

# Finding Your

## Choosing a Yoga Style Laura Warf

**W**hen someone mentions the word yoga, what do you think? Ideas will come up based on what you have heard, or a class you may have experienced in the past. As yoga continues to grow in popularity, this ancient practice has moved beyond yoga studios and into fitness facilities, community centres, church basements and into peoples' homes. The benefits are being experienced by all who practice, and whatever your goal, yoga can help you attain it.

Developed in India, yoga is a spiritual practice that has been evolving for thousands of years. Its definition means a "union" of mind, body, and spirit. Yoga helps lead to a disciplining of the intellect, the mind, the emotions, and the will, which in turn enables one to look at life in all its aspects evenly. The physical postures help make the body stronger by building strength and stamina, while the meditative nature of the practice helps develop focus and concentration. Spiritual benefits are very personal and can be experienced in many ways. Yoga invites a sense of inner stillness and calm to allow for self-observation without judgement to help discover the truth of who you are. In such a state, many sensations are experienced which lead to development of a union with self, a sense of wholeness and acceptance, peacefulness and heightened mental clarity. Regardless of the style practiced, the completeness of mind, body and spirit remains the same.

Patanjali, a great Indian sage, composed and systemized 185 statements called the Yoga

Sutras. This classical work is an authoritative text and is the foundation of yoga. These lessons have been continuously acknowledged and passed down from teacher to student in yoga practices. One particular analogy by Patanjali is the perfect image:

"Wisdom and spirituality unfold in the same manner as a tree grows. Nature is steady and gradual. The world of yoga, with its myriad styles and approaches, may be likened to a forest filled with variety and colour. Every tree in a forest has the same goal: to reach toward the light. One tree's method is not better than another's. Each species has individual characteristics which enable it to grow to its greatest potential. The various yogic systems are unique, yet all have the same purpose: to grow towards enlightenment."

Yoga is universal and is possible for anyone who wants it. The yoga method includes asanas (postures), pranayama (breath control), and meditation (in stillness or in motion). The Yoga Sutras describe the importance of practice;

"first you perfect asana, and then you practice pranayama: you control the inhalation and the exhalation, you regulate the breath. After asana is perfected, then pranayama can be perfected. That is the yoga method."

### Traditional or Trendy?

Whatever your needs, there is a style of yoga for you. Are you looking for something trendy or traditional? Your experience in a fitness club setting may be markedly different than in a yoga studio, either because of how the class is structured or the environment itself. The evolution of different styles has led to a variety of approaches. As mentioned, the mind, body and spirit foundation of yoga remains the same. Some yoga styles are considered gentle or moderate whereas others are more vigorous in their approach. Take the time to inform yourself on which style is the most appropriate based on

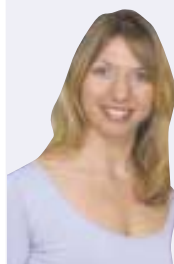


your needs, goals and possible limitations. Seek out qualified teachers who can make recommendations based on what you are looking for so that your experience is a positive one. Following a class, there should be a feeling of relaxation and renewed energy.

You don't necessarily need to be faithful to one style alone. Practices can be tailored to your moods and what you are feeling from one day to the next. Some days your practice may be more meditative in nature; other times more flowing, involving more challenging posture sequences. Respecting where you are at in the present moment is crucial. Learn to go by how you feel and honour yourself by making the right choices. Yoga is a process and life-long commitment, one that you can grow and evolve with.

### Yoga and Can-Fit-Pro JOIN FORCES

This year the **Can-Fit-Pro Toronto 2005 Conference** is offering a specialized yoga track to enable you to explore different styles of yoga with a sampling of some of the most respected yoga teachers. Learn the principles of yoga first hand from those who teach around the globe. If you haven't had the opportunity to practice this ancient discipline, now is your chance. All levels are welcome. Whether you are looking to get started or you want to evolve your practice, this year's Can-Fit-Pro is the place to be.



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Laura is an established fitness professional in Montreal having worked in the industry for over 14 years. With a background in personal training, club management and program coordinating, Laura is currently the Fitness Director for Interclub des Laurentides in Piedmont, Quebec. and the editor for *beyondfitness* magazine. Laura continues to work as a consultant and as a health and fitness educator offering workshops, seminars and coaching services to help others achieve a healthy balanced lifestyle through her business *LauraLifestyles*. She maintains her passion for teaching by actively instructing yoga and group cycling classes at Interclub. Laura Warf can be reached at [laura@laurallifestyles.com](mailto:laura@laurallifestyles.com) or through her website [www.LauraLifestyles.com](http://www.LauraLifestyles.com)



## THE BENEFITS OF YOGA ARE NUMEROUS

MEN AND WOMEN ALIKE ARE ATTENDING CLASSES AND EXPERIENCING WHAT IT HAS TO OFFER.

### YOGA HELPS:

- IMPROVE MUSCLE TONE, FLEXIBILITY, STRENGTH AND STAMINA
- REDUCE STRESS AND TENSION
- BOOST SELF-ESTEEM
- IMPROVE CONCENTRATION AND CREATIVITY
- IMPROVE BODY COMPOSITION BY HELPING INCREASE LEAN MUSCLE AND DECREASING EXCESS BODY FAT
- IMPROVE CIRCULATION
- STIMULATE THE IMMUNE SYSTEM
- CREATE A SENSE OF WELL-BEING AND CALM

### Yoga Styles:

Although there are many styles of yoga, the differences are usually about emphasis, such as focusing on strict alignment of the body, coordination of breath and movement, holding the postures, or the flow from one posture to another. All of the styles share a common lineage. In fact, the founders of three major styles—Ashtanga, Iyengar, and Viniyoga—were all students of Krishnamacharya, a famous teacher at the Yoga Institute at the Mysore Palace in India. Two other styles, Integral and Sivananda, were created by disciples of the famous guru Sivananda. No style is better than another; it's simply a matter of personal preference. More important than any style is the student-teacher relationship.

#### Ananda

Ananda yoga is a classical style of hatha yoga that uses asana and pranayama to awaken, experience, and begin to control the subtle energies within oneself, especially the energies of the chakras. Its object is to use those energies to harmonize body, mind, and emotions, and above all to attune oneself with higher levels of awareness. One unique feature of this system is the use of silent affirmations while in the asanas as a means of working more directly and con-

sciously with the subtle energies to achieve this attunement. Ananda yoga is a relatively gentle, inward experience, not an athletic or aerobic practice. It was developed by Swami Kriyananda, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, author of the spiritual classic, *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

#### Anusara

Anusara means: “to step into the current of Divine Will”, “following your heart”, “flowing with Grace”, “to move with the current of divine will”. A new style developed by John Friend, Anusara yoga is described as heart-oriented, spiritually inspiring, yet grounded in a deep knowledge of outer and inner body alignment. Each student's various abilities and limitations are deeply respected and honoured.

#### Ashtanga

For those who want a serious workout, Ashtanga may be the perfect yoga. Developed by K. Pattabhi Jois, Ashtanga means “eight-step” yoga and is physically demanding. Participants move through a series of flows, jumping from one posture to another to build strength, flexibility, and stamina. It's not for beginners or anyone who's been taking a leisurely approach to fitness. *Power Yoga* is based on Ashtanga.

#### Bikram

Bikram Choudhury's yoga is hot, hot, hot, so be prepared to sweat, sweat, sweat. In class, they crank the thermostat up high, then perform a series of 26 asanas designed to “scientifically” warm and stretch muscles, ligaments, and tendons. Founder Bikram Choudhury studied yoga with Bishnu Ghosh, brother of Paramahansa Yogananda.

#### Integral

Developed by Swami Satichidananda, the man who taught the crowds at the original Woodstock to chant “Om”, Integral classes put almost as much emphasis on pranayama and meditation as they do on postures. Integral yoga is used by Dr. Dean Ornish in his groundbreaking work on reversing heart disease.

#### Iyengar

Ever think standing was just a matter of keeping your body on top of your legs? It's hard to appreciate how involved a simple thing like just standing can be, how much concentration and how many subtle movements and adjustments it takes, until you take an Iyengar yoga class. Of course, the point is that you're not *just* standing. You're doing *Tadasana*, Mountain pose, and in yoga in the style of B.K.S. Iyengar, *Tadasana* is an active pose. B.K.S. Iyengar is one of the best-known yoga teachers and the creator of one of the most popular styles of yoga in the world. His style of yoga is noted for great attention to detail and the precise alignment of postures, as well as the use of props such as blocks and belts.

#### Kali Ray TriYoga

Kali Ray TriYoga, founded by Kali Ray, brings posture, breath, and focus together to create dynamic and intuitive flows. The TriYoga flows combine flowing and sustained postures that emphasize spinal wavelike movements, economy of motion, and synchronization with breath and mudra. The flows are systematized by level and can be as gentle or as challenging as desired. Students may progress from basics to

advanced as they increase their flexibility, strength, endurance and knowledge of the flows.

### Kripalu

Called the yoga of consciousness, Kripalu puts great emphasis on proper breath, alignment, coordinating breath and movement, and "honouring the wisdom of the body"—you work according to the limits of your individual flexibility and strength. Alignment follows awareness. Students learn to focus on the physical and psychological reactions caused by various postures to develop their awareness of mind, body, emotion, and spirit. There are three stages in Kripalu yoga. Stage One focuses on learning the postures and exploring your body's abilities. Stage Two involves holding the postures for an extended time, developing concentration and inner awareness. Stage Three is like a meditation in motion in which the movement from one posture to another arises unconsciously and spontaneously.

### Kundalini

Kundalini yoga in the tradition of Yogi Bhajan, who brought the style to the West in 1969, focuses on the controlled release of Kundalini energy. The practice involves classic poses, coordination of breath and movement and meditation.

### Sivananda

Sivananda is one of the world's largest schools of yoga. Developed by Vishnu-devananda and named for his teacher, Sivananda yoga follows a set structure that includes pranayama, classic asanas, and relaxation. Vishnu-devananda wrote one of the contemporary yoga classics, *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*. First published in 1960, the book is still one of the best introductions to yoga available.

### Svaroopa Yoga

Developed by Rama Berch, Svaroopa yoga teaches significantly different ways of doing familiar poses, emphasizing the opening of the spine by beginning at the tailbone and progressing through each spinal area in turn. Every pose integrates the foundational principles of asana, anatomy, and yoga philosophy, and emphasizes the development of transcendent inner experience, which is called svaroop by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras. This is a consciousness-oriented yoga that also promotes healing and transformation. Svaroopa is not an athletic endeavour, but a development of consciousness using the body as a tool.

### Vinyasa yoga

Vinyasa yoga is a popular, evolving form of traditional hatha yoga that focuses on integrating breath and movement, awareness and alignment, strength and flexibility, your practice with your daily life. Likened to a dynamic dance,

postures or asanas are connected through the breath for a transformative and balancing effect. It originates within the yogic teachings of Sri T. Krishnamacharya whose students are the head of three of the main forms of classical yoga today: Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga (Pattabhi Jois), Iyengar yoga (B.K.S. Iyengar), Viniyoga (T.K.V. Desikachar).

### Viniyoga

Viniyoga is not so much a style as it is a methodology for developing practices for individual conditions and purposes. This is the approach developed by Sri. T. Krishnamacharya, teacher of well-known contemporary masters B.K.S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois, and Indra Devi, and continued by his son, T.K.V. Desikachar. Key characteristics of the asana practice are the careful integration of the flow of breath with movement of the spine, with sequencing, adaptations, and intensity dependent upon the overall context and goals. Function is stressed over form. Practices may also include pranayama, meditation, reflection, study, and other classic elements. Personal practices are taught privately. Given the scope of practice, the inherent therapeutic applications, and the heritage of the lineage, the training requirements for teacher certification are extensive. □

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