



Yoga's Mind-body Fitness Benefits

What is Yoga?

Yoga, which means “to join together,” integrates body and mind through breathing, meditation, and movement.

There are many different forms of this ancient practice, which began in India. Among the most popular in the U.S. is hatha yoga, which focuses on breathing and physical movements that improve balance and strengthen the body. Some forms, such as ashtanga yoga, are much more physically demanding, while others, such as raja yoga, have a more spiritual focus.

Yoga enthusiasts contend that 15 minutes a day will yield noticeable improvements like:

- Better balance and flexibility
- Increased strength
- Better concentration
- Stress relief
- More energy
- An ability to relax at will

Yoga's growing appeal has also been associated with these attributes:

- Body and mind relaxation (helps control breathing and clears the mind)
- Normalizes body weight (burns calories, gives stamina and enhances your awareness that you are full during meals)
- Inherently leads to a healthier lifestyle
- Improves overall productivity due to energy level increases
- Supports inner contentment and self-actualization
- People with serious physical limitations can practice some forms of yoga, such as breathing or meditation exercises

Before you get started

1. If you are suffering from an injury or have health concerns, speak with your doctor.
2. Find out which type of yoga is best for you.
3. Check out your instructor's credentials. Find out how long they've been practicing yoga, how much teaching experience they have, and if they practice yoga daily. (The Yoga Alliance, which registers yoga teachers and schools, considers 200 hours of training the acceptable minimum.)

Prepare for class

- Bring a yoga mat to reduce slips and slides
- Eat a light meal
- Arrive early so you can ask questions and find a spot where the instructor is easy to see
- Tell the instructor about any physical ailments so that you can learn movements that target those areas
- Stop whenever you feel pain, dizzy, lightheaded or nauseous
- Set your own pace

Yoga Safely

Experts say the key to doing yoga safely is going slowly, knowing your limits, and having a good instructor. A good teacher can help you adapt poses to your physical ability and fitness level. You should never continue a posture or move if it hurts, despite what a teacher says.