

# YOGA 101

THE EASTERN PRACTICE THE WEST HAS EMBRACED

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For seasoned practitioners, the benefits of yoga are fully understood. But for those just thinking about taking a yoga class, sorting through the various styles, especially, and what you get from yoga can be confusing. But from intense workouts to more meditative style yoga classes, this nearly 5,000-year-old practice – originally developed in India – has something to offer everyone, young to old. And there are local instructors offering a wide variety of yoga styles – and sub-styles – for every kind of student, goal or problem.

There's more to yoga than feeling good or exercise alone. According to "Yoga Basics" author Mara Carrico, "the benefits of yoga go beyond enhancing physical health and mental acuity to promoting emotional balance

and spiritual awareness." And local yoga instructors say yoga is as helpful for children and teens as it is for adults of all ages.

Selecting the best style of yoga might require a bit of research, but all types of yoga are just different ways to get to the same destination. – a sense of mind-body-spirit unity that gives you a general feeling of well-being and calm. And very often accompanying that feeling of well-being is a reduction in body pains and improvements in some bodily disabilities, too.

"All yoga leads to a sense of mind-body-spirit unity," says veteran yoga instructor Rachel Fiske of Chicago who teaches a class that combines several types of yoga.

Fiske advises trying different types until you find what works for you. "The best one for you," she says, "is the one you like best."

However, many people practice many different styles of yoga over the course of their lives as their needs, interests and abilities change and grow. And what yoga instructors teach is as varied as the people practicing yoga.

## Local Yoga Uplcose

Locally, yoga teachers – and students – run the gamut from former gym rats and high-powered business types who learned to slow down and enjoy life from practicing yoga, to people injured or disabled, to those with permanent special needs who have found that yoga helps them. They all find yoga improves their lives beyond just physically. And it helps students of all kinds and ages.

## From Ache-y to Yoga Advocate

Adeline "Addie" Alex, of Light Of The Heart Yoga in downtown Holliston, first started studying yoga more than 35 years ago. It made some remarkable changes in her body as well as her outlook and life overall even before it became her livelihood.

"I had always totally favored the right side of my body – my left side felt weak," she said. But when she learned to "lean into" her left side doing yoga – instead of favoring her right, strong side – it made her left side equally strong and, along with that, as a result, "I started to 'live' in both YOGA, to page 6

## BRINGING YOGA INTO YOUR LIFE

With so many places to find yoga in the world, there's no reason not to give it a try. But check out these suggestions from yoga instructors about first finding your way into yoga as a beginner or someone just wondering if you'll like yoga.

### DVDs

You can go to the local library or use a movie rental program to check out DVDs about yoga. Try what seems interesting, not just a bestseller. Invest in a copy of the one you like best.

### Books on yoga

There are many great books on yoga focusing on the different styles and their benefits. Library yoga books let you learn about the kinds of yoga without breaking the bank.

### YouTube yoga

YouTube has demonstrations of every kind of yoga that are good introductions for beginners.

### Downloadable YogaVibes

Lesley Reilly, of B-Calm Yoga in Hopkinton, recommends an Internet company, YogaVibes, "that allows students to download yoga classes" (all different styles/techniques) from yoga studios all across the globe. This enables students to practice yoga in their own homes or offices for a small fee (\$10). The student can watch the video as much as they would like for 10 days for the \$10 fee.

"This may be of interest for individuals who are limited on time (there are all different class lengths) and can't make it to the (yoga) studio" – or for "newer students who may be a little anxious," as well as for "the accomplished yogi who may want to try different styles or take class from different experienced teachers."

The Web site YogaVibes represents more than 100 different yoga studios across the U.S. as well as internationally.

YogaVibes.com online notes that yoga

is for anyone, "whether you seek peace and inner stillness, help with addiction recovery or merely a better golf swing. YogaVibes.com has online yoga for you. Whether you're looking for a new back-bending sequence or to take a class with an instructor you've admired from afar, YogaVibes.com offers you access to the top teachers and studios from around the world." With few exceptions, they film real students who come in all shapes, sizes and abilities. "We know they'll inspire your yoga practice, both on and off the mat."

And 5 percent of the YogaVibes' fee goes to charity including yogaHOPE, Yoga Bear and Street Yoga, that establish rehabilitative yoga programs in residential facilities for: homeless women, victims of domestic violence and women in substance abuse recovery; cancer survivors with opportunities for wellness and healing through the practice of yoga: youths and

caregivers who need tools to overcome early life trauma by sharing lifebuilding mindfulness/ wellness practices grounded in yoga.

### Beyond going it alone...

Adeline Alex of Light of the Heart Yoga in Holliston, notes that "most students say they get more out of yoga on an inner level, not just a social level, when they practice yoga with an instructor and a group," rather than alone with books or DVDs. The media yoga might get you interested, but sticking to them might not give you the full benefits of yoga, she says. Alex, who offers classes above Fiske's General Store (770 Washington St., Holliston) and elsewhere, says: "If you're doing it from a book (or DVD), you'll probably be staying at a body level" of learning and benefits. The goal of yoga is "connecting with yourself at a deeper level" as well. "Instructor and class interactions promote learning from each other."

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sides of my body” for a change. And “the way I looked at my life started to change.” Her left side – beyond just the physical, “tends to be more gentle, more laid back, not so into nitty-gritty details, and I began to appreciate that more instead of putting that down” (in herself and her body). Yoga helps you “to condition your body to live in the vastness of who you are” – rather than on only one side (or aspect) of yourself that you always fall back on, she indicated.

Now “I’m much more compassionate” – as well as having strengthened her left side and eliminated pain in her hip that made her more tense physically and prone to favor one side physically, said Alex. “Not having to live with nagging discomfort going on all the time frees up your energy (overall). You’re not spending energy masking your discomfort. You free up a lot of energy, relaxed energy” that also makes you feel great, not tired and tense all the time, said Alex. She has become “more gentle on myself” mentally as well as physically stronger as a result of getting in touch more sides of herself through yoga.

Alex has studied all manner of styles of Hatha yoga but most often teaches Svaroopo yoga – “a gentle style and very deep in terms of what it releases” emotionally and how it helps physically. “It unravels deep-seated layers of tension in your body and creates a healing and personal transformation.”

“Svaroopo, being gentle, doesn’t exacerbate pains or physical disabilities,” she says. “I always tell people it is not a workout like going to a gym, it’s more a meditative style and targets opening of all the tensions along the spine. It’s generally for reclaiming” oneself “on all sorts of levels.”

Alex teaches mostly adults but also has some younger students, particularly ones with disabilities that can be improved considerably by yoga.

Alex says “the Western model” of exercise “is to knock yourself out in the gym and then feel relaxed and tired. Doing yoga, you feel relaxed as you practice yoga, and “afterwards you feel energized” because you’ve relaxed your entire body, loosened it’s tensions, de-

## Lesley Reilly of B~CalM Yoga teaches throughout MetroWest.

stressed and you’re afterwards not using your energy to fight pains, tension etc.

Svaroopo, she says, also has a healing aspect, and “can make transformative changes” in you “and give you deeper experiences of being uplifted, enlightened, illuminated - but not just esoterically - there’s a brightness to you that you experience inside” after doing svaroopo. But, she notes, with yoga “you don’t *have* to go in any of these directions. People take what they need” from yoga.

Alex has taught all ages but focuses mostly on adults and older teens including some teens “with scoliosis” – painful from-birth spine problems. She also teaches “yoga for your back” and her students “get very good results.”

“Yoga is also good for sciatica, (persistent) cramps in legs and feet, neck

and shoulder issues, TMJ (severe recurring jaw pain), carpal tunnel syndrome” (arm pain) and more, says Alex.

Alex’s svaroopo yoga students use props that ease them into yoga positions, very helpful if they have disabilities, tight muscles, etc., she explained.

“Props help you get into yoga poses a little at a time and ‘not push beyond’ ” your physical ability too fast. Instead, you progress in slow but steady and safe increments with yoga and svaroopo.

Alex’s students have found, as did Alex, that svaroopo helps physically - and also has emotional-spiritual benefits. Her students include those in search of pain reduction, improvements in body movement or just emotional-spiritual benefits of yoga.

“The theme is everyone is slightly different” from each other in abilities and

interests “and whenever you’re ready to start, just come.” Alex’s classes are ongoing, just divided into 8-week sessions payment wise. Eight-week session packages cost \$144 for adults and classes run 75 or 90 minutes. “You don’t have to wait for the beginning of the next 8-week session, though - you can start anytime,” says Alex.