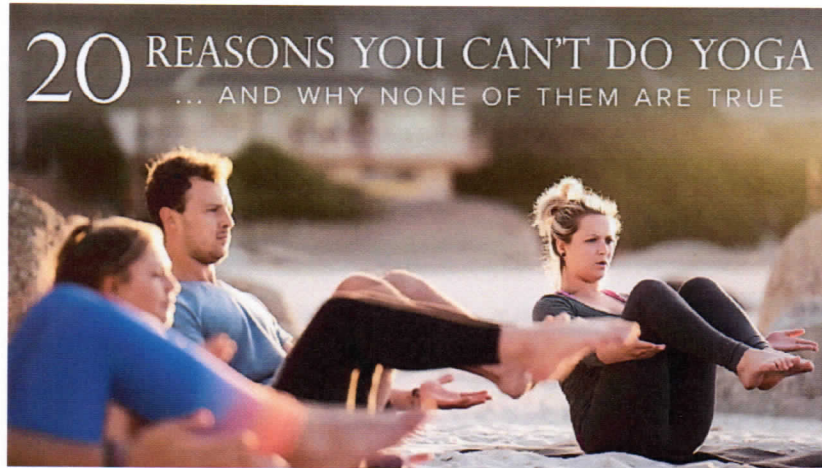


20 Reasons You Can't Do Yoga... And Why None of Them Are True

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There are almost as many great reasons to do yoga as there are yoga poses. Studies are showing what many yogis already know: yoga increases strength and flexibility while decreasing stress. Additionally, yoga has been found (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3193654/>) to improve our respiration, heart health, and sleep quality. Yoga has also been used successfully as a complementary therapy in the treatment of addiction, chronic pain, and mood disorders, and even to lessen the severity of some symptoms of cancer and some of the side effects that arise from its treatment.

With evidence of yoga's benefits mounting, why drag your feet? Don't let any of the misconceptions below keep you from starting a yoga practice that just might enhance your life!

1. I'm just not flexible/calm enough to do yoga.

Yoga teachers hear this at least once a week, to our befuddlement. That's like saying you can't take Spanish class because you don't speak Spanish. If you take the class, you'll probably learn some Spanish. If you take yoga, you'll probably gain some flexibility and calmness.

2. I have to lose some weight before I start yoga.

Why? People of all shapes and sizes are going to be in class. And if weight loss happens to be one of your goals, yoga might help. Though far from a calorie-burning cardiovascular workout, restorative yoga—the gentlest of yoga practices—has actually been shown to lead to weight loss

(<http://www.ajmc.com/journals/evidence-based-diabetes-management/2013/2013-1-Vol19-sp7/Restorative-Yoga-Better-Than-Stretching-for-Trimming-Subcutaneous-Fat-in-Overweight-Women>). It turns out that when our bodies relax, as they do through restorative yoga, they are able to metabolize food more effectively.

3. Well, I should at least give up a vice or two (smoking, drinking, etc.) before I start.

All you have to do is give these things up for the hour of your yoga practice! You might find that as you get more involved in yoga, you end up making some shifts in your lifestyle so you can practice more, or more easily, but those changes will happen at their own pace.

4. My feet are too unsightly to reveal to the public.

Okay, now you're *really* just making excuses. Keep your feet reasonably clean, stick to your own mat (it's considered bad yoga manners to walk across other people's mats), and I promise your feet aren't going to bother anyone. Wearing shoes can make your feet rigid and weak; to use the muscles that support your arches and ankles effectively and keep your feet supple, it's important to take your shoes off now and then. (But if you're still feeling shy about your feet, or if your feet get cold or sweaty during practice, there are special yoga socks you can get—with grips and individuated toes!)

5. Yoga is outrageously expensive.

Most classes at yoga studios cost somewhere between 10 and 15 dollars, or about the price of a cocktail. Chances are, the class lasts longer than the cocktail, and so might the well-being you feel after! Still too pricey? Many studios offer "community" classes at lower prices or by donation, but if you can't find a time or location that works for you, you can find reputable online classes at various sites (like YI! (<https://yogainternational.com/classes/>)). You can take as many of those as you like for around \$15 dollars a month. Plus, yoga practitioners can potentially save on medical expenses (<https://yogainternational.com/article/view/new-study-finds-yoga-and-meditation-reduce-healthcare-costs>). Compare the cost of the preventative medicine yoga offers to the costs of physical therapy and back surgery, for instance, and maybe you'll discover there's room for it in your budget!

6. I have to wear tight, expensive yoga clothes.

Since many classes focus to some degree on alignment—the positioning of your body in a healthy way—it's helpful for your teacher, and for you, to be able to see certain landmarks on your body clearly (which way your knees are pointing, for instance), hence the tightness of dedicated yoga garb—but you can wear whatever is comfortable and stretchy (as opposed to things like denim, belts, and buttons, which are not so good for yoga). If you want to try out some yoga-specific clothing but are worried about the expense, then, my fellow bargain shoppers, know that almost

every clothing store sells yoga clothes, including discount department stores, and that plenty of great yoga duds have migrated to secondhand stores and resale apps.

7. I have to buy a mat, and those seem to be expensive, too!

Chances are your studio or gym has a mat you can borrow (or rent for a buck or two), but you can buy a mat of your own for under twenty dollars. If you end up liking yoga, you might eventually want to upgrade your mat; some of the pricier models boast a better grip or lifetime warranties. And while it's nice to have a mat for the extra knee padding in certain poses and to demarcate your space in the room, especially in a crowded class, technically you don't even *have* to use a mat. Mats are a pretty new invention; they came into existence in the 1950s, and yogis had been practicing yoga in some form for hundreds of years by then. If you go matless, people will think you're doffing your hat to tradition.

8. I need to be feeling energetic to do yoga. And I'm just too tired after work. Or before work. Or at lunch. Whenever yoga is, I'm beat.

You'll be glad to know that yoga just might make you feel more energetic (http://www.sjweh.fi/show_abstract.php?abstract_id=2916) and help you sleep better at night (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15707256>)!

9. Yoga is going to be way too easy.

Ah, there's a good chance that no matter how much you can bench press or how far you can run, you'll find yoga challenging, the way most things are if you've never done them before. If intensity is what you are after, you might want to gravitate toward a vigorous practice like vinyasa, power yoga, hot yoga, or led Ashtanga for beginners.

10. Yoga is going to be way too hard.

There will be challenges, but your yoga teacher will often suggest various versions of a pose or offer modifications that make a challenging pose more accessible. You don't have to do the most "intense" version: Do the one that works for you! And by the way, you get to take a rest whenever you want! You get to skip poses! If you aren't up for anything too intense, find classes geared specifically for beginners or billed as gentle, slow flow, yin, or restorative yoga.

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11. Everyone in class is going to be watching me. And probably laughing.

In yoga, often a gazing point is taught with each pose—students are encouraged, for instance, to look at their outstretched hand, at the tips of their noses, or at a point on the floor or on the wall in front of them while they practice—not at you! As you'll soon discover if you *do* start yoga, when your eyes dart about the room, it's a whole lot harder to stay balanced! In short, our fellow classmates won't be paying that much attention to what you're doing because they'll be busy paying attention to what they're doing and trying not to fall!

12. My teacher is sure to single me out and berate me for my singular incompetence.

I'm not saying there aren't cranky yoga teachers out there, but in general yoga teachers are invested in being nice people. Your yoga teacher is not going to yell at you or embarrass you for not knowing how to do something. We expect you not to know things; if you knew everything you wouldn't need us! Introduce yourself to your teacher before class, go ahead and confess you're new, and I bet she'll set your mind at ease. Feel free to let her know if something doesn't feel right during class or to approach her with questions after. She's there to help.

13. But still: Everyone is going to be better than me! I'm not going to know how to do anything!

If you are in a beginners' class, I swear this will not be true. Many of you will be in the same boat. If you are taking a mixed-levels class, yes, some people might be "better than you," but so what? That means you can take a peek at them to see what's going on if you need to. And if we only did the things we were already good at, wouldn't life be boring? Every time we learn how to do something new that is outside our comfort zones, we improve our cognitive functioning

(<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797613499592?papetoc=&>)!

14. I can't do yoga if I have injury, pain, or illness.

Let your common sense and your doctor be your guides as to whether or not you are healthy enough to exercise. If you feel up to it, and your doctor has given you the okay to get moving, a gentle/basic yoga class may be a great way to ease yourself back into physical activity.

An experienced teacher will know how to approach common, minor injuries in the space of a group class. Most of us expect that in any class there will be students with wrist, shoulder, back, and knee limitations. For some poses, we will offer you alternatives, and some poses you will get to skip. That's fine: No one has to do absolutely every pose.

Most of us yoga practitioners have, or have had, some illness or injury, but seldom has this meant abandoning yoga entirely—more often it's simply caused us to change our practice in some way. For example, if our wrists are injured, we might still go to class, but skip the poses where we put weight on our hands. In the case of a mild but contagious virus like the flu or a cold, we might, for instance, stay out of the studio out of consideration for others, but find that a gentle practice at home is just what we need. If we have something more severe going on in our bodies, we might find that we can still practice some of yoga's breathing or meditative techniques, and that these help us with our anxiety, fatigue, or pain.

There are many conditions which, rather than precluding a yoga practice, seem to be aided by it. Yoga has been shown to help with PMS

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276208864_The_Acute_Effects_of_Yoga_on_Cognitive_Measures_for_Women), and neck pain (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25796668>), depression (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25886805>), diabetes (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26023550>), fibromyalgia (<https://www.elsevier.com/about/press-releases/research-and-journals/yoga-alleviates-pain-and-improves-function-in-fibromyalgia-patients>), and cancer recovery (<http://www.newswise.com/articles/yoga-can-lower-fatigue-inflammation-in-breast-cancer-survivors>), among others.

Tell your teacher what is going on in your body before class, or contact the studio to see if a class is appropriate for you. Keep in mind that there may also be yoga teachers in your area who would be able to work with you privately, creating a class suited to your specific needs.

15. Yoga is for women!

I will point out that some male yoga practitioners see this as an upside of yoga, and then I will add that, though women do outnumber men in many classes, men show up. Some of the guys who live or work down the street from you, who might not look to you like they do yoga, do yoga—and tell us teachers afterward how much their practices have been helping their golf swings or post-weightlifting recovery time. Some of the poses that entail, say, flexible hips, might indeed be easier for women (in general), but you guys tend to have an advantage in many of the poses that require upper-body strength. Many of us admire the way you can, after just a few months, get into arm balances that took us years.

16. Yoga is purely a “social scene” where I live.

I do understand why you would be turned off if you are looking for a cozy place to stretch and relax in your husband's hand-me-down jogging pants and the vibe at that studio you keep passing downtown seems akin to that of the rope-line outside a popular nightclub. But I would bet that, if you look around a little, you'd be

able to find a pointedly unhip yoga class at an underrated hole-in-the-wall studio or church basement somewhere in your town. Of course, you could also dare to sneak into that super-happening class amongst the swirl of lively and carefully coiffed scenesters, sit on your mat, and close your eyes, and that would be fine with everyone. In fact, you would be a valuable model of peace and inward focus, a good reminder to us all of why we're here.

17. Oh, wait—I was on the verge of starting yoga, but I just realized I'm going to have to chant, and I don't really feel like singing at all, especially in a language I don't speak.

Ah, yes. Sometimes we “om” at the beginning and end of class, and some teachers might throw in a little more chanting here and there. You can totally fake it, if you don't want to join in. But if you, like me, are no singer, it's kind of fun to hear your voice disappear into a landslide of other voices; suddenly, it doesn't matter if you're off-key. Singing words you don't understand can also make it easier to focus on the sounds you are making (do-re-me, anyone?) and the feeling of those sounds in your body. Your teacher will probably interpret the words for you, allowing you to judge beforehand if you're saying anything you'd object to. For instance, one popular yoga chant means, “May all beings everywhere be happy and know peace.”

Furthermore, singing is good for you

(<http://www.berkeleywellness.com/healthy-mind/stress/article/singing-good-medicine>)! It improves respiratory health and the functioning of your immune system. Choral singing, i.e., singing in a group, seems to be particularly good at increasing feelings of well-being and connection to others, perhaps because it releases the feel-good chemical oxytocin

(<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00518/full>) and brings us into sync biologically with those around us: When we sing—or chant—in a group, our hearts beat in time

(<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00334/full#B14>)!

18. Some of the people who take yoga are pretty wacky.

I'm not exactly going to disagree with this one, but are you telling me that the people at the bar on Monday night aren't wacky? That everyone in your bowling league is perfectly normal? Everyone in your Spanish class? Everyone in line with you at the grocery store? Everyone at your dinner table around the holidays? There are wacky people everywhere. I'm a big fan of the particular way yoga people are wacky: We want to feel better, and we want other people to feel better, too. At times our methodology may be unique and, okay, scientifically unsubstantiated, but isn't the occasional conversation about astrology, the denseness of energy, the balance of your chakras, or whether you are constitutionally more like wind or mud a small price to pay to be surrounded by our goodwill?

19. The truth is, I kind of like my life the way it is, and if I end up getting into this yoga thing, I'm going to have to learn how to play the sitar, spend my life savings on crystals, essential oils, and pilgrimages to India, and change my name to whatever is Sanskrit for Moonbeam Lotus Nectar.

You will not have to do any of these things. Unless, of course, you want to.

20. Okay. I'm sold. I'll do it. When I have the time...

It's worth *making* the time to do yoga. If all the benefits I've mentioned so far haven't convinced you, try this: Studies like this one (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25964984>), published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, suggest that yoga "causes reversals of markers of aging," which "may not only delay aging and prolong a youthful healthy life but also delay or prevent onset of several lifestyle-related diseases." In other words, the hour that you spend at yoga might just be adding time to your life!

It's worth making the time to do yoga.

So, are there any good reasons not to do yoga? Maybe you've heard a few? If so, share them below. I can think of one really good one: If you already have an activity or constellation of activities that provide the same physical, mental, and emotional benefits as yoga and you spend your days feeling pretty great overall, then no, of course you don't need to take a yoga class. But, in that case, some yogis might tell you, "You've already found *your* yoga."

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Amber Burke lives in Coyote, New Mexico, and teaches alignment-based and restorative yoga at Body in Santa Fe. In her classes, she aspires to a precision of language and detail that will not only create sustainable poses but also guide students inward, toward an ever-deepening self-awareness. She is a graduate of Yale, the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars MFA Program, and two yoga teacher trainings through Yogaworks in Los Angeles, and has been registered with the Yoga Alliance at the 500-hour... Read more>>

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