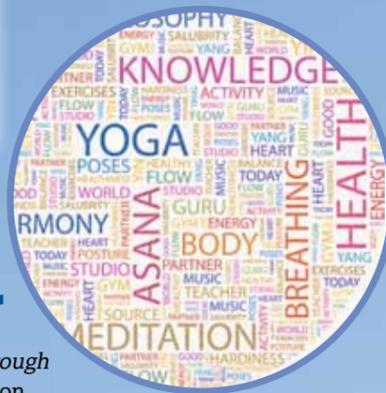


The Power of Yoga

The ancient art has a host of benefits for your body and mind alike



Getting Started

When you think of the benefits, which appeal to you most? Look online as well as by asking local friends for recommendations. Ideally, see if it's possible to chat to the instructor in advance to put your mind at ease.

You're not in competition with others in your class, although you'll probably take inspiration from your flexible classmates in their 70s and even 80s. Class by class, or day by day, the same poses can feel different.

Remember – no matter how experienced your instructor, you know yourself best. Only do what feels good for you.



Only do what feels good for you

The Feel-Good Factor

Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga author, Dave Emerson, describes yoga as a way to become friendlier with our own bodies. Additional benefits include helping us age more gracefully, reducing stress and anxiety, boosting heart health, easing chronic pain conditions, aiding digestion, improving sleep, increasing joint mobility, overall balance and flexibility. Co-ordinating movement with breath takes us out of our heads and we start appreciating our bodies more for what they can do.

Even one-off sessions can help. Dr Chris Streeter found that an hour's class increased GABA levels (a neurotransmitter that's mimicked in anti-anxiety meds like Zanax) and research shows that Yoga Nidra (a type of relaxing visualisation) boosts dopamine by up to 65%, helping us feel good and stay motivated.

Know Yourself

While everyone in the class may look serene, like you they may have millions of thoughts going through their heads. Everyone is having their own experience. Yoga is a psycho-spiritual practice, but sometimes, these thoughts may be unfriendly ones towards our bodies. Remember that the images of typical yogis can be off-putting if we don't fit those physical ideals) but, apart from the poses (asanas) yoga's really not about posing. It's about getting to know yourself and what feels good for your body as you also befriend your mind. Check out Gaia, Curvy Girl Yoga and similar sites and instructors for modifications to suit your body type.



It may look easy but...!

Which Type Is For You?

From Hatha (very popular) to Vinyassa (a dynamic flow), Ashtanga (sometimes called Power Yoga), Yin (holding poses for a long time) and Iyengar (emphasis on alignment and props), therapeutic yoga (for physical ailments and mental health) and more, the array can be confusing.

Ultimately, it's about finding an instructor you feel comfortable with. A gym setting will be different to a boutique studio, designer yoga establishment or church hall. Try a few different classes to get a sense of how different yoga can be and what works best for you at this time. Yoga Alliance UK and the British Wheel of Yoga have online directories of qualified teachers near you.



Integrative doctor Dean Ornish's (inoperable) patients found yoga with dietary changes actually reversed heart disease

Get Comfortable

All you need are comfortable clothes that you can move freely in. Bare feet are generally best but you may want to wear socks and other layers for the relaxation segment (if your class has one) as body temperature can drop.

Longer vest tops can protect your modesty as well as keeping the kidney area warmer. Layering is helpful as studios can be chilly or even hot.

Many studios provide mats. Similarly, bolsters, blocks, straps and blankets can all be helpful but you may want to see how you get on before buying your own so you can choose what you'll actually use. One advantage is how little you need.



£24 Peopletree.co.uk

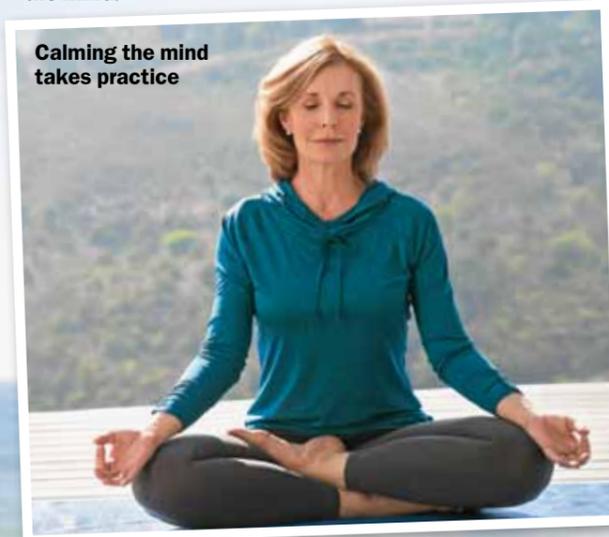


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...And Relax

Yoga is a wonderful way to practise mindfulness of the breath, body and (with practice) thoughts. Many classes end with relaxation, from simple Savasana (though it can be challenging for busy souls who don't like to switch off) to Yoga Nidra (yogic sleep) and body scans.

Just as some days you'll notice more flexibility in your body, these can help you notice, "Ahh, I'm finding it harder to concentrate today." It's important to be kind to yourself. Allow your mind to wander if it's too much! Let yourself have a little wriggle if need be. Yoga is not meant to be torture or endured. Still, practice can help us cultivate the mind.



Calming the mind takes practice