

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

What Is Yoga?

A Beginner's Guide to Its Meaning and Principles

What yoga is and is not, its core principles,
and a simple way to begin

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General education only. Not medical advice. Speak with your doctor before starting any new practice.

Contents

#	Section
1	What Yoga is
2	Before you begin: safety first
3	The main principles
4	The parts of yoga
5	A first 15-minute home practice
6	Your four-week plan
7	Choosing a class or teacher
8	Practising at home
9	Honest expectations
10	Common mistakes and fixes
11	Questions people ask
12	A pre-session checklist
13	Your first week, day by day
14	Glossary
15	Practice log

1. What Yoga is

The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit root "yuj", usually translated as to join or to unite. In its traditional meaning, yoga is a set of practices for steadying the mind and living with awareness. Physical postures are one part of it, not the whole.

Today most people meet yoga as a class of postures, breathing and relaxation. That is a valid and useful way in. It helps to know that the wider tradition also includes ethics, breathing practices, concentration and meditation.

The short answer

Yoga is a system of practices for body, breath and mind. In everyday life it means gentle movement, breathing and relaxation, taught at a level to suit you. It is a practice for well-being, not a medical treatment.

2. Before you begin: safety first

General education only. Check with your doctor first if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, a heart, lung, joint or spine condition, osteoporosis, an eye condition such as glaucoma, or have had recent surgery or injury.

Stop and rest if you feel:

- sharp, pinching or burning pain (a mild stretch is fine, pain is a stop sign);
- dizziness, nausea or breathlessness;
- numbness or tingling, or pressure in the head or neck.

Yoga is generally gentle when taught well, but injuries can happen. Move within a pain-free range, skip anything that hurts, and speak to your doctor before starting if you are pregnant, recovering from an injury or surgery, or living with a health condition.

3. The main principles

Principle	Plain meaning
Awareness	Notice the body, breath and mind as they are right now.
Non-harming	Practise without forcing or competing. This idea is called ahimsa.
Steady effort and ease	Work with effort, but stay relaxed. The classic phrase is sthira and sukha.
Breath as a guide	Let a smooth breath set the pace of movement.
Regular practice	Short, steady practice beats rare long sessions.
Acceptance	Begin where you are. Every body is different.

4. The parts of yoga

Part	What it is
Asana	Postures and movement.
Pranayama	Breathing practices.
Meditation	Sitting quietly with attention.
Ethics	Guidelines for how we treat ourselves and others (yamas and niyamas).
Relaxation	Rest at the end of practice.

Many classes include only the first, second and last. All of these are valid.

5. A first 15-minute home practice

Time	Practice	Notes
2 min	Sit or stand and notice your breath	No changes yet.
3 min	Neck and shoulder rolls, cat and cow	Slow and small.
4 min	Mountain pose, a forward fold, and a gentle twist	Stay comfortable.
3 min	Easy seated breathing, longer exhale	Never strain.
3 min	Lie down and rest	Cover up.

6. Your four-week plan

Week	Focus	Length	What to notice
1	Rest and noticing the breath	10 min	What does your breath feel like?
2	Add gentle movement	12 min	Which stretch felt best?
3	Add the 15-minute practice	15 min	How is your mood after?
4	Try a beginner class or one of our guides	30 min	What style appeals to you?

7. Choosing a class or teacher

A beginner class usually has a warm-up, a few simple poses, a short breathing practice and a final rest. You do not need flexibility, special clothes or a particular belief. A good teacher offers options and welcomes questions.

- Tell the teacher about any injury, surgery, pregnancy or health condition before class.
- Ask which poses are optional; a good teacher says most of them are.
- If a teacher dismisses pain as part of the process, find another class.

8. Practising at home

At home you need a quiet spot, a mat or a folded blanket, and comfortable clothes. Begin with ten minutes. A short regular practice is easier to keep than a long one that you drop.

9. Honest expectations

Yoga can help many people feel more relaxed and move more comfortably. It will not cure disease, and it does not replace medical care. Claims of miracle results are not supported by evidence. If a symptom worries you, see a doctor.

10. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	Fix
Comparing yourself with others	Your practice is your own. Notice, do not compete.
Forcing a pose	Back off until it feels steady.
Holding the breath	Keep breathing smoothly.
Skipping the rest at the end	It is part of the practice.
Doing too much too soon	Start small and build.

11. Questions people ask

Do I need to be flexible?

No. Flexibility comes slowly with practice, and many people never need extreme flexibility.

Is yoga a religion?

Yoga has roots in Indian spiritual traditions, but people of any faith or none practise it. You are free to focus on the physical and breathing parts only.

How often should I practise?

Even a few short sessions a week help build the habit.

Is yoga good for weight loss?

It is gentle exercise that can be part of an active lifestyle. Weight depends on many factors, including food and overall activity.

12. A pre-session checklist

- Have I eaten lightly, at least two hours ago, and had some water?
- Is my space clear, warm and free from interruptions?
- Do I know what I will practise, and how long I have?
- Is there anything in my body today (pain, tiredness, illness) that means I should do less?

- Do I know my stop signs: sharp pain, dizziness, breathlessness?

Running through these five questions takes less than a minute and prevents most beginner problems.

13. Your first week, day by day

Day	Suggestion
1	Read this guide. Try just the warm-up and the final rest.
2	Rest, or a five-minute walk.
3	Repeat day 1 and add one new pose or step.
4	Rest.
5	Practise a short version. Notice how you feel afterwards.
6	Write a few lines in the practice log.
7	Rest. Plan next week from what you noticed.

Three short sessions a week are a good start. Regular, gentle practice builds confidence, and rest days let the body adapt.

14. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Asana	A yoga posture.
Pranayama	Breathing practice.
Ahimsa	Non-harming.
Sthira-sukha	Steadiness and ease.

Reminder

This guide is general education and not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or cure any condition. If you have a health concern, speak with your doctor before starting a new practice.

Practice log

Print this page and keep a short record. Notes help you see patterns over time.

Day	Minutes	Practice done	How it felt	Notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				