



ACSM Information On...

Selecting and Effectively Using a Yoga Program

Yoga provides a number of well-documented physical, mental and emotional benefits, including reduced blood pressure, enhanced feelings of relaxation, stress reduction, improved digestion, better posture, increased strength and flexibility and improved balance. Yoga also has been shown to benefit individuals with chronic diseases and disabilities through improved body awareness and orientation, the development of focus and concentration, the encouragement of learning and creativity, and increased awareness of our connectedness to others..

A COMPLETE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross country skiing
- Swimming.

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

Yoga practice involves breath work (pranayama) to connect the mind and body, as well as to connect our thoughts and feelings with movement.

SELECTING A YOGA CLASS

You can choose from a wide variety of yoga classes offering different types of yoga and different teachers and styles. Make sure to select an appropriate class and instructor for your skill level.

Types or styles of yoga vary in pace and emphasis from slower-paced practices that include breathing and meditation to faster, flowing movement sequences combined with rhythmic breathing. Yoga types are as follows:

- **Ananda** – Provides a tool for spiritual growth while releasing tension; uses silent affirmations while holding poses.
- **Ashtanga** – A vigorous practice incorporating a fast-paced series of sequential postures that increase in difficulty.
- **Bikram** – Involves practicing a series of 26 traditional Hatha yoga postures (13 standing and 13 sitting) in a hot environment (near 100° Fahrenheit).
- **Hatha** – A more relaxed, slower-paced practice that includes breathing and meditation exercises; emphasizes breathing, strength and flexibility; good for those new to yoga.
- **Iyengar** – Focuses on proper alignment with the use of props; poses are typically held much longer than in other styles of yoga.
- **Jivamukti** – A highly meditative yet physically challenging form of yoga that includes vinyasa-style sequences of poses asanas, chanting, meditation, readings, music and affirmations.
- **Kripalu** – Three stages make up this practice: will-practice, willful surrender and meditation in motion; characterized by trusting the body's wisdom to move in a way needed to release tensions and enter more deeply into meditation.
- **Kundalini** – Incorporates postures with dynamic breathing techniques, chanting and meditating to awaken the energy at the base of the spine and draw it upward through each of the seven energy centers of the body (chakras).
- **Power Yoga** – A challenging and disciplined series of poses designed with the intention of creating heat and energy flow.
- **Sivananda** – Geared toward aiding participants in their journeys toward self-discovery.
- **Svaroopa** – Incorporates proper breathing (pranayama), exercise, relaxation (savasana) and vegetarian diet

with positive thinking (vedanta) and meditation (dhyana).

- **Therapeutic** – Addresses all levels – physical, emotional and spiritual – of the healing process to promote health, function and enhanced quality of life for special populations (e.g., heart patients, hypertensives, cancer survivors or others with physical limitations).
- **Viniyoga** - A gentle yet powerful and transformative practice in which poses are synchronized with the breath in sequences determined by the practitioner.
- **Vinyasa** – A flow-style of yoga that melds breathing with movement, similar to Ashtanga but with less repetition or following of a set sequence.
- **Yoga For Fitness** – Based upon the Hatha yoga practice, this fitness-based approach is tailored for the mainstream health club member. It utilizes strength, flexibility, balance and power to give you a full workout.

YOGA SAFETY

Your yoga instructor should be certified through or hold one or more credentials from an established and respected organization and have experience teaching yoga. Some certifications, such as Yoga Alliance's Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT-200 and RYT-500), require completion of a certain number and type of trainings along with a specified number of hours of yoga teaching. Ideally, the yoga instructor should minimize risk of injury to participants as well as have CPR or first aid training in order to respond appropriately in the event of an emergency. The instructor should have and be able to demonstrate his or her ability to modify poses and flow sequences for different levels of ability and physical limitations. Let your yoga instructor know if you have any physical limitations before you begin yoga.

KEYS TO A SAFE YOGA SESSION

- Warm-up of low- to moderate-intensity movements designed to increase your heart rate, respiration and blood flow to the muscles, while also preparing the body for more intense activity.
- Work phase of more intense activity, which varies depending on the yoga style, and may include a greater number of repetitions, holding poses for a longer time period or using more explosive movements.

- The class should end with a cool down, which may include lower-intensity exercises, stretching, twisting poses and a final relaxation.
- Listen to your body. If performing a posture causes you pain or doesn't feel right, practice a modification or another pose.

YOGA EQUIPMENT

- Sticky mat – this prevents your feet from sliding on the mat and the mat from sliding on the floor.
- Gloves and socks with rubber-like pads or dots on the palms or soles – These help participants hold their positions and move safely between poses, especially in the absence of a sticky mat.
- Use blocks, straps, bolsters and blankets for modifying poses to enhance technique and body position and to increase safety and comfort for the participant.
- Yoga mats should be cleaned regularly, either with a damp cloth or sponge and mild soap or detergent.

YOGA CLOTHING

- Yoga clothing should be comfortable and allow full range of motion.
- It is important for clothing to provide adequate coverage as you move and bend.

ETIQUETTE

When attending a yoga class, there are a few guidelines to follow to ensure that you have a positive experience.

- **Arrive early.** Allow ample time to ready yourself for class.
- **Enter quietly.** Enter the room quietly, making sure not to disturb others.
- **Be free of distractions.** Do not bring a cellphone or other electronic items to class that may be a distraction.
- **Be considerate.** Allow plenty of room between you and your neighbor for free movement. If you must leave the room during class, do so quietly and discreetly.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

It is more comfortable to practice yoga on a somewhat empty or empty stomach, so eat lightly in the minutes or hour before practice or have a bigger meal two or more hours before class. Have a bottle of water available during practice.

YOGA BENEFITS

- Relaxation and stress reduction.
- Greater strength, flexibility and improved balance.
- Yoga can be tailored to focus on strengthening and stretching specific muscle groups.

STAYING ACTIVE PAYS OFF!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity – such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking – significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

THE FIRST STEP

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

PRIOR TO EXERCISE

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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