

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

Iyengar Yoga

A Beginner's Guide

Alignment, props and precision: how the method works and how to start safely

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

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1. What Iyengar yoga is

Iyengar yoga is a style developed by B.K.S. Iyengar (1918 to 2014) and known for its attention to alignment, precise instruction and the use of props such as blocks, belts, blankets and bolsters. Poses are usually held for longer than in flowing styles, and teachers often give detailed, step-by-step instructions.

Because props make poses accessible, the style is often recommended to people who are stiff, recovering from minor strain, or new to yoga. Teacher training in this tradition is long and structured, so many Iyengar teachers have extensive training in anatomy and safe modification.

The short answer

Iyengar yoga is a slow, alignment-focused style that uses props to make poses safer and more accessible. It suits beginners who like clear instruction and who want to learn poses carefully.

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.

Props are a tool for safety, not a sign of weakness. Use them freely.

3. The props and what they do

Prop	Use
Blocks	Bring the floor closer in standing poses and folds.
Belt (strap)	Extends the reach in seated folds and shoulder stretches.
Blanket	Pads knees, lifts hips in seated poses and keeps you warm in rest.
Bolster	Supports the back in restorative poses.
Wall	Helps with balance and alignment.
Chair	Supports forward folds, twists and rest.

If you do not have yoga props, use thick books, a firm cushion, a scarf or dressing-gown belt, and a sturdy chair.

4. How the method works

- **Alignment first.** Learn where your feet, knees, hips and spine should be before you go deeper.
- **Hold with awareness.** Stay in a pose for several breaths and notice what is working and what is not.
- **Use props to find the pose.** The aim is the pose that serves your body, not the one that looks like the picture.
- **Build slowly.** A class often focuses on a handful of poses.

5. Five foundation poses

Pose	Key alignment points	Prop idea
Mountain	Feet parallel, weight even, kneecaps relaxed, spine long.	Stand with a block between the thighs to feel alignment.
Triangle	Back heel in line with front heel, chest open, no knee pressure.	Hand on a block or the shin.
Warrior II	Front knee over ankle, back leg strong, torso upright.	Back heel against a wall for stability.
Seated forward bend	Long spine first, then fold from the hips.	Belt around the feet; sit on a blanket.
Supported relaxation	Body symmetrical and supported.	Bolster under the knees, blanket on the body.

6. A 25-minute beginner session

Time	Practice	Notes
3 min	Mountain with attention to the feet	Notice weight evenly spread.
5 min	Standing forward fold with hands on blocks	Knees soft.
6 min	Triangle and warrior II, both sides	Use blocks or a wall.
5 min	Seated forward bend with a belt	Sit tall first.
6 min	Supported relaxation	Stay warm, breathe naturally.

7. Your four-week plan

Week	Focus	Length	What to notice
1	Mountain and supported relaxation	10 min	Can you feel your weight spread evenly?
2	Add forward fold with blocks	15 min	Do the knees stay soft?
3	Add triangle and warrior II	20 min	Does the front knee stay lined up?
4	Full 25-minute session	25 min	Which prop helped most?

8. Choosing a class or teacher

Iyengar teachers are usually certified through a structured, multi-year training. You can ask a prospective teacher about their training and whether the studio offers a beginner course. A good beginner class explains each pose, offers props without making you feel behind, and will happily adapt poses for an injury.

- Tell the teacher about injuries and conditions before the class starts.
- Ask whether the studio supplies props.
- Expect fewer poses per class than in flowing styles, and more detail.

9. Practising at home

Home practice works best after you have learnt the basic poses in a class. Set up a clear space near a wall, gather your props, and choose three to five poses. Spend more time on understanding what the pose feels like than on adding new poses. If you feel strain in a joint, change the prop or leave the pose.

10. Honest expectations

Iyengar yoga is sometimes described as therapeutic, and many people find the careful, supported approach helpful for stiffness. It is not a medical treatment, and results vary. If you have a condition, ask your doctor first, and treat the practice as a complement to, not a replacement for, medical care.

11. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	Fix
Locking the knees	Keep a micro-bend and engage the thigh muscles lightly.
Forcing the pose	Add a prop and find a version you can breathe in.
Collapsing the chest in folds	Lengthen the spine first, then hinge from the hips.
Comparing yourself to a photo	Alignment cues matter more than depth.

12. Questions people ask

Is Iyengar yoga good for beginners?

Yes. The clear instruction and props make it a safe start for many people, though you should still tell the teacher about any health conditions.

Do I need to buy props?

Not at first. Household items work. If you continue, a pair of blocks and a belt are a good start.

Is it good for people with injuries?

Many people use it that way under qualified guidance, but it is not a medical treatment. See your doctor and tell the teacher about your condition.

How is it different from Hatha yoga?

Iyengar is a specific style of Hatha yoga with more emphasis on alignment, props and longer holds.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Iyengar	Named after B.K.S. Iyengar.
Alignment	How body parts are placed in a pose.
Prop	A support such as a block or belt.
Asana	A yoga pose.

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