

Yoga meaning and history and development

a Hindu theistic philosophy teaching the suppression of all activity of body, mind, and will in order that the self may realize its distinction from them and attain liberation

The practice of Yoga is believed to have started with the very dawn of civilization. The science of **yoga** has its origin thousands of years ago, long before the first religions or belief systems were born. In the yogic lore, Shiva is seen as the first yogi or Adiyogi, and the first Guru or Adi Guru.

Basic Fundamentals of Yoga

The basic fundamentals of Yoga is based on the concept that human beings are basically spiritual beings and aims to free us from the shackles of this worldly bondage that ties us down to our mundane existence of wants, wishes and desires. Yoga aims to make us realise our inner divinity which is much beyond our body mind and possession.

In order to attain this superior level of consciousness, it is important that as individuals we lead a moral life that is guided by the principals of law, order, truthfulness, virtue, chastity, compassion and kindness. It is only when we follow these basic guidelines that we can realise our true nature fully.

Yoga is a mind and body practise, which means one, has to exercise both the mind and the body to reap the benefits. Firstly we need to practise the yogic poses correctly every day, which would keep our body fit. Secondly we need to engage in daily meditations so that we can understand of our minds and discover our true consciousness.

Yoga is all about breaking the shackles of regularity, which binds us to a pattern of life. In order to become a perfect yogi an individual needs to replace undesirable habit patterns with positive ones. As part of the Yogic philosophy a yogi needs to let go all types of attachment, which alone holds the key to our liberation.

The masters or gurus who teach yoga to his disciples are regarded as channels of benevolent energies, or blessings. The process by which a guru blesses a disciple is called "transmission" (samcâra) in section schools of Jaina yoga and Buddhist Yoga.

Yoga is basically initiatory in nature and one needs guidance from a qualified teacher to attain success in this line. The higher one proceeds in the level of consciousness, the more shall he feel the need for a proper guru.

Keeping in mind the different types of mental and physical disposition of different individuals the early practitioners of yoga classified this ancient branch of learning into seven broad categories.

- Hatha Yoga- Developed during the 12th century, the practises of Hatha Yoga, involves the use of some amount of force in practising various asana. Hatha Yoga is widely practised in the western countries and is one of the most popular forms of yogic practises followed by people all around the world.
- Jnana Yoga- This form of yoga is all about the liberation of the mind and attainment of wisdom through yogic practises.
- Raja Yoga- This is traditionally regarded as “classical yoga” and aims to teach the yogi the principals of gaining control over mind and emotions.
- Karma Yoga- Widely based on the teachings of Bhagavad Gita, Karma yoga teaches the philosophies of selfless action through which liberation can be achieved.
- Bhakti-Yoga- Bhakti yoga teaches the principals through which one can achieve state of spiritual enlightenment or liberation through the realisation of oneness with God.
- Tantra Yoga – Tantra Yoga is a form of yoga where two people in conjugation try to attain a common or universal consciousness by practising certain yogic principals and postures. Tantra yoga has nothing to do with sex or man- woman relationship.
- Mantra Yoga- Mantra yoga aims to attain liberation through continuous chanting of powerful words which creates a certain aura of empowerment around the reciter

Yoga is a gradual and slow process by which the conscious self-encompassing our thoughts, ideas and emotions is replaced by an understanding of the higher consciousness which can lead us on the path to true self-realisation.

Yogic Practices for Health and Wellness

Here are a few simple yet effective ways you can introduce yourself to yoga for good health and overall wellness in your life.

1) Breathe

Bring Pranayama into your daily practice. An easy way to introduce this is practicing pranayama as soon as you wake up.

Start with Kapalbhati kriya, one of the most powerful cleansing techniques, where you inhale passively and actively exhale through your nose with short bursts or strokes and let the belly get pulled in as the diaphragm moves up. Let the inhalation happen naturally. Some of the benefits of this kriya are:

- Aids weight loss and increases metabolic rate
- Improves lung capacity
- Helps in regulating blood glucose levels
- Improves digestion and many more such benefits

Add Bhastrika the 3 dosha (known as vata, pitta, and kapha) balancer or a quick recharger of energy into your daily practice. In this, you inhale deep through your nose taking your arms up, while your palms are open, next you exhale forcefully, bringing the palms down towards the shoulder making a fist with your palms. Repeat this 15 to 20 times at a medium pace.

This pranayam

- Helps increase oxygen levels in the body almost immediately
- It increases awareness levels
- Is excellent to improve overall lung health

Practice Bhramri pranayama, the stress buster. Simply close your ears with your index fingers by pressing the cartilage between the cheek and the ears. Close your eyes and let the tongue touch the roof of the mouth. Breathe in through the nose, and as you breathe out through the nose, make a humming bee-like sound. Feel the vibration as you do so. You can repeat this 3 to 5 times.

Some of the many benefits include

- Releases stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system
- Improves awareness levels and builds focus
- Helps remove migraines or headaches
- Is excellent for people suffering from high blood pressure

2) Move

Include Yoga asanas in your routine. Practice Surya Namaskars daily to maintain the metabolic rate. This is a combination of 12 asanas and 2 sets which is to be practiced preferably early morning on an empty stomach facing the sun.

The first step (Pranamasana) is to start by standing on the front edge of the mat with your legs in line with the shoulder or together, palms in Namaste at the sternum.

2nd step (Hastauttanasana) Breathe in and raise your arms up and back with Namaste palms and arch your back a little by pressing the hips forward.

3rd step (Hastapadasana) is to fold forward with the torso and arms keeping the back flat and spine straight with the shoulder blades together, if possible place the hands on the floor or on the shin.

4th step (Ashwasanchalanasana) Inhale and keep right leg back and the left remains in between both palms, keep the right knee on the floor and the right toes released.

5th step breath out (Dandasana) come into a plank position by sending the left leg back, making sure the hips, shoulders and ankles are in a straight line.

6th step inhale (Ashtanga Namaskara) descend down by keeping your knee, exhale chest and chin on the floor.

7th step breath in (Bhujangasana) slide and flare up by lifting your chest like a snake, make sure your elbows are bent and shoulder blades together.

Step 8th is exhale (Adho Mukha Svanasana) in the inverted v position.

9th step Breath in (Ashwa Sanchalanasana) and bring your right foot forward in between both palms.

10th step (Hastapadasana) exhale and fold forward by bringing the left foot forward.

11th step (Hastauttanasana) Breathe in and raise your arms up and back with Namaste palms and arch your back a little by pressing the hips forward.

12th step, exhale and come back to Pranamasana.

Repeat the same on the other side to complete 24 steps all together.

3) Sit Quietly

Find time to sit in silence and meditate. Use the various guided meditations available online to start you off, you can download the SARVA app for more such content.

You can start with mindfulness meditation, sit in any comfortable position with your spine erect, begin to breathe deeply and focus on your inhalations and exhalations, notice the expansion and contraction of your lungs, notice how the breath passes into your nostrils and all the way out. Notice the sound of your breath and keep the awareness on different aspects of breathing like your heart beat, your pulse etc. You can also do a chakra meditation by focusing on the chakra you want to open. You can do an energy recharge meditation on a daily basis to keep the mind active and away from negative mind chatter.

Over all, include Yoga in your lifestyle in different ways to see changes in not just your physical health but also your mind. It's a beautiful practice and a journey in which one will experience many wonderful changes and grow as an individual.

General guidelines for Yogic Practice.

When not to practice yoga

Please read the contraindications for each posture before doing it. Menstruation, pregnancy, high blood pressure and injuries to the knees, shoulders, and neck are all conditions where certain postures must be avoided and special care must be taken in all postures. If you have any medical condition, you should check with your health care professional before starting a yoga practice.

Modify the postures for your body

The instructions and pictures of the yoga postures are the “goal,” meaning the direction you are going towards, not where you need to be. Experiment and explore different positions and alignment to make the posture work for your body.

Moderate the level of intensity

You can make your yoga practice as challenging and vigorous as you want. We recommend you start slowly and make sure you understand the alignment of postures. There are three ways to increase the intensity of your practice: one, hold postures for longer and longer periods of time; two, slowly build your practice up to more advanced and challenging postures; three, move quickly between postures. Read our Challenge Yourself article.

How to choose postures

Choose to practice postures that look like you can do them. Postures done on the floor are going to be easier than standing postures, as they do not require as much strength or balance. Also, postures that have longer recommended hold times (in breaths) are going to be easier to do.

Use our yoga posture sequences as a starting point and foundation for your practice sequence.

Duration of practice

Your daily practice should be between 15 to 90 minutes long and done 1-6 times per week, depending on your schedule, goals and ability. Practicing more frequently with shorter practice times will yield greater results than practicing less frequently with longer practice times.

What to wear

Loose, comfortable clothing or tights / unitards work best. It's important to wear something that will not restrict your movement.

Drinking and eating

It is not advisable to eat or drink right before a yoga practice (especially if you are practicing inversions). Eat no less than 1-3 hours before and drink only small amounts of water before practice, and do not drink during your practice if possible.

Yogic principles of Food.

Yoga diet principles play an important part in getting full benefits from your yoga practice. Why do sportsmen and pregnant women need special food? Our body requires food for getting energy and this energy sustains life. Food is what builds up our body, we are what we eat. Type of food and its quality affects your physical as well as mental health.

Yogic diet philosophy does not believe in calorie count of foods or the amount of vitamins, minerals or proteins we get from the food. Instead stress is laid on type of food and its quality. Some of the yogis survive on meager amount of food and still enjoy better health than all of us.

Yogic Diet For Health

Focus on nutrition available from food without bothering about its taste. Becoming a slave to taste buds is temptation yoga does not recommend. Also, moderation is recommended in whatever you drink and eat. As per yoga philosophy, self discipline in choice of foods is critical for your health and subsequent march to meditation and spirituality. Yoga diet principles are very easy but difficult to follow.

Fast Foods

Modern fast food items like hamburgers, pizzas, jams, jellies, soft drinks, ice creams etc. have gained control over our eating patterns and are the main cause of obesity we see all around. These fast foods are rich source of sugar, oils and preservatives all of which are not good for our health. People are now attracted by various types of fast food which are very low in nutrition. In addition, these foods tax our digestive system and body has to do extra work for digestion and elimination of such food. Everyday we are faced with the choice of selecting our food and we must prefer nutritious food rather than going for the taste.

Look Towards Nature

Yoga diet philosophy emphasises on the natural sources of nutrition. Nature has provided us several nutritious edible foods in their natural form like whole grains, seasonal fruits, vegetables, milk, honey and dry fruits.

Over Eating

More people fall sick due to overeating or wrong dietary habits as compared to people who get sick due to non availability of food. Observe moderation in quantity of food we eat. People who keep on over eating without proper understanding of the principles of eating are bound to harm themselves physically and mentally. One golden rule to avoid overeating is, not to have any type of snacks between your meals.

Balanced Diet

Balanced diet is essential requirement of good health. A balanced diet should include plenty of salads, fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, milk and raw nuts. Include these items in your existing dietary choices.

Salads

All vegetables eaten raw constitute salad. Fresh cucumber, tomato, carrots, beetroot, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower etc are used for preparing salad. Salad should be cut into small pieces with suitable dressing of your choice. Ideally salad should form first course of your lunch and dinner. Eat plenty of salad half an hour prior to your meals in case you want to reduce your food intake.

Fresh Vegetables

Ideally fresh vegetables from your kitchen garden can be the freshest vegetables. Fresh vegetables should not be dried or deformed in shape. Vegetables stored in your refrigerator do not remain fresh for a long time.

Fresh Fruits

Fresh fruits are most nutritious food for our body. Regular intake of fresh fruits is essential for good health. Use fresh seasonal fruits. Fruits are better than fruit juices as fruit also provides you fibre.

Raw Nuts

Yoga diet should include nuts like cashew, pistachio, almond and walnuts provide essential minerals, proteins and vitamins. For yoga practitioners, a handful mixture of these nuts is recommended for obtaining energy and good health.

Quantity Of Food

As a general rule, fill only 50% of your stomach with food, 25% of your stomach for water and keep 25% of your stomach empty. If your stomach is overstuffed, it is not properly digested. You will feel uncomfortable and your body is forced to digest extra food and also work for eliminating it. By overeating, your abdominal system is strained and body becomes sluggish. Finally, it leads to gaining of extra weight. Eat only when you feel hungry and eliminate any snacks in between the meals.

Alcoholic Drinks

Alcoholic drinks are nutrient thieves; they steal and destroy nutrients available in your system. Alcoholic drinks weaken the individual physically and mentally, if used without restraint. For yoga practitioners, it is best to avoid alcoholic drinks.

Spices

Avoid excessive use of spices and salt. Too much of seasoning of food is also not recommended.

Water

Drink 10 to 12 glasses of water everyday. Drink water half an hour before meals. Avoid drinking water with food. Drinking of one or two glasses of water when you wake up is ideal for health.

Coffee and Tea

It is ideal if you can avoid tea and coffee completely. Otherwise limit your tea or coffee intake to 2 cups per day. Excess of tea and coffee leads to constipation, insomnia and nervousness in addition to extra calories each cup of tea or coffee pumps into our bodies.

Method of Eating

Eat slowly and chew your food properly. Eating fast does not allow the time for satiating signals to reach your brain from your abdomen resulting in overeating. By chewing the food properly, saliva can better mix with food and make it easily digestible. Body is able to make full use of food you eat and helps you to maintain better health. Principles of yoga diet are time tested and very easy to follow. To lead a healthy life one has to establish a dietary pattern that will sustain good health. Yoga and diet are essential components of good health and happiness. Eat to live and not live to eat.

Vegetarian Vs Non Vegetarain Diet

Shall I stop eating non vegetarian diet with yoga is a common question for yoga beginners. Though it is not essential to stop eating meat for starting yoga but vegetarian diet is highly recommended for holistic yoga practice.

Types of Yoga Diet

The type of food you eat has an immense effect on your health and well being. As per yoga all food items can be classified into three types of yoga diet namely sattvik, rajasik or tamasik.

Suggested Diet for Yoga Practice

A simple vegetarian diet for yoga is essential for maintaining a healthy body with yoga practice. The diet needs to be balanced and nutritious.