



Staying Flexible with Yoga

When people first start on their journey to practicing yoga, they are surprised by how many benefits they receive beyond their physical abilities. Yoga is a life philosophy and not just an exercise.

Throughout this guide, you will learn everything you need to know to get started on a fantastic journey to liberation with yoga. Yoga can help you achieve many things, from improved mental health to increased flexibility.

There is a myth that only the healthiest and most flexible can practice yoga. In fact, people who need it the most are the least flexible and shouldn't let it stop them. Continue reading to see how easily you can get started today.

What Is Yoga?

Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word "Yuji," which means to bind. Yoga is considered a form of exercise as well as a discipline. Men and women have separate pronouns when practicing yoga. A male is called a yogi, and a female is called a yogini. Yoga has been seen in history since the 5th or 6th century BCE, and over time it has adapted.

About 2,000 years ago, a sage called Patanjali developed the eight limbs to yoga called Yoga Sutra. Each limb represents different things or stages of yoga practice.

- ✓ Yamas – Restraints
- ✓ Niyamas – Observances
- ✓ Asana – Postures
- ✓ Pranayama – Breathing
- ✓ Pratyahara – Withdrawal of sense
- ✓ Adharana – Concentration
- ✓ Dhyani – Meditation
- ✓ Samadhi – Absorption

As you practice each limb and grow in yoga, the goal is to reach liberation and enlightenment. Liberation is known as Savasana, and to get there, you must be at peace. Each session ends with the final pose of Savasana where you will lay down with your arms and legs out comfortably and breathe. Savasana represents calmness, relaxation, and letting go, surrendering yourself to peace and acceptance.

Yogis and yoginis today mostly focus on the limb asana. Asana focuses on different postures or poses that purify and provide strength and stamina to the body during meditation. Yoga is also a spiritual discipline, as it tries to connect the physical and mental body. However, you do not need to surrender any religious beliefs to practice; it is not a religion but rather a philosophy to live by.

As you can see, Yoga goes beyond the physical practice that most forms of exercise do. Yoga uses the mind, body, and breath to center and connect as one functioning unit to reach peace and liberation. Not only will your body become more flexible and healthier, but so will your mind.

The Many Benefits of Yoga

One of the reasons yoga is popular is due to the many different benefits it offers. The fantastic thing is that the benefits you receive are going to be unique to you and your experience. Yoga requires more from you than just executing a pose correctly. It is being in the moment and focusing on the pose that you are performing as well. It is an overall state of mind.

Read on to learn all the benefits you may experience after adopting a yoga routine:

- **Improved brain health** – Yoga increases blood flow, which allows more oxygen to get to the brain to improve brain health. In turn, this will boost your memory and encourage your mind to focus more.
- **Improved heart health** – Yoga can lower the risk of heart disease by improving blood circulation or even reducing high blood pressure.
- **Improved posture** – The slow control and holds yoga requires stretches out the spine and effectively increases strength, which will encourage you to keep the correct posture.
- **Eased chronic pain** – The movements promote blood flow and less inflammation, which relaxes the nervous system and releases tension that can be responsible for pain.
- **Immunity boost** – Slow and controlled exercises increase blood flow, heart rate, and concentration to boost your immunity.
- **Improved mental health** – Yoga involves being mindful and aware of your body as you perform each exercise. This helps boost self-esteem and acceptance of one's self. The stronger you get, the more rewarding your practice will feel.
- **Improved sleep** – Any exercise and especially yoga will improve your sleep. If you are having trouble sleeping, add a routine to your mornings. Avoid exercising at night, however, as this will only increase your energy and make it harder to sleep. You will notice longer and deeper sleep.

- **Increased flexibility** – By far one of the most important benefits you will receive from yoga is added flexibility. The wide range of movement holds and the concentration of the body allow for more flexibility. Flexibility is responsible for many health benefits that you will learn later on in this guide.

If you want to improve your health and increase your flexibility, then getting into yoga is exactly what you need to do. It is straightforward to get started and doesn't take a lot of your time.

Common Yoga Questions and Answers for Beginners

Before you start practicing yoga, it is vital to understand the basics, what to expect, and where to start. Yoga takes a new outlook on exercising and life in general. It involves more than physically completing the exercise.

First, let's go over a few common questions that new yogis, or yoginis, have that you may even be wondering yourself:

“Who is yoga best for?”

Yoga can be for just about anyone. This is because all poses can be modified or simply avoided if they are too difficult to perform. Depending on your abilities, it might be best to purchase more products to assist you, especially if you have problems with balance or flexibility. Over time your body will build more strength, and your balance and flexibility will improve.

“How long should I practice each day and how often?”

Again, the great thing about yoga is that it can be adjusted to your needs. When first starting with yoga, it is a good idea to start slowly. The recommended time is usually three times a week at 20 minutes a session. Don't think you need to dive right in and overdo it right away. Even if you can put in five minutes a day, it's enough.

“When is the best time to practice yoga?”

Yoga can be practiced at any time, but it's best done two to three hours after a meal. This means that morning time is ideal. Yoga requires your body to do a lot of twisting and turning, bending, and concentration, and having a recent meal can upset this.

“What is om-ing and why is it important?”

When you attend a yoga class, you will notice others om-ing at the beginning and end of each session. Om-ing is a vibration sound that helps relax the body and mind and

connect us to the sounds and rhythm of the world. Ancient philosophers say that om-ing is found in nature and can always be heard or synchronized.

“I am not flexible so I shouldn’t even do yoga, right?”

Wrong! You should start yoga right away if you think you are not flexible. When you first start, it’s okay not to be flexible. The slow, controlled, and wide range of motions required in yoga build up your flexibility and is the exact reason why many people start practicing yoga in the first place.

“Do yoga instructors have to touch me during a yoga class?”

This is important to talk about because many yoga instructors will come around and make sure the poses are correct. Bad form can lead to injury or poor balance, so it is important to correct it. If you don’t want to be touched, please inform your instructor before you get started. However, do consider that it’s beneficial to the yoga sessions to be sure you have the correct form.

“Do I have to be on a certain diet to practice yoga? I thought all yogis and yoginis were vegetarian?”

There is a running debate in the community on whether or not you should change your diet. This is because in Yoga Sutra, one philosophy of Ahimsa is to be non-self-harming to yourself and others. Many believe this means you shouldn’t eat animals. However, it is important to keep in mind your own dietary needs. You can still practice yoga without being vegetarian and it’s honestly up to you and how you feel about this part of the philosophy.

As always, it is important to ask as many questions as you can before you start something new. If you have more questions, feel free to ask any instructor at a yoga studio. They are always happy to provide education and make you feel relaxed about any concerns you may have.

What You Need and How to Get Started with Yoga

Getting started with yoga is easy and doesn’t require a lot of equipment or other items. There are a few things you should know and items you will need first to get started, though. There are also many options to choose from that suit your needs. Depending on your situation, it might be best to get a few extra items so you can be sure to do everything safely. For example, those who are pregnant or overweight will benefit from purchasing yoga blocks.

1. How to Get Started

Learn patience and acceptance first

No one will master the art of yoga right away. Yoga is something that you will improve every single day. Learn to be patient with your body as you learn and accept yourself now, and release any expectations. Yoga is not just executing and holding the correct pose; it also includes your overall state of being. You are aiming to reach for the pure state of happiness and acceptance of you in the very moment.

Find a class

You can find a class in your community or simply online. Today you can find many free yoga classes on YouTube. However, if you are new, sometimes it is best to find a local class so you can be sure you are doing the poses correctly and safely.

Understand breathwork

Before you get started with yoga, you need to understand the importance of proper breathing. Part of practicing yoga includes breathwork. In other words, when you do a yoga pose, you will also need to make sure you are breathing correctly, and many instructors will point out the proper technique for you to be following.

Breathwork reduces stress and allows your body to drain of negative energy by practicing different ways of breathing.

Do your research

Make sure you learn everything you need before you get started. Even talk with your doctor to be sure your plan is healthy and safe for you. However, yoga is unlikely to be harmful. The most important reason to research is to make sure you are doing everything right and getting benefits where you need it.

Understand flexibility

There are plenty of people who refrain from yoga because they believe they are not flexible enough. However, increasing your flexibility is one of the number one reasons to start yoga in the first place. Flexibility brings so many benefits to your life and health, and it starts with yoga.

Now that we've given a basic understanding and hopefully have a few questions answered, you need to see if you are prepared and have what you need to get started. Another benefit to yoga is that it doesn't need much, if anything, to get started, although a few items or tools can make it easier and more comfortable.

2. Useful Items

The following are items you will benefit from when getting started with yoga:

Yoga mat

Some experts will say this is not required and may hinder your abilities, but for many, the yoga mat symbolizes their space for peace and relaxation. It also provides a clean area to peacefully exercise, and provides some stabilities to areas that may be slippery. Yoga mats are pads made of vinyl about 1/8th inch thick, designed to provide protection and stability while doing poses.

Proper clothing

It is a good idea to make sure you are wearing the proper gear, not only for comfort and flexibility but for safety as well. This includes:

- **Shorts or yoga pants** – Make sure they are form-fitting, breathable, and comfortable to allow for a wide range of motion.
- **Form-fitting tops** – Keep in mind the same factors as for pants. You will want to make sure your top is comfortable enough to move around and also secure enough to even move upside down.
- **Sports bras** – Yoga moves require stability, and sports bras allow your breasts to stay in place. The last thing you will want is distraction or pain when performing more challenging poses.
- **Headbands or ties** – To keep your hair in place and prevent distraction.
- **Yoga socks** – These unique socks are designed so that each of your toes has a separate slot. Throughout yoga sessions, instructors will tell you to spread your toes, and these socks make it easier to achieve while also providing more stability.

Other optional equipment

There are tons of options when it comes to equipment for yoga. Depending on your needs, the following equipment may be useful. However, it's not essential.

- **Mat bags** – These bags allow you to easily carry all of your yoga equipment without strain or too many trips. It also provides a safe space for a change of clothes, wallet, and keys when doing yoga classes at a studio.

- **Blankets** – An alternative to yoga mats, blankets can help you achieve deeper yoga postures. Blankets can also be used as an addition to yoga mats to provide support to the knees, back, feet, or during more difficult stretches or poses.
- **Yoga blocks** – The purpose of yoga blocks is to help with alignment and to release tension. They can also be used to make the pose more challenging. They come in all shapes and sizes and are great for those who need more stability, like the elderly.
- **Yoga straps** – Yoga straps help to improve posture, increase movement, and expand stretches to achieve a broader range of motion. They help safeguard against injury.
- **Bolsters** – Bolsters are firm, narrow or tube-like pillows that can provide support during yoga postures. They are commonly used during yoga postures that require deep breathing exercises.
- **Yoga wheels** – An item for the more advanced yogi and yogini, yoga wheels are wooden wheels that help deepen the posture and stretch the front side of the body.

At the end of the day, if all you have is a towel and free space, then you have more than enough to get at least started. Don't let this list of equipment or list of special items stop you from practicing. Yoga is great because it honestly does not require a lot to get started. As you learn and grow, you can add more items if you need them.

Different Types of Yoga

Now that you know how easy it is to get started, you may have noticed when looking up classes or videos all the different types of classes or options there are. As mentioned, yoga is thought to have begun around the fifth century BCE, so there are bound to be many different versions to choose from. You can even find HIIT (high-intensity interval-training) classes centered around yoga these days.

Don't let the many choices overwhelm you. There are many different types of yoga classes, but most of them are pretty similar and have common goals.

Many traditional yoga studios will offer routines or classes focused on these common types:

- Hatha Yoga
- Yin Yoga
- Ashtanga Yoga

- Vinyasa Yoga
- Kundalini Yoga
- Iyengar Yoga
- Bikram Yoga
- Power Yoga
- Sivananda Yoga
- Restorative Yoga
- Prenatal Yoga
- Aerial Yoga
- Acro Yoga

While all types of yoga will increase your flexibility, certain types have a more focused approach and increase results faster. This includes:

- **Hatha Yoga** – This is what you see in most western yoga and it refers to the practice of physical poses and holding them for at least thirty seconds at a time to build core strength.
- **Yin Yoga** – This type of yoga focuses more on meditation while using props to hold poses for a more extended period of time, typically for two minutes or more to build deeper strength.
- **Ashtanga Yoga** – This is a type of yoga that performs the same set of poses the same way each time, making it a unique and structured class. Each pose must be mastered before you can move on to the next.
- **Vinyasa Yoga** – Similar to Hatha but at a faster pace. Poses are held for thirty seconds, with more focus on breathwork.

Most classes you find will be focused on Hatha Yoga, which is precisely what you need to increase flexibility. If you want to dive deeper or become more advanced, find an Ashtanga Yoga class and master the moves. However, no matter what yoga class you find, you will be sure to reap many benefits and gain more flexibility.

Benefits of Flexibility and Why It Is Important

Flexibility helps you complete day-to-day tasks easily and efficiently. Flexibility is important to overall health. Being flexible is the ability to move around or bend without injury. In other words, flexibility has to do with the range of motion your joints can do.

Flexibility varies, and some people will be more flexible while others will need to work on it more. Flexibility plays in your daily life – from getting out of the bed to grabbing a cup

of water. If you are not flexible, these seemingly easy tasks can become hard and even overwhelming.

There are so many benefits to being flexible and that's why it is important to concentrate on this aspect. Here are numerous benefits you will notice once you adopt a yoga routine to increase your flexibility:

- Better mobility
- Improved posture
- Improved balance
- Less chance of injury
- Increase core and muscle strength
- Counteract signs of aging
- Soothed aches and pain
- Improved joint health
- Relaxed muscles
- Better sex life
- Improved mental and physical health
- Reduced weight
- Promotes a less sedentary lifestyle

If you are having any trouble in these areas of life, you may not be as flexible as you thought and you will definitely benefit from yoga. It's an easy exercise to get started with because it can be tailored to your needs and physical level. Even one day of yoga can increase your flexibility and improve daily activities in your life.

How Yoga Helps You Achieve More Flexibility

You will have gathered by now that flexibility is an important area when it comes to yoga. This is due to the many benefits flexibility provides during all stages of life. Many believe they can't start yoga because they are not flexible, but this is far from the truth. Yoga helps increase flexibility; therefore, it should not prevent you from starting.

Yoga helps you achieve more flexibility because:

It Stretches Muscles and Joints

To increase your flexibility, you need to have a wide range of motions, and yoga helps to do this by continually stretching and warming up these muscles or soft tissue. The more you warm up these areas, the more relaxed they will be.

It Targets Specific Areas of the Body

Depending on your needs, you can customize yoga routines to target specific areas of the body that need help. You can do yoga exercises that focus on increasing flexibility in the neck or groin area. Most routines are designed to create mobility in all areas of the body with controlled movements.

It Is Customizable

Routines and speeds can be customized to your ability or needs. If you are sore or sensitive in certain areas, you can slow down your pace to slowly increase your capacity. This is especially important for flexibility, so you don't overdo it and cause injury. Remember, yoga is a journey, not a race, and increasing flexibility is one of the main missions.

It Focuses on the Three A's

The three A's are alignment, attention, and awareness. While stretching is important, yoga is more than that. It is the combination of having the right pose or alignment, paying attention to how your body feels during the pose, and being aware of the present moment. Together it helps reduce stress and anxiety, and improves your poses to increase flexibility.

Ten Yoga Poses for Flexibility

While pretty much any pose you do in yoga will eventually help with flexibility, certain poses will benefit you more. Before you get started, it is essential to contact your doctor and be sure it is safe for you to do these poses. Always start slow, and don't overextend yourself.

1. Big Toe Pose

How

Start by lying down on your back. Keeping your right leg straight, bring your left knee in and grab your foot with your left hand. Make sure your left knee is landing next to your arm as you pull in to stretch. This position can also be done standing. Keep your legs together and grab your big toe with your index, middle, and thumb. Then gradually lift above your head as far as you can go.

Breathing

As you push in for the stretch, you want to exhale, and as you lift, start breathing in again.

Hold

As you push down using your hands, you can hold for a few seconds or longer, depending on your needs.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

2. Bound Angle Pose

How

Start by sitting on your mat and extend your legs out in front of you. Then bend your knees and bring your feet toward your groin and pair the soles of your feet together. Put your arms behind you with the palms of your hands to the ground. Make sure your back is straight. Bend forward, keeping your back straight and hold while breathing deeply. Then release by leaning back while still keeping your back straight. Repeat as needed.

Breathing

As you bend forward, breathe in. Then as you are holding the pose, take two smooth and even deep breaths or more. As you come up, breathe out.

Hold

Hold for two deep breaths or more.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

3. Child's Pose

How

Starting on a yoga mat, kneel with your back straight and legs just as wide as your hips. Then begin to lean forward, lowering your chest onto your thighs and forehead on the mat, leaving your arms close by your side and hold. To get more of a stretch, reach your arms forward.

Breathing

Breathe deeply as you hold the pose, focusing on releasing stress.

Hold

Hold for 20 seconds or more.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

4. Cow Face Pose

How

Sit on your mat and bring your legs in with the soles of your feet flat on the ground. Then slide your right leg under your left leg, making sure each foot is on the opposite side, and your knees are stacked on top of each other. Then raise your left arm into the air and bend it down at the elbow. Reach down your back, meeting your right arm that is down and bending backward from the elbow.

Interlock your hands if you can reach; if not, include yoga stretches. Bend forward and hold the position. Then slowly move back and release each arm and leg one at time. Repeat this pose by switching your leg positions.

Breathing

Breathe normally when upright. As you bend forward and hold the pose, breathe smoothly and evenly.

Hold

Hold the position when you lean forward for as long as you comfortably do so.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

5. Downward-Facing Dog

How

Make sure your shoulders are turned in externally and palms inside. Start with your palms down, arms shoulder width apart, on the mat with your knees down and together. Then lift your body and walk your feet down, moving your back downward, keeping it straight, and stretching your arms. You will look like the letter A when holding the pose.

Breathing

As you hold this position, breathe in smoothly and slowly.

Hold

Hold for 30 seconds or more.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

6. Garland Pose

How

From a standing position, keep your feet shoulder width apart and arms out in a T-shaped formation. Now raise your arms above your head and put your hands together in a praying position. Then bend down until you pass the knees, placing your elbows up against them. Apply pressure by pushing up against your knees and elbows. Release by slowly standing up.

Breathing

As you hold the position, breathe in deeply and slowly.

Hold

Hold the position for thirty seconds to a minute.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

7. Bow Pose

How

Lay on your stomach with your arms at your side. Bend your knees and then grab your ankles with your arms by grabbing behind. Then lift your head backward and pull on your ankles to stretch.

Breathing

As you hold the pose, make sure your breathing is relaxed as your chest is too compressed to breathe deeply.

Hold

Hold for five slow and controlled breaths.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

8. Warrior I Pose

How

Start with your legs out to your side. Then step one leg out to the side, creating a lunge formation and rotating your body to one side. Your foot should be at a 45-degree angle while the leg to your front is pointed forward to a position slightly off-center. Then put your arms above your head, reach and lean forward as if you are doing a lunge.

Breathing

As you hold the position, take in deep controlled breaths.

Hold

Hold for 30 seconds or longer.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

9. Triangle Pose

How

Starting from a standing position on your mat, bring one leg forward, keep your foot pointed, and then your back leg and foot at a 45-degree angle. Make sure your legs are just slightly past your shoulders but not too much to overextend. The goal is to create a triangle with your feet, legs, and arms. Then reach for your front foot, place your palm to the ground, and have your opposite arm reach for the sky. Make sure your chest is turned out even with your body.

Breathing

As you do the pose, apply pressure through your feet, arms, and fingers and breathe in. As you release pressure, breathe out.

Hold

Hold this pose for no more than one minute.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

10. Crescent Lunge

How

From a low lunge position, reach your arms to the sky and make sure your tail bone is tucked under. Hold your rib cage muscles in. Then squeeze your back leg straight, press your heel back and bend into your front knee.

Breathing

Breathe regularly as you hold the pose.

Hold

Hold for thirty seconds or more.

Follow this [video](#) to learn more.

Practice these yoga positions daily to increase your flexibility and reap the many benefits it has to offer. As you build your skill and learn more about yoga philosophy, you will become stronger and lead a happier life.