

YOGA

What is yoga?

Yoga originated over 2000 years ago in India as a system of physical, moral, and spiritual practices. Like other meditative movement practices used for health purposes, modern day yoga typically combines physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation. There are many different styles of yoga and it is important to do your research and check with your physician before starting yoga.

What is yoga used for and how could yoga help me?

Many people who practice yoga do so for their health and well-being, to improve physical fitness, relieve stress, and enhance quality of life. In addition, yoga is also used for specific health conditions, such as back pain, neck pain, arthritis, and anxiety.

There has been some research on yoga for certain health conditions. Current research suggests that practicing might improve quality of life; reduce stress; lower heart rate and blood pressure; help relieve anxiety, depression, and insomnia; and improve overall physical fitness, strength, and flexibility. A carefully adapted set of yoga poses may reduce low-back pain and improve function.



What are the risks?

Yoga is generally safe for healthy people when practiced correctly and with the guidance of a well-trained instructor. There is a low rate of side effects, and few serious injuries occur. Pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions, such as high blood pressure and sciatica, should modify or avoid some yoga poses.

Who teaches yoga?

There are many training programs for yoga teachers throughout the country. These programs range from a few days to more than 2 years. Standards for teacher training and certification differ depending on the style of yoga.

There are organizations that register yoga teachers and training programs that have complied with a certain curriculum and educational standards. For example, one nonprofit group (the Yoga Alliance) requires at least 200 hours of training, with a specified number of hours in areas including techniques, teaching methodology, anatomy, physiology, and philosophy.

What else should I know about yoga before taking a class?

Everyone's body is different, and yoga postures should be modified based on individual abilities. Selecting an instructor who is experienced and attentive to your needs is an important first step to a safe and effective yoga practice.

Regardless of which type of yoga you practice, you don't have to do every pose. If a pose is uncomfortable or you can't hold it as long as the instructor requests, don't do it. Good instructors will understand and encourage you to explore — but not exceed — your personal limits.

Adapted from:

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>