpse pose' and you practise it lying on your back. In this case, your whole body is fully supported by the floor so that it's relieved of any effort whatsoever.

Shavasana is guided by the Yoga teacher, and most people find it very useful for stilling the mind.

It's sometimes practised at the beginning of the class and sometimes at the end, this depending on the preference of each teacher.

During shavasana, it's very important to be quiet and still. You may find this a bit difficult in the beginning, but just give it some time... You will just love it!

What is Namaste?

Namaste is a Yoga greeting, which means "deep respect and reverence". It's a very common salutation in Yoga classes and it's also how we say 'good bye' and 'thank you' at the end.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Is there just one type of Yoga?

Deciding that you want to start practising Yoga is the first step, though be careful; it's easy to get stuck while still trying to make up your mind. So don't feel intimidated!

Many types of Yoga exist, and choosing the right one as a beginner could get difficult. To start with, I would recommend Hatha Yoga. You can always try something different later, but here are other styles that you might have heard of, or may want to learn about:

Types of Yoga:

Hatha Yoga. This is a rigorous practise done for purification purposes. In other respects, Hatha Yoga follows yama, the moral restraint, and niyama, spiritual observances. Hatha Yoga is what most people associate with the word 'Yoga', and it's practised to achieve mental and physical health.

I personally practise Hatha Yoga; I believe it has a very balanced view of Yoga with focus on body, mind, meditation, breath, compassion and understanding.

Iyengar Yoga. This type of Yoga was developed by the living Yoga master B.K.S. Iyengar. Iyengar emphasizes alignment and encourages the use of Yoga props to accomplish complicated or advanced Asanas. It is quite physical and very demanding.

Jivamukti Yoga. David Life and Sharon Gannon are the founders of this type of Yoga; it blends vigorous vinyasa practise with spiritual teachings, chanting, and an emphasis on how to bring the philosophy of Yoga into your daily life is at the forefront of Yoga's current popularity.

Bikram Yoga. Vinyasa Yoga classes taught in heated rooms, they have become very popular and are taught by living Yoga master Bikram Choudhury.

Kundalini Yoga. This type of Yoga has only recently been practised in the west.

It's an ancient form of Yoga and it's one of the most spiritual. It goes beyond the physical performance of Asanas, with its emphasis on breathing, meditation, and chanting.

Ashtanga Yoga. Ashtanga, which means "eight limbs" in Sanskrit (ancient Hindu language), is a fast-paced, intense style of Yoga practise. A set series of Asanas is performed, always in the same order. Ashtanga Yoga is physically demanding because of the constant movement from one Asana to the next, so students progress at their own pace.

Power Yoga. is a general term used to describe a vigorous, fitness-based approach to vinyasa-style Yoga.

How do I find a suitable Yoga class?

Online resources will help you find a Yoga class in your area. You can also check local alternative newspapers or wellness magazines for listings or search online for "Yoga" and the name of your suburb.

Pick a class that is conveniently close to your home or work so that getting to class will be easy. Make sure that you start with a basic level class, or that the teacher gives you beginner alternatives to the Asanas.

Many gyms also offer Yoga classes; they usually provide the fitness side of Yoga (or Asanas) only, and there is no focus on personal development, achievement or evolution, neither mentally nor spiritually. However, don't be afraid to join; it's probably easier to blend in with the crowd and follow others, so that when you feel more capable, you can join a smaller group at a Yoga studio.

What should I bring to my first Yoga class?

On the first day, you won't need to bring much except for yourself and some comfortable, breathable clothing.

Basic Equipment

Clothing: Comfortable, breathable clothes are recommended for Yoga. Any exercise pants or shorts will do. However, you'll probably want to wear a shirt that is somewhat form-fitting, since in many Yoga poses, your head drops below your hips and your shirt can slide down.

Shoes: Yoga is practised barefoot, which is great news for those of us tired of packing a bulky pair of athletic shoes for after work trips to the gym. Yoga studios will often request that you leave your shoes (and egos!) near the entrance.

Mats: In gyms and Yoga studios, it's commonplace to use a Yoga mat. The mat helps define your personal space, but more importantly, it creates traction for your hands and feet so you don't slip, especially as you get a little sweaty. The mat also provides a bit of cushioning on a hard floor. Most studios have mats for rent, usually for one or two dollars per class. The downside to renting these mats is that lots of people use them, and you can't be sure how often they are washed.

Yoga mats can be purchased in most department and sports stores and specialised Yoga shops and many studios will allow you to store your mat there if you become a regular.

The best mat: Yoga mats must have slip resistant surfaces, which offer the safety you want while providing comfort and insulation from cold hard floors. Look for mats that come with handy roll straps and are lightweight and washable; these measure 60 x 180 cm approximately. Don't buy the cushioned ones; although they are very comfortable for shavasana, they tend to slip.

Blankets: Yoga studios often have stacks of woollen blankets available for students to use during class. Grab yourself one or two blankets at the beginning of class. The folded blankets are used as props to sit and lie on during class. For instance, when sitting cross-legged, you can put a blanket under your sitting bones to elevate the hips above the knees. Blankets come in handy for all sorts of things during class, and if it's chilly, you can use them to cover yourself during shavasana.

During winter, I strongly suggest you bring a blanket; any blanket will do! As a matter of fact, it will come in handy at any time of the year; it generally gets very chilly during relaxation at the end of the class, since our bodies tend to cool down as our breathing and our organs and systems slow down.

Optional Equipment

The following Yoga props are taken from the Iyengar tradition. Iyengar-style Yoga teaches that having the proper alignment in the Asanas is most important.

Until the body becomes both flexible and strong to hold the poses, students should use props to bring the body into alignment in order to achieve maximum benefit and avoid injury.

Iyengar's use of props has been adopted by many other styles of Yoga. The props are usually provided for students to use during class, and there is no need to buy your own unless you are beginning a home practise.

Blocks: Like blankets, blocks are props for you to use in order to make yourself more comfortable and improve your alignment. Blocks are great for standing poses in which your hands can't reach the floor.

Straps: Straps are particularly useful for bound poses if your hands do not reach each other, and for poses where you need to hold onto your feet but cannot reach them.

What do I expect from a Yoga class?

In a typical Yoga class, the students place their mats facing the front of the room (often identifiable by a small altar or by the teacher's mat) in a loose grid. Do not to line your mat up exactly with the one next to it because you and your neighbour will need some space for certain poses. The students often sit in a cross-legged position waiting for class to start or they do some light stretching. I recommend you place your mat in such a way that you can see the

teacher; this way, you will be able to follow the class, and the teacher will be able to see you too! In addition, she/he can help you with your alignment.

The teacher may start by leading the class in chanting 'oms' three times. 'Om' is pronounced by voicing the most open 'o' or 'au' sound, which represents the Universe, and the most closed 'm' sound representing the Individual. This is the basic sound of Yoga chanting as in practise it means Union. Another common way to start a class is with a short breathing exercise or short meditation.

This is followed by joint rotations, warm-up poses, more vigorous poses, then stretches and final relaxation. If at any moment you feel you need some rest, the child's pose is highly suggested. (The child's pose is a restful forward bend pose).

It's quite common to feel a bit sore the day after your first class and every time you work a different group of muscles. Feeling resistance is ok; it's your body's natural response to change. However, it's not ok to feel pain; learn to honour your body during your Yoga practise, and practise compassion with yourself.

Dos and Don'ts

Don't...

- ...have a big meal right before class. Try eating lightly a few hours before class starts.
- ...drink water during class, but have some before and after.
- ...wear shoes or socks during class.
- ...bring your ego; it's usually your worst enemy. Your body and mind work differently every day, and you never know, you might as well give them the chance!

Do...

- ...review Yoga etiquette so you feel very comfortable entering an unfamiliar situation.
- ...tell the teacher it's your first class (you probably won't be the only one).
- ...ask the teacher for help if you need it.
- ...look around and follow what other students are doing, especially if the teacher doesn't demonstrate every pose. However, keep in mind that you may be looking at more advanced students, so do not compare yourself to them.
- ...familiarise yourself with some beginner Yoga poses and their names before you take your first class.
- ...try to find alignment and balance within yourself; mirrors will not be as real as what your body is going through.
- ...return! Don't give up after just one class; try a few or even change venues and teachers until you find one that suits you. You will not regret it!

What are the general guidelines for starting Yoga?

There are certain guidelines for Yoga Asanas and guidelines for Pranayama, which can help beginners.

A classic Yoga workout of one to two hours will have following components:

- Joint rotations
- Warm up
- Yoga poses
- Standing poses
- Supine poses
- Prone poses
- Sitting poses
- Pranayama
- Meditation
- Deep Yogic relaxation (Shavasana)

You will be able to take part in all of it! Don't be afraid to give it a go, unless, of course, some physical condition holds you back from doing so.

BASIC OBSTACLES

AGE

Am I too old to start Yoga?

Yoga is unique; you can start at any stage of your life and always make the most of the benefits. I actually believe that this is a great option for people over the age of 60 who decide to start any kind of fitness or well being program. They, in particular, will definitely experience physical, emotional and psychological improvement. There is no maximum age limit for practising Yoga. You can start at the age of 30, 60 or even at the age of 100 older. Children can start Yoga from 12 years of age or earlier in a specialised kids Yoga class.

For people over 50, I would not recommend gyms, as Yoga offered in gyms only focuses on the physical aspect of Yoga, and you may not get personalised attention and supervision on your own physical needs, which can include back, hip, knee and neck problems, high or low blood pressure, or other related issues.

I have found a few Yoga classes that are designed for people over 50 and they are packed! Everyone can benefit from Yoga.

Is age important?

Though anyone can practise Yoga, here are a few guidelines that will help you make the most of Yoga, depending on your age:

Under the age of 40: You can practise any Asana you feel comfortable with, but it is suggested that you start with easy Asanas during the first month and gradually attempt more difficult ones.

Between the ages of 40 and 60: Concentrate more on Pranayama (Yoga breathing) to revitalise your body. Practise the Asanas you feel comfortable with and gradually attempt more difficult ones.

Over the age of 60: During the first month, only practise Pranayama, as it will give you vitality, improve your blood circulation and energise your heart. Then, listen to your body. But by all means, move forward!

LEVEL OF FITNESS

Do I have to be fit to join a Yoga class?

Not at all! However, it's important to keep in mind your personal health issues.

Inform your teacher about them, so that you can get alternatives to the poses that are being performed and you don't injure yourself.

As I have said before, it's not ok to feel pain, so listen to your body. Yoga entails body awareness; therefore, you will be more sensitive to anything that happens and will be able to easily recognise if something is not right for you.

Do I have to be lean, flexible and strong?

The answer is no! Yogis are the most tolerant, patient and compassionate people I have encountered. No one will give you a second glance; everyone will be immersed in their own practise! You will usually not even find that there are mirrors! You can do it with your eyes closed! This is what most people actually do, although you may have to keep your eyes opened at the beginning to watch the teacher and other students perform the poses, so that you can become familiar with them.

DISTANCE OR PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

What if I have no access to Yoga classes?

There are many great Yoga books and videos available; I would recommend a video rather than a book, as it will give you more visuals to follow. Although I believe that there is no true substitute to learning directly from a good teacher in a Yoga class, problems with time or distance sometimes make this option very difficult.

Can I start Yoga practise with online instructions or books?

Yes, you can start with Pranayama and easy Yoga poses. When you start practising Yoga, you can select your Yoga sequence in accordance with your age, physical condition and medical history. Start with Asanas that you feel comfortable with and that your body tolerates.

CULTURE RELIGION AND PERSONAL CUSTOMS

Will I have to become a Hindu to do Yoga?

Though Yoga and Hinduism are closely linked, you need not become a Hindu to practise Yoga. Yoga is a philosophy that primarily aids the spiritual progress of a person. Yoga does not involve an idol, special deity or specific rituals to follow.

God has given all of us the same body, and Yoga is beneficial to all of mankind regardless the country, age, race or sex.

Why is moderation recommended in Yoga?

In Yoga practise, the ultimate aim is to still the mind. You have to search for inner happiness; therefore, it is recommended you not be a slave to your habits.

This will become easy once you have an established practise. Don't put any extra pressure on yourself; just let go, and when you least imagine, you will start craving for moderation and healthier habits.

TIMES AND SCHEDULES

Ideally, what is the best time of the day to practise Yoga?

An ideal time to practise Yoga is one to two hours before sunrise. You may also perform Yoga in the evening provided you have not eaten anything for the past 3 to 4 hours.

Actually, you should just focus on getting yourself into a Yoga class! Issues such as children, work, sleeping habits, and eating habits can make early or late Yoga classes difficult, so find a time that suits you and get yourself to start!

How much time should I be able to spare for Yoga?

Generally, you should spare 20 minutes to one hour for Yoga. After some time, you'll feel so good while doing Yoga that you will forget about time.

On the other hand, by practising meditation (Pranayama and shavasana), your mind will be busy only with things that are really important! This may sound amazing but you will have more time for your Yoga!

As I have been saying, no pressure, everything will fall into place... in due time...

PREGNANCY

Is it safe to practise Yoga during pregnancy?

Yoga can be very beneficial for pregnant women. It helps you improve your breathing patterns and relax, which in turn can help you adjust to the physical demands of pregnancy, labour, birth, and motherhood. It calms both mind and body, providing the physical and emotional stress relief your body needs throughout the experience of pregnancy. If you have never practised Yoga before, I would recommend a prenatal Yoga class instead of a general Yoga class; it is also a great way to meet other mothers-to-be and embark on this journey together.

BASIC MOTIVATIONS

What type of diseases can Yoga cure?

Yoga will harmonise your body, make your body strong from within and help cure most lifestyle diseases. However, it shouldn't be thought of as a means to cure a particular disease.

Yoga will improve the whole level of fitness of your body.

If you practise Yoga regularly and take care of your diet? You'll be able to cope with stress and avoid lifestyle diseases like obesity, hypertension, insomnia and cancer.

Can Yoga help you lose weight?

The type of Yoga you need in order to lose weight includes vinyasa, which is based on the performance of a series of poses that include many popular, athletic and sweat-drenched Yoga styles.

What are the benefits of practising Yoga?

Yoga is a scientific system that improves your blood circulation and tones up your digestive and endocrine systems; it also provides more oxygen to your body. Benefits of Yoga are not a miracle. Even spending 20 minutes to practise Yoga can make a tremendous change to your body and life.

Some of the benefits of Yoga are:

A healthy body

- It increases flexibility in your body.
- It tunes up your metabolism.
- It gives you a feeling of well-being which is not attainable with any other exercise.
- It works like magic as it enables the body to realise its full potential in terms of good health.
- It allows you to derive maximum nutritious value from the food you eat.
- Yoga stimulates your body and provides natural immunity against diseases.
- Both proper breathing and relaxation result in deeper, more beneficial sleep and a general sense of restfulness and well-being.

Cool mind

- Yoga brings harmony to your thoughts and actions.
- It gives you power to re-fresh and relax your nerves and calm your mind.
- Shavasana, Pranayama and meditation in Yoga lead to better concentration.

Energise your personal life

- Constant practise of Yoga can bring peace and everlasting happiness to your life.
- Yoga teaches patience.
- Excellent physical health enables you to take on a more relaxed approach to your emotional problems.
- Learn to live without tensions; you discover your own optimum potential.
- Students of Yoga have control of their thoughts instead of being controlled by them.

Recharge your professional life

- It improves efficiency.
- It improves memory.
- It helps bring your emotions under control and improves your Emotional Quotient.
- Yoga turns you into you a healthy and relaxed individual.
- It improves your decision-making ability, as you are always at peace with yourself.
- Yoga practise provides enough energy and vigour to last the whole day.

THE “WHAT IFS” ...

What if I fall asleep and start to snore during Shavasana?

This is very common, so you shouldn't feel ashamed; it's actually an accomplishment, as it means that you have reached a state where you can completely let go of your thoughts.

You will notice that it's not a restless sleep and that you were aware of your state most of the time! Even asleep!

What if I need to use the toilet?

Always find out where the restrooms are before you start your class, as you wouldn't want to interrupt it for instructions! It's very common too! As your body is purifying and working in perfect rhythm and harmony, it tends to want to get rid of waste.

What if I fall?

Falling is part of the process of learning and progress; if you don't fall, then you're not pushing your body a bit further! Don't stay in your comfort zone; it's ok to give your body a chance for better and more aligned poses, which means that you will fall every once in a while.

What if I fart?

Ha ha ha ha, just laugh at yourself and keep going. Among my Yogi friends, we call it 'Yoga in action'! And it's usually the result of poses that squeeze and twist the digestive organs!

What if I skip one or more classes?

You wouldn't miss a class if you were really committed. Missing a class every now and then is ok; we all have commitments and schedules, but try to stick to your Yoga so that you can enjoy the benefits and see the results.

What if I feel the urge to laugh?

It's all about laughing! Well, not really, but there are a few things at the beginning that will make you want to laugh. I know some that made me laugh!

Chanting 'oms', some Pranayama practises and even some poses... I guess I was a bit nervous too! So don't be afraid to go ahead... and laugh!

What if I begin to feel pain?

That is not good. You should stop and rest, and as soon as you have a chance, let the teacher know so that he/she can suggest alternatives for future classes. It is also advisable to consult your physician and ask him/her if you should continue with Yoga.

What if I feel dizzy?

You may have moved too fast from one pose to another. Remember that Yoga is gentle and smooth; in fact, you should avoid sudden movements in your life!

However, feeling dizzy could also be related to high or low blood pressure. Even if you don't have a history of high or low blood pressure, you should consult your physician. If you are feeling dizzy, stop doing the pose and rest in a pose where your head is above your heart and... avoid inversions!

What if I cramp up?

Cramping up is just simple pain. Don't feel concerned, so just stop the pose that is causing you to cramp up and rub the area until the cramp is gone, just as you would do in any other circumstance when you get a cramp.