

Natural Awakenings

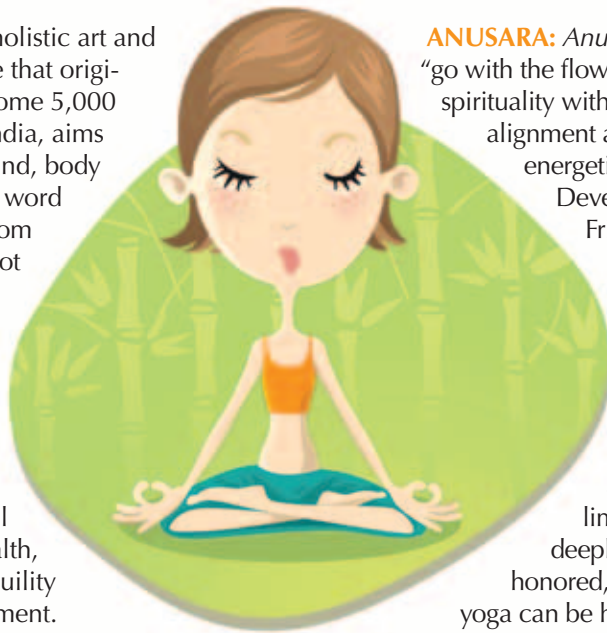
YOGA GUIDE

Yoga, a holistic art and practice that originated some 5,000 years ago in India, aims to integrate mind, body and spirit. The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning to yoke or unite, and refers to the joining of body with mind and mind with soul to achieve health, balance, tranquility and enlightenment.

Individuals of every age and physical condition can benefit from the regular practice of yoga, which has been proved to enhance flexibility, strength, stamina and concentration. Using a combination of *asanas*, or postures, and breathing techniques, yoga works to induce deep relaxation and reduce stress, tone the body and organs, increase vitality and improve circulation and energy flow. Uplifting and meditative, yoga can be applied as a spiritual practice, as well.

Although many schools, or styles, of yoga exist, most differences derive from the primary focus of the practitioner's attention: precise alignment of the body; holding of the *asanas*; flow between the postures; breath and movement coordination; or inner awareness and meditation. No particular style is better than another, and many students practice more than one.

ANANDA: A form of gentle *Hatha* yoga with an emphasis on meditation. *Ananda* combines classic yoga postures with breathing and silent affirmations to attune with higher levels of body sense, energy and silent inner awareness. As an inner-directed practice, it has less appeal to those desiring a more athletic or aerobic experience.



ANUSARA: *Anusara* means “go with the flow,” and blends spirituality with inner/outer alignment and balanced energetic actions.

Developed by John Friend in 1997, this style urges students to think of poses as artistic expressions of the heart. Individual abilities and limitations are deeply respected and honored, so *Anusara* yoga can be helpful for everyone and is good for beginners.

ASHTANGA: A physically demanding style that is light on meditation, *Ashtanga* yoga employs a fast-paced series of flowing poses to build strength, flexibility and stamina. Developed by Indian yoga master Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, *Ashtanga*'s progressively difficult postures are synchronized with a loud breath (called *Ujjayi* breath in Sanskrit) and are designed to produce intense internal heat and purifying sweat in order to detoxify muscles and organs. The room is usually heated to warm muscles and increase flexibility. Preferred by many athletes, this style is too intense and demanding for most beginners.

BIKRAM: A strenuous style, designed to make students sweat, taught in rooms heated to a minimum of 105° Fahrenheit, with about 40 percent humidity. The superheated rooms facilitate stretching and allow the body to release toxins through perspiration. Former national India yoga champion Bikram Choudhury developed the style, whose 26 demanding poses are performed in a specific order, to promote optimal health and proper function of every bodily system. *Bikram* yoga is a good

choice for highly fit individuals and seasoned students seeking a challenge.

HATHA: *Hatha* yoga is the foundational discipline on which nearly all other styles are based. In Sanskrit, *ha* represents the sun and *tha*, the moon—hence, the practice is designed to bring the yin and yang, light and dark, masculine and feminine aspects and polarities into balance. Essentially, Hatha yoga brings all aspects of life together. A class described as hatha will likely include slow-paced stretching, *asanas*, or postures, that are not too difficult, simple breathing exercises and perhaps, seated meditation. Hatha yoga classes provide a good starting point for beginners, who can learn basic poses and relaxation techniques.

INTEGRAL: A gentle style of yoga brought to this country in 1966 by Sri Swami Satchidananda. Classes are structured to balance physical effort with relaxation and include breathing practices, chanting and both guided and silent meditation. Integral yoga is suitable for beginners and helpful for more advanced students who wish to deepen their physical and spiritual awareness.

INTEGRATIVE YOGA THERAPY: Gentle postures, guided imagery, assisted stretching and breathwork help to make this style a useful one for rehab centers and hospitals. Joseph LePage began this therapy in the early 1990s to help promote healing and well-being for individuals facing heart disease, cancer, AIDS and psychiatric disorders.

IYENGAR: Noted for precise alignment and symmetry of postures, the development of balance, and the use of props such as blocks, balls and belts. The Iyengar style of yoga was developed by B.K.S. Iyengar, based on an exceptional understanding of how the body works. Poses are held longer than usual. Iyengar is a good style for beginners, but can challenge seasoned practitioners, as well.

KRIPALU: An integrated practice that emphasizes breathing and alignment and coordinates the breath with movement. *Kripalu*, also called the yoga of consciousness, was developed by Amrit

Desai, a long time student of *Kundalini* yoga master Swami Kripaluvananda. This style incorporates three stages of development, beginning with postural alignment and progressing to meditation, with longer posture holding, finally creating a meditation in motion, where the movement from one posture to another happens unconsciously and spontaneously. Students are encouraged to honor “the wisdom of the body” and to work according to the limits of their flexibility and strength. Kripalu is suitable for everyone, from beginners to advanced students.

KUNDALINI: A powerful, enlightening style that incorporates *mantras* (chanting), meditation, visualization, breathing and guided relaxation, with precise postures. According to Hindu philosophy, *kundalini* is a concentrated form of *prana*, or life force, represented by a coiled, sleeping serpent said to reside at the base of the spine. When breath and movement awaken the serpent (energy), it moves up the spine through each of the seven *chakras* (energy centers) of the body, bringing energy and bliss. Once a closely guarded secret in India, kundalini yoga was first brought to the West in 1969 and has been known to help with addictions and releasing endorphins in the body. Kundalini will not appeal to everyone and should be practiced under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

PHOENIX RISING YOGA THERAPY: This style helps release physical and emotional tension through assisted postures, breathing techniques and ongoing student/teacher dialogue. A deeper connection to the self is encouraged by incorporating traditional yoga techniques with contemporary psychology, which ultimately results in the healing of mind, body and spirit.

POWER: An intense style that creates heat and energy, while developing strength and flexibility. Power yoga evolved from ashtanga yoga and was developed by American Beryl Bender Birch in the early 1990s. Its flowing style requires the strength and stamina of *Ashtanga*, but doesn't always follow the same sequence of postures, making



it similar to Vinyasa style. Power yoga is usually performed in a heated room. Although Baron Baptiste is a name often associated with power yoga, he has developed his own method, called Baptiste Power Vinyasa yoga, which is taught only by teachers he certifies. Students that enjoy aerobics will probably favor power yoga.

SIVANANDA: Cultivates awareness of mind and body by incorporating five main principles of proper exercise, breathing, relaxation and diet, as well

as positive thinking and meditation. Based on the philosophy of Swami Sivananda, of India, the practice uses chanting, breathing techniques and meditation to help unblock energy and release stress. Sivananda focuses on 12 basic yoga postures to increase strength and spinal flexibility. It is an excellent practice for beginners, those recovering from injury or anyone interested in spiritual aspects of yoga.

SVAROOPA: A style that helps each student discover their bliss. The Sanskrit word *svaroopā* means “the true nature of being,” and Svaroopā yoga is sometimes called the yoga of alignment and compassion. Attention to alignment in specifically chosen poses helps to soften the body’s connective tissues and ease spinal tension. Blocks and bolsters may be used to allow for deeper muscle release. The style is suitable for beginners and useful for those recovering from injury.

VINYASA: A challenging style that matches breath to movement. *Vinyasa* yoga poses incorporate alignment

principles and are woven together in a flowing practice that is both intense and dance-like. Translated from Sanskrit, *vinyasa* means “without obstacle.” The style is best suited to energetic, physically fit students.

VINIYOGA: A transformative, slower and more individualized form of yoga that emphasizes gentle flow and coordinated breath with movement. *Viniyoga* yoga is holistic in its approach and teaches the student how to apply the yoga tools of poses, chanting, breathing and meditation. Function is stressed over form in this style. *Viniyoga* is recommended for beginners and seniors, as well as those who are in chronic pain or healing from injury or disease.

PLEASE NOTE: The contents of this *Yoga Guide* are for informational purposes only. The information is not intended to be used in place of a visit or consultation with a healthcare professional. Always seek out a practitioner who is licensed, certified or otherwise professionally qualified to conduct a selected treatment, as appropriate.