

Aug. 8, 2018

SMARTER LIVING

Your Yoga Questions, Answered

Jessamyn Stanley is a yoga teacher, body positivity advocate and author of “Every Body Yoga.” She teamed up with our editors to answer your questions about all things yoga. (Next week’s topic: running with Robin Arzón, an ultramarathoner and certified running coach.)



Your Yoga Questions, Answered



Jessamyn Stanley is a yoga teacher, body positivity advocate and author of "Every Body Yoga." She teamed up with our editors to answer your questions about all things yoga: the best classes to inspire you, poses to ease your aches and pains, and other things you were wondering about yoga.

Below is an edited selection of questions she answered from subscribers online at nytimes.com/ask.

How do I get over being the biggest body in the room?

BY K. M. TORRES

You should never have to explain or apologize for who you are — as yoga, or anywhere else.

Really, that question should be, "Does my body ever have to show up? I get over being the tallest person, the oldest person?"

As a fat model, queer, black practitioner, I have been dealing with this kind of discrimination literally my entire life in every single arena. Even to this day, I experience a lot of discrimination looking into a yoga studio.

The only way that I can explain how to get over it is that you just have to accept that people are going to stare at you. It's not going to be easy. It's going to be very painful to recognize that there are people who have negative feelings about you because of the way your body works. But it's helpful to remember that the reactions those people have to others based out of fear and hatred toward themselves. It's people reflecting their own self-hate.

So try to come to a place of understanding that everyone else in the room is putting their baggage into you, and you don't have to be beholden to it.

WHAT TO REMEMBER
• You do not have to explain or apologize for who you are.
• You can prove or disprove it.
• If you don't like the teacher, you don't have to come back.
• You can leave in the middle of the class without an explanation.

What kind of yoga exercise is beneficial for runners?

CHRIS ANTONIENCO, ANTIPOD

If you run, you should practice yoga. Running can make your calves, quads, hip flexors and hamstrings tight. Several yoga postures, including lunges and eagle pose, can help.

This is the sport that people are always asking me about and I'm like, "Yoga and running literally could go together like peanut butter and jelly." If you run, you should practice yoga. Your hip flexors and hamstrings can get tight from running. I don't run, but here are some postures that might help.

- **Pyramid Pose**
- **Lunges**, such as crescent lunge, low lunge, and runner's lunge
- **Eagle pose** or other one-legged balance postures
- **Forward bend**

For more information, I'd recommend you check out "The Runner's Guide to Yoga," by Sage Rountree. She owns the faculty of studios that I teach at in Durham, N.C., and has written several books about yoga and running.

What motivates you to work toward a daily home practice?

DEBBIE WEINSTEIN

The strongest motivation comes when you see the changes in your mind and to your perspective toward life. That's when you start to see things shift.

I think that for a lot of people, there's the feeling that you always have to be in the mood to practice. I've never been able to make myself practice because I think I should practice.

One thing that can be helpful — a small tip — is to roll out the yoga mat wherever you are and make it really inconvenient, like putting it in front of the door to the bathroom or putting it out in the middle of your office. Then you spend all this time stopping yourself just like, "All I have to do to start on the yoga mat today and that will be enough of a practice. And then I'll be like, O.K."

What are the benefits of hot yoga?

REBEKAH NEW YORK

There are a lot of benefits to hot yoga (which is performed in a room heated to between 85 degrees and 105 degrees Fahrenheit). There are also some people who say that those benefits are maybe not as important as the potential negative ones.

The benefits of hot yoga are added flexibility and suppleness in your muscles. It allows you to stretch until you're able to bend much deeper. It also allows you to think about your breath in a really different way, because you have to focus on your breath to even stay in the room.

The negative side of hot yoga is a higher risk of injury. Some would say that your muscles are so soft, you could potentially injure yourself more easily. And because the heat is so intense, you're not necessarily paying as close attention to what you would otherwise.

Both things definitely seem to be true. Research on one form of hot yoga, Bikram yoga, suggests it improves balance, lower body strength and range of motion for both the upper and lower body, and might even help improve arterial stiffness and metabolic measures like glucose tolerance and cholesterol levels, as well as bone density and perceived stress.

BE CAREFUL If you have low blood pressure or a pre-existing health condition, consult with a doctor before trying hot yoga. If you have adverse reactions to heat, are prone to heat stroke or dehydration or have a medical reason to avoid being in a hot tub or sauna, you may want to stick with regular yoga. If you are doing a hot yoga class, make sure you're well hydrated by drinking a lot of water before, during and after class.



How do you structure a sequence for a class?

THOMAS NEW YORK

A good sequence should start slowly, then move into more rapid poses and end with a restoration, cool pose.

If you've never practiced yoga outside a studio, it feels really daunting to just be like, "Oh, I like to sequence such that the poses feel super organic to my body. I don't want to start and just immediately rush into movement. I like for everything to start from a neutral state and then grow and I'm moving really quickly. Then I gradually turn it back down to that neutral state."

BE AN ADVISOR Start at the end. I see people do this classes all the time walk out of the classes. They're like, "O.K., now I did the important part of the yoga class. I'm not going to stay for the rest." The rest is the whole reason you came. It's everything.

Here's how I think about sequencing. I like to start with my breathing. I see people coming that all the time, and then they get fatigued halfway through class. Then, I allow that breath to move through the body and stretch postures like cat pose, cow pose, even downward-facing dog. These are shapes that allow you to see how the breath is working. Once you've moved a little bit more through those poses, then you can move into more rapid sequencing to build heat in the body. So I do an *ashtanga* and *ashtanga* based on what I'm interested in at that particular time. (Like a lot of time on my core, my hips, back bends or whatever it may be.)

Toward the end, I like to get back into that quiet space. I like the long, deep rest of *corpse* pose. I don't like to practice without a *corpse* pose. I like to end with *seated meditation* after I have a *corpse* pose.

What's a good type of yoga for those who fall asleep in slow classes?

POLIX MEXICO

This is a pretty common situation, where your friend introduces you to yoga at the Y.M.C.A., and the class is a slower class. You're maybe a little bit bored, or you're looking for something that's going to be high energy, high endurance.

Want high energy, high endurance? For that kind of person, the *vinyasa* style yoga is a very high energy yoga. If you're looking for something that's even more fiery than *vinyasa*, I would say to try *Forest* yoga or *Ashtanga* yoga.

Need some structure? *Ashtanga* yoga requires a high level of discipline that can be helpful for people who could use some structure.

Just want to relax? There are styles of yoga that can put you to sleep, and perhaps should put you to sleep, like *yin* style yoga. I definitely find a lot of relief in practice like that since I have to move very quickly in other parts of my life.

ONLINE: ASK ABOUT RUNNING

Next week, Robin Arañ, an ultramarathoner, certified running coach and personal trainer, will answer subscribers' questions about running. Starting Monday morning, submit your questions. nytimes.com/ask



If you could do only four poses a day for 10 minutes, what would they be?

BY

Oh man, I feel like there's pressure. Jessamyn, do you really love this pose that much? I do love downward-facing dog, because it was a long road to get me there. We've had a love-hate relationship for years. But it's a standard core pose and should definitely be one of them.

I also love *camel* pose; this is a deep back bend that always emerges me. It's literally like taking a shot of espresso every single time and I feel like if I only had time for four, I want to make time for that one.

Probably *delphin* pose next, which is a really good core pose. It is a good way to work the hamstrings and a good way to see how your whole body integrates together to hold you. And it's a really great reminder of my humanity.

And then, probably *happy baby* pose because it's that kind of stretch feeling that is so difficult to manifest in our regular lives because there's such a need to be the opposite of a happy baby. And I think that just that reminder for me can go a really long way.



Does yoga get your heart rate up? Is holding yoga poses for over a minute good for you?

JOANNE, COLORADO

Yoga can certainly get your heart rate up. And if you're interested in holding postures for long periods of time, look to yoga styles that specifically and intentionally use long holds (i.e. *Iyengar* yoga, *Vin* yoga or *Kundalini* yoga). However, arbitrarily holding postures for the sake of it could increase your risk of injury.

Some styles of yoga can get your heart rate up, but there are styles that can lower it as well. And, because of the focus on your breath during a yoga practice, it can also help you regulate your heart rate.

It is not innately bad to hold yoga postures for long periods of time. I do think that if you hold them for a long time, especially if you don't have the best alignment and/or the posture holds are not intentional, there's absolutely the potential for injury.

Ask yourself, Why are you holding the posture for so long? People hold postures for long periods of time sometimes because yoga becomes competitive. And people want to show off how much they can do.

IN PRACTICE

There are styles of yoga, such as *Kundalini* or *Iyengar* Yoga, which really emphasize holding postures for long periods. During a *Kundalini* class, you may be holding *bird* pose for 90 minutes. During *Iyengar* Yoga, you might practice three yoga poses during a 90-minute class.

But the difference is that during these classes you're not just holding downward-facing dog for 45 seconds on your hands and your feet. You have lots of different props around to support you, so that you can maintain the pose for long periods of time.

Downward-Facing Dog



1. Start on your hands and knees, with your hands shoulder-distance apart and your knees under your hips, toes tucked.



2. Lift your hips up and back, working to lengthen your spine.



3. Exhale as you begin to straighten your legs as much as possible, heels reaching toward the ground. If your legs are straight, lift the thigh muscles strongly up as you press into the ground with your feet.

ONLINE To learn more about starting a yoga practice, read our guide at nytimes.com/beginnyoga

DIMITRI ANTONISSEN, ANTWERP

If you run, you should practice yoga. Running can make your calves, quads, hip flexors and hamstrings tight. Several yoga postures, including lunges and eagle pose, can help.

This is the sport that people are always asking me about and I'm like, "Yoga and running literally could go together like peanut butter and jelly." If you run, you should practice yoga. Your hip flexors and hamstrings can get tight from running. I don't run, but here are some postures that might help:

- Pyramid Pose
- Lunges, such as crescent lunge, low lunge, and runner's lunge
- Eagle pose or other one-legged balance postures
- Forward bend

For more information, I'd recommend you check out "The Runner's Guide to Yoga," by Sage Rountree. She owns the family of studios that I teach at in Durham, N.C., and has written several books about yoga and running.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CELESTE SLOMAN
FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

What's a good type of yoga to fall asleep in slow class

This is a pretty common situation where your friend introduces you to yoga at the Y.M.C.A., and the class is a slower class. You're maybe a little bit bored, or you're looking for something that's going to be high energy, high endurance.

Want high energy, high endurance? For that kind of person, the vinyasa style yoga is a very high energy yoga. If you're looking for something that's even more fire than vinyasa, I would say to try Forrest yoga or Ashtanga yoga.

Downward-Facing Dog

1

2