

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

Yoga-at-a-Glance

YOGA IS MORE POPULAR THAN ever and today you can choose from a wide variety of yoga classes to suit your individual needs and goals. While some styles of yoga are more powerful and intense, others are more relaxing and soothing. With so many options, it is difficult to simply speak of yoga—it is necessary to identify and understand the different types of yoga. Here is a brief primer of five of the most popular types of yoga to help you get started.

Ashtanga

Ashtanga yoga (a.k.a. power yoga) is marked by a series of postures that flow together to create constant movement. The emphasis here is muscular endurance as well as flexibility and, with the thermostat cranked up, there is no shortage of sweat and heavy breathing. Even those with a strong base of fitness may find it difficult to complete every pose the first time out, especially if upper-body strength is lacking. A word of warning for those with wrist or shoulder problems—many of the poses require these joints to bear the brunt of one's body weight, which could exacerbate an injury or weakness.

Bikram

Bikram yoga, a favorite among those who want to increase flexibility, is anchored by a series of 13 standing and 13 sitting asanas. Developed by Bikram Choudhury, a champion weight lifter who as a youth studied yoga in India, this athletic workout also features specific breathing techniques and exercises. Proponents of Bikram yoga believe it is an effective therapy for some forms of arthritis and chronic back pain. Many Bikram yoga classes are conducted in temperatures of 80 to 100 degrees or higher, which may prove dangerous to those who are not acclimated to extreme heat.



You could say yoga started the trend toward increasing emphasis on mind/body activities and awareness. It was in the early 1990s that yoga's journey toward mainstream acceptance was first launched, with activities such as tai chi, Pilates and meditation following suit. Now a mainstay of many fitness programs, it's hard to imagine that yoga was once relegated to the far outskirts of mainstream society.

Iyengar

For those interested in the perfection of form, Iyengar focuses more on the skeletal alignment with static poses and props to help correct the alignment. Developed by B.K.S. Iyengar, this type of yoga is great for those rehabilitating an injury and is popular among athletes looking to gain better

balance and flexibility. Iyengar is also great for the beginner since each pose begins at the basic and structured level before moving on to the advanced postures.

Kundalini

The focus in Kundalini yoga is higher consciousness as well as greater flexibility. The cornerstone of this form of yoga is one's energy force, or chakras, and the focus is on awakening these chakras. Energy is released via intense breathing patterns of varying lengths and depths. Individuals with high blood pressure and pregnant women should probably avoid this type of yoga.

Sivanada

A gentle meditative form of yoga, this type of yoga is great for beginners or those looking for a relaxing, stress-relieving class. Each of 12 poses comprising the Sun Salutation are held for longer periods of time to increase the mind-body connection and to allow ample time for the body to adjust and the mind to relax into the pose.

Sivanada classes begin and end with a short mantra chant followed by prayers.

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