

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF IN YOGA CLASS

Yoga is meant to meet each individual exactly where he or she is. If you are new to yoga, there are many things you can do to make every class enjoyable and appropriate for your body and your needs.

- 1. Leave your ambition at the door.** Yoga is a practice that will keep you interested and challenged for a lifetime. There's no need to achieve – or even try - everything the first day, week, month, or year.
- 2. Talk to the teacher before class.** Let the teacher know that you are new to yoga and to the teacher's class. Let the teacher know if you have any injuries or medical conditions, or any concerns about class. Any teacher of an all-levels class will warmly welcome you and try to accommodate you in the class.
- 3. Give yourself permission.** Take care of your own needs in class, whether that's by taking a break, observing instead of doing, or modifying a pose to make it more comfortable. You can use child's pose, or another resting pose, to focus on your breath and rest the body.::
- 4. Stay mindful.** Every action in yoga is intentional. Take the time to understand and approach a pose or movement at your own pace. By paying close attention to alignment and action, even challenging poses will eventually become possible and comfortable.
- 5. Ask for assistance.** If you're unsure whether a pose or movement is right for you, ask the teacher for help. If you have a recent injury or other special concerns, seek out a smaller, slower-paced class, so the teacher can provide more individual attention.
- 6. Use your breath as a guide.** If you cannot breathe smoothly and deeply, you may be working too hard or at risk for injuring yourself. Safe, comfortable stretching usually deepens the breath. Appropriate effort also deepens the breath. In contrast, strain of any kind (including working too hard or pushing too hard in a stretch) is usually accompanied by shallow or forced breathing.
- 7. Listen to the teacher's feedback.** Individual feedback is one of the most valuable benefits of attending yoga class. We are so used to our physical habits that it often takes an observer to point out how we create stress in the body.
- 8. During hands-on adjustments, give the teacher feedback.** Let the teacher know whether you prefer gentle or strong adjustments. If you prefer not to be adjusted, let the teacher know before class.
- 9. Take the best, and leave the rest.** In any given class, some poses will feel good and others will not; some movements will feel exhilarating, and others won't. Notice what feels right for your body. You can begin to include these practices in your everyday life, when you can't make it to class.
- 10. Stay open.** As you explore different classes, keep an open mind. No class or style of yoga is universally best for every person. As you build a regular practice, you may find that poses, practices, and classes that you didn't enjoy at first will become your favorites. As your life changes, so will your practice. Always honor your needs.