

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

History of Yoga

A Beginner's Guide to Its Origins

How yoga grew over thousands of years, key texts,
and how it became a modern class

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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 yoga history is

Yoga is an old tradition from the Indian subcontinent. Its early history is hard to date exactly, because it began as an oral tradition and was written down later. Scholars still debate the dates of many texts, so any timeline is approximate.

What we can say with reasonable confidence is that ideas about meditation, breath control and ethical living appear in early Indian texts, were organised in later works, and developed into many schools over the centuries.

The short answer

Yoga began as a spiritual and meditative tradition in ancient India. It grew through texts such as the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras, then became a physical practice and spread worldwide in the modern period.

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.

This is a history guide, not a practice guide. If you try any practice you read about, do it with care, use a qualified teacher, and talk to a doctor first if you have a health condition.

3. A simple timeline (approximate)

Period	What happened
Earliest period	Meditation and ascetic practices described in the oldest Indian texts. Dates are uncertain.
Upanishads	Texts that speak of the self, breath control and inner discipline.
Bhagavad Gita	Teaches several yogas: action (karma), devotion (bhakti) and knowledge (jnana).
Yoga Sutras of Patanjali	A short text that sets out an eight-limbed path. Scholars usually place it in the early centuries of the common era.
Medieval period	Hatha yoga texts describe postures, breath control and cleansing practices.
Modern period	Indian teachers bring yoga to wider audiences, and it spreads to many countries and into fitness classes.

Some popular claims, such as exact ages for yoga or seals from early cities, are debated by scholars. Treat precise dates with caution.

4. Your four-week plan

Week	Focus	Length	What to notice
1	Read about the eight limbs	10 min	Which limb interests you most?
2	Read about the Gita yogas	15 min	How do they differ?
3	Read about Hatha yoga	15 min	How does this compare with a class?
4	Think about your own practice	10 min	What from the tradition suits you?

5. Choosing a class or teacher

Many teachers share a little history in class. Some focus on postures only. You can pick the depth that suits you. If a teacher makes strong claims about ancient secrets, ask for the source.

- 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.

6. Practising at home

You can read translations of the Yoga Sutras, the Gita and Hatha texts at home. Use a reputable translation, and read commentary if the text is hard. Reading history does not require practising anything.

7. Honest expectations

Yoga has a long history, but not every claim online about it is reliable. Modern postural yoga is a mixture of older ideas and recent developments. Respecting the tradition includes being honest about what is known and what is not.

8. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	Fix
Quoting exact ages	Say "about" and note scholars differ.
Mixing up the texts	The Gita and the Sutras are different works.
Assuming yoga was always postures	Early yoga focused on meditation and discipline.
Treating yoga as one thing	It has many schools and paths.
Ignoring its roots	Learn about the Indian origins with respect.

9. Questions people ask

How old is yoga?

It is very old, but exact dates are uncertain. Early ideas appear in ancient Indian texts, and scholars debate how far back they go.

Who wrote the Yoga Sutras?

Tradition credits Patanjali. Scholars discuss who he was and when the text was compiled.

Is modern yoga the same as ancient yoga?

No. Modern postural yoga builds on older ideas and has changed a lot.

Where can I learn more?

Start with a reliable translation of the Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita, and a scholarly overview.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Upanishads	Ancient Indian philosophical texts.
Bhagavad Gita	A text that teaches several paths of yoga.
Yoga Sutras	Patanjali's short text on yoga.
Hatha	A later tradition focusing on postures and breath.

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