

YOGA - 4 - BEGINNERS

Information for New Yoga Students from www.geoffyoga.co.uk

Yoga is an ancient system which has been traced back over 3000 years. A literal translation of the word yoga is that of union or harmony.

Yoga is a wonderful way to improve your health and well being. It develops flexibility, strength, confidence, peace of mind, awareness and concentration.

Yoga is known to develop long, supple muscles and produces a distinctive lean body shape. But yoga is more than just a form of exercise. It is also a blueprint for living in harmony with both yourself and others and finding an oasis of peace in the midst of an increasingly hectic and crazy life.



There are many other aspects you can explore if you want to extend your practice. These include philosophy, diet, meditation and chanting. There are also plenty of courses and workshops available that will allow you to deepen your knowledge of these areas if you wish.

Although it is easy to get a sense of calmness and relaxation from your very first yoga class, it is only through consistent long term practice that the true benefits of yoga become apparent.

Please enjoy your classes, practice as frequently as you can and most of all have fun!

Your Practice

There is a basic concept in yoga (called *Ahimsa*) of not causing harm to others or to yourself. Please take this principle on board during your yoga practice. We want you to enjoy your classes, not injure yourself.

Although a very safe activity, new-comers to yoga need to be aware of a few basic safety precautions. Many new-comers have a tendency to push themselves too far too quickly when they start yoga, impatient to see instant results.



It is important to let your body adapt and develop at its own pace, one which will be right for you. This is very likely to be different from what is right for the person on the yoga mat next to you.

It is not always possible in a large class for a teacher to monitor every student, thus you need to take responsibility for your own well being - listen to your teacher but also listen to your body. If something feels uncomfortable or causes pain, it is likely that it is either being done incorrectly or that your body is not yet ready for that posture. If so, please don't force your body. Instead, just stop, relax and watch.

If something doesn't feel right or is not working for you, ask advice at the end of the class.

The following notes address some common health and practice issues and will allow you to realise that it is OK to take your foot off the accelerator.

So take a step back, relax and have fun in your classes. You will discover that a great part of yoga is not about getting to the end point, but in enjoying and savouring the journey along the way.

Yogini's (female yoga practitioners)

Monthly cycles

Conventional advice is to avoid spending too long in inverted postures during menstruation. These include shoulder stands, headstands and handstands. However, many women do continue to practice at this time, and it has become a matter of personal preference. So use your own judgement, if it doesn't feel right, relax or ask your teacher for an alternative posture.

Pregnancy

Yoga can be highly beneficial during pregnancy, to tone and prepare both your body and mind for the demands ahead. However, the extent of your yoga practice will depend on your existing level of fitness and how proficient your yoga practice is. Please inform your teacher if you are pregnant, use your individual judgement and take advice from your doctor. Although you can attend regular classes (working at a level that suits your condition), it is recommended that you attend specialist ante-natal yoga classes, especially in the later stages of pregnancy. Post-natal mother and baby classes, which are great fun, offer specialist advice and practice, as well as a chance to meet other new mums and babies.

General health issues

Backs

We all have them and lots of us have stiff, achy ones from time to time. Regular yoga practice can greatly alleviate back problems, by re-aligning the posture and stretching and strengthening the muscles of the spine and skeleton. You need to be careful if you have specific problems such as slipped disks or recent operations. If you have any concerns, seek advice from your doctor and talk to your yoga teacher. Again, listen to your body. If a posture is hurting your back, your teacher will probably be able to offer you a more suitable alternative or you may prefer to sit out an activity that doesn't feel right for your body at that particular time.

Knees

Over time, weak knees and joints become greatly strengthened by regular yoga practice. However, some postures, if wrongly approached can put strain on your knee joints. Your knees are very important and injuries to knees can take a long time to heal. If you feel undue knee strain in any posture, stop and seek advice from your yoga teacher. Again, an alternative posture may work better for you.

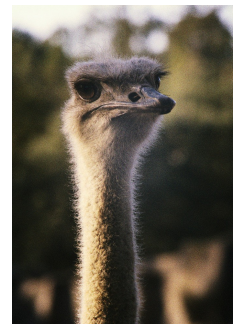
Many people have sensitive knees or cartilage problems that make it painful to kneel. If this is the case, use a cushion or double up your yoga mat under your knee when you need to kneel. Ensure that your yoga practice is comfortable for you.

Joint problems (arthritis/rheumatism)

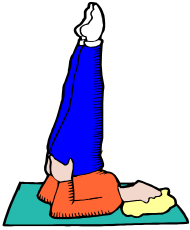
Over time, yoga can improve joint mobility and strength, but you must listen to your body and use modified poses if necessary e.g. use the flats of your knuckles instead of your palms if your wrists are weak. Take care with sore or inflamed joints. Rest when you need to, and let your body release and strengthen at its own pace. Yoga is never a race.

Neck problems - high/low blood pressure

Your neck is very important, without it your head would fall off! Existing damage or weakness in your neck can be made worse by certain postures, if not performed with awareness and care.

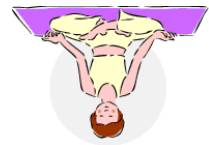


In particular, inverted postures such as shoulder-stand, head-stand and hand-stand should be approached with caution if you have any neck or blood pressure issues. In many cases modified poses can be suggested. Take advice from your doctor and yoga teacher.



You will often be introduced to shoulder-stand in beginners' classes. Head-stand and hand-stand are normally taught in more advanced classes. You should be confident that your muscles and joints are capable of supporting you safely in these postures before attempting them. Where practical, consider using a wall for support until you become more confident.

Inverted postures have very significant benefits in your yoga practice so it is worth persevering with them if your health allows. The sense of achievement gained when you finally float up with no strain and no fear into a perfectly stable head-stand is quite something!



Asthma

The emphasis on relaxation and breathing techniques strengthens lungs and eases respiration. Most sufferers find rapid improvements in their condition.

Want to find out more?

Try browsing web sites for details of up coming courses, workshops and other information, (www.geoffyoga.co.uk has some useful links). Many interesting books & magazines are available ranging from basic 'how to' manuals to more in depth discussions on philosophy and spirituality.

Alternatively talk to your yoga teacher who will do his/her best to help you.

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