

LEARNING MADE EASY



4th Edition

Yoga

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Discover the healing
power of your breath

Learn how ancient practices
offer modern benefits

Make Yoga accessible for
all stages of your life

Larry Payne, PhD

Internationally renowned Yoga
therapy pioneer, teacher, and author

Brenda Feuerstein

Internationally renowned Yoga teacher
and author



Yoga

4th Edition

by Larry Payne Ph.D.,
internationally renowned Yoga therapy pioneer,
teacher, and author

Brenda Feuerstein,
internationally renowned Yoga teacher and author

Georg Feuerstein Ph.D.,
internationally renowned Yoga researcher and author

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Yoga For Dummies®, 4th Edition

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2023 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Media and software compilation copyright © 2023 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved.

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and may not be used without written permission. Prime of Life Yoga® is a registered trademark of Larry Payne. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: WHILE THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHORS HAVE USED THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN PREPARING THIS WORK, THEY MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES REPRESENTATIVES, WRITTEN SALES MATERIALS OR PROMOTIONAL STATEMENTS FOR THIS WORK. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION, WEBSITE, OR PRODUCT IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHORS ENDORSE THE INFORMATION OR SERVICES THE ORGANIZATION, WEBSITE, OR PRODUCT MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR SITUATION. YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH A SPECIALIST WHERE APPROPRIATE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR AUTHORS SHALL BE LIABLE FOR ANY LOSS OF PROFIT OR ANY OTHER COMMERCIAL DAMAGES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO SPECIAL, INCIDENTAL, CONSEQUENTIAL, OR OTHER DAMAGES.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit <https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies>.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023931516

ISBN: 978-1-119-98906-6 (pbk); 978-1-119-98907-3 (ebk); 978-1-119-98908-0 (ebk)

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: Getting Started with Yoga	5
CHAPTER 1: Yoga 101: Building a Foundation	7
CHAPTER 2: Ready, Set, Yoga!	23
CHAPTER 3: Preparing for a Fruitful Yoga Practice	35
CHAPTER 4: The Fine Art of Letting Go of Stress	43
CHAPTER 5: Breath and Movement Simplified	59
Part 2: Moving into Position: Basic Yoga Postures	83
CHAPTER 6: Please Be Seated	85
CHAPTER 7: Standing Tall	97
CHAPTER 8: Steady as a Tree: Mastering Balance	113
CHAPTER 9: Absolutely Abs	123
CHAPTER 10: Looking at the World Upside Down: Safe Inversion Postures	131
CHAPTER 11: Easy 'round the Bends: Classic Bending Floor Postures	141
CHAPTER 12: Several Twists on the Yoga Twist	159
CHAPTER 13: Dynamic Posture: The Rejuvenation Sequence and Sun Salutation	167
CHAPTER 14: A Beginner's Routine for Everyone	177
Part 3: Creating and Customizing Your Yoga Routine	189
CHAPTER 15: Designing Your Own Yoga Program	191
CHAPTER 16: Partnering Up for Yoga	229
CHAPTER 17: It's Never Too Soon: Pre- and Postnatal Yoga	245
CHAPTER 18: Yoga for Kids and Teens	257
CHAPTER 19: It's Never Too Late: Yoga for Aging Adults	281
CHAPTER 20: Prop Art: The Why and How of Simple Props	305
CHAPTER 21: Yoga Against the Wall	313
Part 4: Living Life the Yoga Way	327
CHAPTER 22: Yoga throughout the Day	329
CHAPTER 23: Meditation and the Higher Reaches of Yoga	343
CHAPTER 24: Yoga Therapy: Customizing Your Back and Body Treatments	359
CHAPTER 25: Using Restorative Postures to Relieve Stress and Chronic Pain	381

Part 5: The Part of Tens	397
CHAPTER 26: Ten Tips for a Safe Yoga Practice.....	399
CHAPTER 27: Ten Ways to Get the Most out of Your Yoga Practice.....	403
Index	407

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	3
Icons Used in This Book	3
Beyond the Book	4
Where to Go from Here	4
PART 1: GETTING STARTED WITH YOGA	5
CHAPTER 1: Yoga 101: Building a Foundation	7
Understanding the True Character of Yoga	7
Finding unity	8
Finding yourself: Are you a Yoga practitioner?	9
Considering Your Options: The Seven Main Branches of Yoga	9
Taking a Closer Look at Hatha Yoga	12
Finding Your Niche: Four Basic Approaches to Yoga	16
Yoga as fitness training	16
Yoga as therapy	17
Yoga as a lifestyle	17
Yoga as a spiritual discipline	18
What most approaches to Yoga have in common	18
Pointing the Way to Happiness: Health, Healing, and Yoga	19
Balancing Your Life with Yoga	21
Locating Your Starting Place in the World of Yoga	21
CHAPTER 2: Ready, Set, Yoga!	23
Finding Suitable Yoga Instruction	24
Checking out classes and teachers	24
Making sure the course fits your experience level	26
Taking other important considerations into account	27
Preparing for Group Practice	28
Deciding what to wear	28
Packing your Yoga class kit	29
Putting safety first	29
Class etiquette	30
Going for It on Your Own	31
Fulfilling Your Promise to Yourself: Making Time for Yoga Practice	32

CHAPTER 3: Preparing for a Fruitful Yoga Practice	35
Cultivating the Right Attitude	35
Leave pretzels for snack time	36
Practice at your own pace	36
Send the scorekeeper home	37
Picture yourself in the posture	38
Enjoying a Peaceful Yoga Practice	38
Busting the perfect posture myth	38
Listening to your body	39
Moving slowly but surely	40
Practicing function over form with Forgiving Limbs	41
CHAPTER 4: The Fine Art of Letting Go of Stress	43
The Nature of Stress	44
Correcting wrong attitudes	45
Changing poor habits	45
Releasing bodily tension	46
Relaxation Techniques That Work	47
Deep relaxation: The corpse posture	48
Afternoon delight	50
Magic triangles: Relaxing through visualization	51
Relaxation before sleep	53
Insomnia buster	53
Yoga Nidra: Catch Up on Your Sleep Quotient with Yogic Sleep	54
Formulating your intention	55
Performing Yoga Nidra	56
CHAPTER 5: Breath and Movement Simplified	59
Breathing Your Way to Good Health	59
Taking high-quality breaths	60
Relaxing with a couple of deep breaths	61
Practicing safe yogic breathing	62
Reaping the benefits of yogic breathing	63
Breathing through your nose (most of the time)	63
Mastering the Mechanics of Yogic Breathing	65
Understanding how your emotions affect your diaphragm	66
Appreciating the complete yogic breath	67
Starting out with focus breathing	70
Realizing the power of a pause	70
Seeing How Breath and Postural Movement Work Together	70
Breathing in four directions	71
Recognizing the distinct roles of movement and holding in Yoga postures	72
Achieving a deeper stretch with The Yoga Miracle	73
Answering common breath and movement questions	74

Infusing Sound into Yogic Breathing	76
Breath Control the Traditional Way	77
Alternate nostril breathing.....	78
The cooling breath.....	80
Shitkari: Inhalation through the mouth.....	80
Kapala-bhati: Frontal sinus cleansing.....	81
PART 2: MOVING INTO POSITION:	
BASIC YOGA POSTURES	83
CHAPTER 6: Please Be Seated	85
Understanding the Philosophy of Sitting	86
Adding Variety to Your Sitting Postures.....	87
Chair-sitting posture.....	88
The easy posture: Sukhasana	88
The thunderbolt posture: Vajrasana.....	90
The auspicious posture: Svastikasana	91
The perfect posture: Siddhasana	92
CHAPTER 7: Standing Tall.....	97
Standing Strong.....	97
Exercising Your Standing Options.....	99
Mountain posture: Tadasana.....	99
Standing forward bend: Uttanasana	100
Half standing forward bend: Ardha uttanasana.....	102
Asymmetrical forward bend: Parshva uttanasana	103
Triangle posture: Utthita trikonasana	104
Reverse triangle posture: Parivritta trikonasana variation	106
Warrior I: Vira bhadrasana I.....	107
Warrior II: Vira bhadrasana II.....	108
Standing spread-legged forward bend: Prasara pada uttanasana	109
Half chair posture: Ardha utkatasana.....	110
Downward-facing dog: Adhomukha shvanasana.....	111
CHAPTER 8: Steady as a Tree: Mastering Balance.....	113
Getting to the Roots of the Posture	113
Balancing Postures for Graceful Strength	114
Warrior at the wall: Vira bhadrasana III variation.....	115
Balancing cat	116
The tree posture: Vrikshasana.....	117
The karate kid.....	118
Standing heel-to-buttock	118
Scorpion	119

CHAPTER 9: Absolutely Abs	123
Taking Care of the Abdomen: Your Business Center	124
Exercising Those Abs	125
Exploring push-downs	125
Trying yogi sit-ups	126
Strengthening with yogi sit-backs	127
Creating variety with extended leg slide-ups	128
Arching with the suck 'em up posture	129
Exhaling "soundly"	130
CHAPTER 10: Looking at the World Upside Down: Safe Inversion Postures	131
Getting a Leg Up on Leg Inversions	132
Legs up on a chair	132
Legs up on the wall	133
The happy baby	134
Standing spread-legged forward bend at the wall	135
Trying a Trio of Shoulder Stands	137
Half shoulder stand at the wall	137
Reverse half shoulder stand at the wall	138
Half shoulder stand: Viparita karani	139
CHAPTER 11: Easy 'round the Bends: Classic Bending Floor Postures	141
Gaining a Strong Spine (and Some Insight)	141
Bending over Backward	143
Cobra I: Salamba bhujangasana	144
Cobra II: Bhujangasana	145
Cobra III	146
Locust I: Shalabhasana	147
Locust II	148
Locust III: Superman posture	149
Bending from Side to Side	149
Seated side bend	150
All-fours side bend	151
Folded side bend	152
Bending Forward	152
Seated forward bend: Pashcimottanasana	153
Head-to-knee posture: Janushirshasana	154
The great seal: Mahamudra	156
Wide-legged forward bend: Upavishta konasana	157

CHAPTER 12: Several Twists on the Yoga Twist	159
Trying Simple Upright Twists	160
Easy chair twist	160
Easy sitting twist	161
The sage twist	162
Twisting while Reclining	163
Bent leg supine twist	163
The Swiss army knife	164
Extended legs supine twist: Jathara parivritti	165
CHAPTER 13: Dynamic Posture: The Rejuvenation Sequence and Sun Salutation	167
Warming Up for the Sun: Rejuvenating in Nine Steps	168
Gliding Through the Seven-Step Kneeling Salutation	171
Advancing to the 12-Step Sun Salutation	173
CHAPTER 14: A Beginner's Routine for Everyone	177
Starting Slowly and Wisely	177
Trying Out a Fun Beginner Routine	178
Easy pose: Sukhasana	179
Shoulder rolls	179
Sitting cat: Cakravakasana	180
Balancing cat: Caravakasana variation	181
Sitting cat: Cakravakasana variation	181
Mini rejuvenation sequence	182
Standing twist: Parivrta trikonasana	182
Cobra: Bhujangasana	184
Child's pose: Balasana	184
Reclined hamstring stretch: Supta padangusthasana	185
Bent leg supine twist: Parivartanasana	186
Knees to chest pose: Apanasana	187
Corpse pose: Shavasana	187
Reaching Beyond the Beginning	188
PART 3: CREATING AND CUSTOMIZING YOUR YOGA ROUTINE	189
CHAPTER 15: Designing Your Own Yoga Program	191
Applying the Rules of Sequencing	192
Getting Started with Warm-ups	193
Reclining warm-up postures	196
Standing warm-up postures	201
Seated warm-up postures	204

Selecting Your Main Postures and Compensation Poses	206
Getting stronger with standard asanas	206
Bringing balance with compensation postures.	208
Including Plenty of Rest and Relaxation.	211
Knowing when to rest and when to resume	211
Mastering rest postures	211
Cooking Up a Creative Yoga Routine with the Classic Formula	214
Enjoying a postural feast: The 30- to 60-minute general conditioning routine	215
Making the most of a little: A 15-minute routine	225
Satisfying an appetite for a quick pick-me-up: A five-minute routine	227
CHAPTER 16: Partnering Up for Yoga	229
Defining Partner Yoga.	229
Enjoying the Benefits of Partner Yoga	230
Exploring Eleven Ways to Pose with a Partner	231
Partner suspension bridge.	231
Partner teeter-totter	232
Partner warrior II.	234
Partner table pose.	235
Double triangle	236
Partner tree pose.	237
Yoga miracle pose	238
Seated straddle pose	239
The partner diamond	240
Partner seated twist	241
Easy partner camel	242
CHAPTER 17: It's Never Too Soon: Pre- and Postnatal Yoga.	245
Partnering Yoga with Pregnancy.	245
Enjoying Yoga support as you and your baby grow.	246
Exercising caution during pregnancy	247
Finding Perfect Pregnancy Postures.	248
Side-lying posture	248
The cat and cow.	249
The cobbler's posture: Baddha konasana	250
A safe, quick prenatal routine	251
Continuing Yogic Exercise after Pregnancy (Postpartum).	255
CHAPTER 18: Yoga for Kids and Teens	257
Kid Stuff: Making Yoga Fun for Youngsters	258
Engaging the imagination: Approaching poses in a child-friendly way.	258
Finding Yoga postures kids love	259

	Easing the Transition into Adulthood: Yoga for Teens	271
	Calling all teens: The antidote to stress in an overscheduled life	271
	Fit for life, and so much more	272
	A New Yoga Routine for Teens	273
CHAPTER 19:	It's Never Too Late: Yoga for Aging Adults	281
	Reaping the Benefits of Yoga through Midlife and Beyond	282
	Working through menopause	282
	Navigating andropause	282
	Developing bones of steel	283
	Approaching Prime of Life Yoga with the Right Mindset	283
	Developing User-Friendly Routines for Midlifers	284
	Prime of Life Yoga routine: Level I	284
	Prime of Life Yoga routine: Level II	286
	Staying Active: Yoga for Older Adults	290
	Cherishing the Chair: Safe Routines for Older Adults	291
	Cherish the chair routine: Level I	291
	Cherish the chair routine: Level II	297
CHAPTER 20:	Prop Art: The Why and How of Simple Props	305
	Examining the Pros and Cons of Props	306
	Exploring the advantages of props	306
	Looking at props' drawbacks	306
	Going Prop Hunting at Home	307
	Working with a wall	307
	Using a blanket for more than bedding	308
	Choosing a chair for comfort	308
	Stretching with a strap	309
	Seeking Out Props You May Want to Purchase	309
	Supporting alignment with the help of blocks	309
	Bolstering support with pillows	310
	Eyeing the many uses of eye pillows	311
	Turning to inversion props	311
CHAPTER 21:	Yoga Against the Wall	313
	The World Is Your Yoga Studio	314
	A Wall-Supported Yoga Workout	315
	Wall mountain pose	315
	Mountain posture flow	316
	Wall warrior flow	317
	Standing side bend at the wall	318
	Half chair at the wall	319
	Wall warrior III	320

Wall hang	321
Yogi wall sit-ups	322
Wall splits	323
Inverted hamstring pose at the wall	324
Legs up against the wall	325

PART 4: LIVING LIFE THE YOGA WAY 327

CHAPTER 22: Yoga throughout the Day 329

Making Yoga a Habit	330
Turning your face toward a Yoga morning	330
Practicing Yoga throughout the day	330
Seeking Your Higher Self	331
Observing yourself	331
Understanding yourself	332
Practicing self-discipline	332
Transcending yourself	333
Making Inroads into the Eightfold Path with Moral Discipline	333
Vowing to do no harm	334
Telling the truth all the time.	335
Seeing how stealing means more than material theft.	336
Observing chastity in thought and deed	336
Acquiring more by living with less.	337
Adding other moral practices	338
Exercising Yogic Self-Discipline	338
Purifying mind and body	339
Calming the quest through contentment	339
Focusing with austerity.	339
Partnering research with self-study	340
Relating to a higher principle.	341

CHAPTER 23: Meditation and the Higher Reaches of Yoga 343

Understanding Concentration	344
Unleashing your essence	345
Gaining focus	346
Practicing Meditation	347
Getting a handle on cakras	347
Following a few guidelines for successful meditation	349
Maintaining proper bodily posture.	352
Overcoming obstacles to meditation	353
Adding sounds to meditation	353
Breathing mindfully.	354
Trying walking meditation	355
Practicing lovingkindness meditation.	356

	Working toward Ecstasy	357
	Reaching toward Enlightenment.	358
CHAPTER 24:	Yoga Therapy: Customizing Your Back and Body Treatments	359
	What You Need to Know about Yoga Therapy	360
	How to find a good Yoga therapist	361
	What to expect if you see a Yoga therapist	361
	A Five-Step Plan for a Healthy Back	362
	Yoga Rx for Lower Backs	363
	Lower back conditions that need more arching	363
	Lower back conditions that need more folding	364
	Lower back routine	365
CHAPTER 25:	Using Restorative Postures to Relieve Stress and Chronic Pain	381
	Your Yoga Toolkit for Relieving Chronic Pain	382
	Relieving back and body pain with gentle movement	382
	Reducing the intensity and frequency of headaches	383
	Helpful Postures for Chronic Pain.	383
	For your aching lower back	384
	For relief from headaches and from upper back and neck pain.	388
	For when it hurts all over: Joint and overall body pain	393
	PART 5: THE PART OF TENS	397
CHAPTER 26:	Ten Tips for a Safe Yoga Practice	399
	Avoid Seeing Yoga as a Competition— Even with Yourself.	400
	Listen to Your Body and Be in the Moment.	400
	Challenge Yourself, Don't Strain Yourself	400
	Forget about What You Used to Do	401
	Don't Buy into "No Pain, No Gain".	401
	Choose Function over Form.	401
	Find the Intersection of Focus and Ease in Your Postures	401
	Seek Out a Yoga Teacher Who Respects Your Limits.	402
	Find Your Personal Comfort Zone.	402
	Give Yourself the Benefit of Time and Allow Yoga to Unfold	402
CHAPTER 27:	Ten Ways to Get the Most out of Your Yoga Practice	403
	Understand Yoga	403
	Set Clear and Realistic Goals	404
	Commit Yourself to Growth	404

Stay for the Long Haul	404
Start with Good Habits	404
Vary Your Routine	404
Breathe to Increase Your Awareness	405
Do Your Best, Don't Worry about the Rest	405
Allow Your Body to Speak Up	405
Share Yoga	405
INDEX	407

Introduction

More than 35 million Americans practice Yoga of some kind, and many more millions of Yoga practitioners live in other parts of the world. Yoga isn't a fad. It has a history of approximately five millennia and has been around in the West for much more than a hundred years. Though ancient, it's especially relevant to today's hectic and stressful way of life.

By its very nature, Yoga leads you toward greater balance and relaxation. It's the ultimate mind-body practice. A Yoga practice brings a balanced mixture of alertness and relaxation with each pose. The physical movements coordinated with the breath bring bodily and mental relaxation, and the serene mind brings further relaxation to stressed and tight muscles. What results is a welcome dose of enhanced well-being. These benefits draw millions to the practice of this ancient tradition. And indeed, Yoga has never been more important. In our hectic 24/7 way of life, loaded with opportunities for constant stimulation and accumulation of stress, Yoga brings balance to all who take the time to welcome it into their lives.

Yoga has brought health and peace of mind to millions of people, and it can do the same for you. We invite you to explore Yoga in depth with *Yoga For Dummies*, 4th Edition as your guide. The yogic postures are an excellent starting point, but they're merely the outermost shell of a multilayered tradition. At its core, Yoga is a timeless answer for anyone seeking deeper meaning in life and the elusive treasures of peace and contentment.

About This Book

Perhaps *Yoga For Dummies*, 4th Edition, is the first book on Yoga you've ever held in your hands. In this case, we can definitely say that you're starting at the right place. More likely, however, you've leafed through quite a few other books, including some that are neither sound nor helpful. How, then, is this book different? We have a two-part answer for you.

First, the information you find in *Yoga For Dummies*, 4th Edition, is based on our extensive study and practice of Yoga. Between us, we have more than 100 years of experience with Yoga. One author (Larry Payne) directs a university-based Yoga

therapy training program for Yoga teachers at Loyola Marymount University; has a thriving practice as a Yoga therapist and Yoga teacher in Los Angeles, where he adapts Yoga to his clients' specific needs and health challenges (especially back problems); and has produced a popular series of Yoga DVDs. The other authors are the late Georg Feuerstein and Brenda Feuerstein. Georg was internationally recognized as a leading expert on the Yoga tradition, authored many seminal works on it, and created a teacher training manual on Yoga philosophy that Yoga teachers in 11 countries refer to. Brenda is an internationally recognized Yoga teacher who leads workshops, retreats, and trainings worldwide and is the director of Traditional Yoga Studies, which offers online Yoga programs. In this book, we merge our respective areas of expertise to create a reliable and user-friendly introductory book that can also serve you as a reference work on an ongoing basis.

Second, we're dedicated to motivating you to practice Yoga, a system that we've seen work both minor and major miracles. We've committed our lives to making Yoga available to anyone who cares about the health and wholeness of their body and mind. In short, we can say, with all modesty, that you're in the best of hands.

This book guides you slowly, step by step, into the treasure house of Yoga. And what a treasure house it is! You find out how to strengthen your mind and enlist it to unlock your body's extraordinary potential. A sound body requires a sound mind, and we show you how to improve or regain the health and wholeness of both.

We know you're busy, so we've organized this book in the easy-access way the Dummies series is known for. You may choose to read the book from cover to cover, or you may read any section or chapter as it calls to you. Feel free to skip over the Technical Stuff, which we indicate with an icon, and the sidebars (although we think you'll find these interesting). But please, when you see a Warning icon, take note — we want your practice to be a safe one.

Whether you're interested in becoming more flexible, more fit, less stressed, or more peaceful and joyful, this book contains all the good counsel and practical exercises you need to get started.

Above all, we've endeavored to make this book relevant to busy people like you. And if, after reading this guide, you become more serious about studying and practicing Yoga, consider taking a Yoga class with a qualified instructor. This book is a great guide, but nothing compares to hands-on instruction and guidance.

Foolish Assumptions

We know you're no dummy! But if you're a newbie to Yoga, we know you appreciate starting with the basics. No prior exposure to the many aspects of Yoga is necessary for you to benefit from this book. In fact, this book is the perfect first step in your exploration, and we invite you to continue to explore further when you have this under your belt. Additional Yoga resources can be found at samata.com and traditionalyogastudies.com.

We also know that some of our readers may already have some experience with Yoga and want to understand the fundamentals more deeply. For you, we provide detail and a fair amount of depth across the Yoga spectrum, but always in a clear and direct manner. We assume that you're looking for sound information with a no-nonsense presentation. Let other books speak to you in an esoteric manner. For us, let's just talk Yoga!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, you'll notice little pictures in the margins. These icons point you to information that you may not want to forget or, in some cases, you may decide to skip over.



TIP

Our tips point you toward helpful information that can make your yogic journey a little smoother.



REMEMBER

When we point to information for you to remember, we think it's worthwhile for you to pause and make a mental note of the information; it can help you down the road in your understanding and practice.



WARNING

Please take note of all warnings. Yoga is safe, but Yoga injuries can and do happen, and we don't want that to be your experience.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Consider this material "nice to know" information. We think it's interesting and can add to your experience. But feel free to skip it if you want to breeze through.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the book content, you can find valuable free material online. We provide you with a Cheat Sheet that addresses questions that may be first and foremost in your mind: We separate Yoga facts from myths, help you find the right Yoga teacher for you, and offer tips for a successful Yoga practice. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet by searching www.dummies.com for **Yoga for Dummies Cheat Sheet**.

You can also check out video clips online of many of the poses you learn in this book at www.dummies.com/go/yoga.

Where to Go from Here

We've designed *Yoga For Dummies*, 4th Edition, to be both an introduction and a beginner's reference work. You can read the chapters one after the other and practice along with us, or you can dip into the book here and there, reading up on the subjects that currently interest you, such as relaxation techniques or helpful props for your practice.

If you're a newcomer to Yoga, we recommend that you spend some time with the table of contents and leaf through the book to get a general sense of how we've structured and approached the material. You probably want to begin your reading with the first two chapters, which give you a picture of the Yoga landscape.

If you aren't new to Yoga and you want a refresher course, you can also use this book as a reliable guide in answering your questions. Perusing the table of contents is a good starting point for you as well. You may find yourself gravitating to later chapters that zero in on specific categories of postures, or postures and routines for specific age groups or needs, or ways to custom-design a personal practice. And of course, the index is always useful to locate specific information on any topic of interest.

Okay, then, are you ready to Yoga?

1

Getting Started with Yoga

IN THIS PART . . .

Explore the primary branches, styles, and approaches to Yoga and learn how to take control of your mind, body, health, and life with Yoga.

Discover a Yoga class and instructor that meet your individual needs.

Learn to approach Yoga with a healthy attitude and leave competition and regret behind.

Understand stress and learn to use Yoga to manage it.

Practice traditional methods of breath control, conscious breathing, relaxation techniques, and breath and movement.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Debunking Yoga myths
- » Deciphering the word Yoga
- » Exploring the primary branches, styles, and approaches to Yoga
- » Understanding the yogic principles of being
- » Taking control of your mind, body, health, and life with Yoga

Chapter **1**

Yoga 101: Building a Foundation

Although *Yoga* is now a household word, many people don't know exactly what it is. Far more than just physical exercise, Yoga can transform you, even if it's not your intention when you first step onto the mat. In this chapter, we clear up the confusion and explain what Yoga is and how it relates to your health and happiness. We also help you see the richness of Yoga, with its many different branches and approaches. Yoga really does offer something for everyone.

Whatever your age, weight, flexibility, or beliefs may be, you can practice and benefit from some version of Yoga. Yoga may have originated in India, but it's for all of humanity.

Understanding the True Character of Yoga

Whenever you hear that Yoga is *just* this or *just* that, your nonsense alert should kick into action. Yoga is too comprehensive to reduce to any one aspect — it's like a skyscraper with many floors and numerous rooms at each level. Yoga isn't *just*

gymnastics, fitness training, a way to manage your weight, stress reduction, meditation, or a spiritual path — it's *all* these tools and a great deal more.

The Yoga we enjoy today comes from a 5,000-year-old Indian tradition. Some of the exercises look like gymnastics and so, not surprisingly, have made their way into Western gymnastics. These exercises, or postures, help you become (and stay) fit, manage your weight, and reduce your stress level. Yoga also offers a whole range of meditation practices, including breathing techniques that exercise your lungs and calm your nervous system, or that charge your brain and the rest of your body with delicious energy.

You can also use Yoga as an efficient system of healthcare that has proven its usefulness in both restoring and maintaining health. Yoga continues to gain acceptance within the medical establishment; more physicians are recommending Yoga to their patients not only for stress reduction, but also as a safe and beneficial method of exercise and reconditioning (notably, for the back, neck, knees, and hips).

Still, Yoga is far more than a system of preventative or restorative healthcare. Yoga looks at health from a broad, holistic perspective that integrative medicine is continuing to rediscover. This perspective appreciates the enormous influence of the mind — your psychological attitudes — on physical health.

Finding unity

The word *Yoga* comes from the ancient Sanskrit language spoken by the traditional religious elite of India, the *Brahmins*. *Yoga* means “union” or “integration” and also “discipline.” The system of *Yoga*, then, is a *unitive* or *integrating discipline*. *Yoga* seeks unity at various levels. First, it seeks to unite body and mind, which people all too often separate. Some people are chronically “out of their body.” They can't feel their feet or the ground beneath them, as if they hover like ghosts just above their bodies. They're unable to cope with the ordinary pressures of daily life, so they collapse under stress. They don't understand their own emotions. Afraid of life, they're easily hurt emotionally.

Yoga also seeks to unite the rational mind and the emotions. People frequently bottle up their emotions and don't express their real feelings. Instead, they choose to rationalize away these feelings. Chronic avoidance can become a serious health hazard; if people aren't aware that they're suppressing feelings such as anger, the anger consumes them from the inside out.



REMEMBER

Here's how *Yoga* can help you with your personal growth:

» It can put you in touch with your real feelings and balance your emotional life.

- » It can help you understand and accept yourself so that you feel comfortable with who you are. You don't have to “fake it” or reduce your life to constant role playing.
- » It can help you become more able to empathize and communicate with others.

Yoga is a powerful means of psychological integration. It makes you aware that you're part of a larger whole, not merely an island unto yourself. People can't thrive in isolation. Even the most independent individual is greatly indebted to others. When your mind and body are happily reunited, this union with others comes about naturally. The moral principles of Yoga are all-embracing, encouraging you to seek kinship with everyone and everything. We say more about this topic in Chapter 22.

Finding yourself: Are you a Yoga practitioner?

Someone who's practicing the discipline of balancing mind and body through Yoga is traditionally called a *yogi*. Alternatively, we also use the English term *Yoga practitioner*. Becoming a *yogi* or Yoga practitioner means you do more than practice Yoga postures. Yogis embrace Yoga as a self-transforming spiritual discipline. A *yogi* who has really mastered Yoga is called an *adept*. If such an adept also teaches (and not all of them do), this person is traditionally called a *guru*. The Sanskrit word *guru* literally means “weighty one.” According to traditional esoteric sources, the syllable *gu* signifies spiritual darkness, and *ru* signifies the act of removing. Thus, a *guru* is a teacher who leads the student from darkness to light.



WARNING

Very few Westerners have achieved complete mastery of Yoga, mainly because Yoga is still a relatively young movement in the West. So please be careful about anyone who claims to be enlightened or to have been given the title of *guru*! However, at the level at which Yoga is generally taught outside its Indian homeland, many competent Yoga teachers or instructors can lend a helping hand to beginners. In this book, we hope to do just that for you.

Considering Your Options: The Seven Main Branches of Yoga

When you take a bird's-eye view of the Yoga tradition, you see a dozen major strands of development, each with its own subdivisions. Picture Yoga as a giant tree with seven branches; each branch has its own unique character, but each is

also part of the same tree. With so many different paths, you're sure to find one that's right for your personality, lifestyle, and goals. In this book, we focus on Hatha Yoga, the most popular branch of Yoga, but we avoid the common mistake of reducing it to mere physical fitness training. Therefore, we also talk about meditation and breathing exercises, and the spiritual aspects of Yoga.

Here are the seven principal branches of Yoga



REMEMBER

» **Bhakti (*bhuk-tee*) Yoga, the Yoga of devotion:** Bhakti Yoga practitioners believe that a supreme being (the Divine) transcends their lives, and they feel moved to connect or even completely merge with that supreme being through acts of devotion. Bhakti Yoga includes such practices as making flower offerings, singing hymns of praise, and thinking about the Divine.

» **Hatha (*haht-ha*) Yoga, the Yoga of physical discipline:** All branches of Yoga seek to achieve the same final goal, enlightenment (see Chapter 23), but Hatha Yoga approaches this goal through the body instead of through the mind or the emotions. Hatha Yoga practitioners believe that unless they properly purify and prepare their bodies, the higher stages of meditation and beyond are virtually impossible to achieve — such an attempt is like trying to climb Mt. Everest without the necessary gear. We focus on this particular branch of Yoga in this book.

Hatha Yoga is much more than posture practice, which is so popular today. Like every form of authentic Yoga, it's a *spiritual* path.

» **Jnana (*gyah-nah*) Yoga, the Yoga of wisdom:** Jnana Yoga teaches the ideal of *nondualism* — that reality is singular and your perception of countless distinct phenomena is a basic misconception. What about the chair or sofa you're sitting on? Isn't that real? What about the light that strikes your retina? Isn't that real? Jnana Yoga masters answer these questions by saying that all these things are real at your present level of consciousness, but they aren't ultimately real as separate or distinct things. Upon enlightenment, everything melts into one, and you become one with the immortal spirit.

» **Karma (*kahr-mah*) Yoga, the Yoga of self-transcending action:** Karma Yoga's most important principle is to act unselfishly, without attachment, and with integrity. Karma Yoga practitioners believe that all actions, whether bodily, vocal, or mental, have far-reaching consequences for which they must assume full responsibility.

» **Mantra (*mahn-trah*) Yoga, the Yoga of potent sound:** Mantra Yoga uses sound to harmonize the body and focus the mind. It works with *mantras*, which can be a syllable, word, or phrase. Traditionally, practitioners receive a mantra from their teacher in the context of a formal initiation. They're asked

to repeat it as often as possible and to keep it secret. Many Western teachers feel that initiation isn't necessary and that any sound works. You can even pick a word from the dictionary, such as *love*, *peace*, or *happiness*. From a traditional perspective, such words aren't really mantras, but they can be useful, nonetheless.

» **Raja (*rah-jah*) Yoga, the Royal Yoga:** Raja Yoga means literally “Royal Yoga” and is also known as classical Yoga. When you mingle with Yoga students long enough, you can expect to hear them refer to the eightfold path laid down in the Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali, the standard work of Raja Yoga. Another name for this yogic tradition is Ashtanga Yoga (pronounced *ahsh-tahng-gah*), the “eight-limbed Yoga” — from *ashta* (eight) and *anga* (limb). (Don't confuse this tradition with the Yoga style known as Ashtanga Yoga, which we discuss in “Taking a Closer Look at Hatha Yoga,” later in this chapter.)

THE EIGHT LIMBS OF YOGA

In traditional Raja Yoga, students move toward enlightenment, or liberation, through an eight-limb approach:

- **Yama (*yah-mah*):** Moral discipline, consisting of the practices of nonharming, truthfulness, nonstealing, chastity, and greedlessness. (For an explanation of these five virtues, head to Chapter 22.)
- **Niyama (*nee-yah-mah*):** Self-restraint, consisting of the five practices of purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and devotion to a higher principle.
- **Asana (*ah-sah-nah*):** Posture, which serves two basic purposes: meditation and health.
- **Pranayama (*prah-nah-yah-mah*):** Breath control, which raises and balances your mental energy, thus boosting your health and mental concentration.
- **Pratyahara (*prah-tyah-hah-rah*):** Sensory inhibition, which internalizes your consciousness to prepare your mind for the various stages of meditation.
- **Dharana (*dhah-rah-nah*):** Concentration, or extended mental focusing, which is fundamental to yogic meditation.
- **Dhyana (*dhee-yah-nah*):** Meditation, the principal practice of higher Yoga. (Chapter 23 explains this practice and the next.)
- **Samadhi (*sah-mah-dhee*):** Ecstasy, or the experience in which you become inwardly one with the object of your contemplation. This state is surpassed by actual enlightenment, or spiritual liberation.

GOOD KARMA, BAD KARMA, NO KARMA

The Sanskrit term *karma* literally means “action.” It stands for activity in general, but also for the “invisible action” of destiny. According to Yoga, every action of body, speech, and mind produces visible and also hidden consequences. Sometimes the hidden consequences — destiny — are far more significant than the obvious repercussions. Don’t think of karma as blind destiny. You’re always free to make choices. The purpose of Karma Yoga is to regulate how you act in the world so that you cease to be bound by karma. The practitioners of all types of Yoga seek to not only prevent bad karma, but also go beyond good karma, to no karma at all.

» **Tantra (*tahn-trah*) Yoga (including Laya Yoga and Kundalini Yoga), the Yoga of continuity:** Tantra Yoga is the most complex and most widely misunderstood branch of Yoga. In the West and India, Tantra Yoga is often confused with “spiritualized” sex; although some (so-called left-hand) schools of Tantra Yoga use sexual rituals, they aren’t a regular practice in the majority of (so-called right-hand) schools. Tantra Yoga is actually a strict spiritual discipline involving fairly complex rituals and detailed visualizations of deities. These deities are visions of the divine and are invoked to aid the yogic process of contemplation.

Another common name for Tantra Yoga is Kundalini Yoga (pronounced *koon-dah-lee-nee*). The latter name, which means “she who is coiled,” hints at the secret “serpent power” that Tantra Yoga seeks to activate: the latent spiritual energy stored in the human body. If you’re curious about this aspect of Yoga, you may want to read the autobiographical account by Gopi Krishna or Georg Feuerstein’s *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Shambhala). **Note:** Kundalini Yoga is also the name of a Hatha Yoga style; we discuss it in “Taking a Closer Look at Hatha Yoga,” later in the chapter.

Taking a Closer Look at Hatha Yoga

In its voyage to modernity, Yoga has undergone many transformations. One of them was Hatha Yoga, which emerged around 1100 AD. (We focus on this branch of Yoga throughout this book.) The most significant adaptations, however, occurred during the past several decades, particularly to serve the needs or wants of Western students. Of the many styles of Hatha Yoga available today, the following are the best known:

- » **Iyengar Yoga** is the most widely recognized approach to Hatha Yoga. Characteristics of this style include precision performance and the aid of numerous props. B.K.S. Iyengar, the brother-in-law of the famous T.S. Krishnamacharya (1888–1989) and uncle of T.K.V. Desikachar, developed this approach. Iyengar has trained thousands of teachers, including many in the United States. His Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, founded in 1974 and dedicated to his late wife, Ramamani, is located in Pune, India.
- » **Viniyoga** (pronounced *vee-nee yoh-gah*) focuses on the breath and emphasizes practicing Yoga according to your individual needs and capacities. Shri Krishnamacharya first developed this approach, and his son T.K.V. Desikachar continued it. In the United States, Viniyoga is now associated with Gary Kraftsow and the American Viniyoga Institute (AVI); Desikachar expanded his approach in conjunction with his son Kausthub under the new umbrella of The Krishnamacharya Healing and Yoga Foundation (KHYF) and Sannidhi of Krishnamacharya Yoga (SKY), headquartered in Chennai (formerly Madras), India. As the teacher of well-known Yoga masters B.K.S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois, and Indra Devi, Professor T.S. Krishnamacharya can be said to have launched a veritable Hatha Yoga renaissance in modern times that's still sweeping the world.
- » **Ashtanga Yoga** is by far the most athletic of the three versions of Hatha Yoga. This version combines postures with breathing. Ashtanga Yoga differs from Patanjali's eightfold path (also called Ashtanga Yoga), although it's theoretically grounded in it. (We discuss the Ashtanga Yoga tradition in "Considering Your Options: The Seven Main Branches of Yoga," earlier in this chapter.) This approach originated with Shri Krishnamacharya but grew in popularity thanks to K. Pattabhi Jois. Jois was born in 1915 but had such a modern outlook that he drew eager Western students to his Ashtanga Yoga Institute in Mysore, India, until his death in 2009. He was a principal disciple of T.S. Krishnamacharya, who apparently instructed him to teach the sequences known as Ashtanga Yoga or Power Yoga.



REMEMBER

Power Yoga is a generic term for any style that closely follows Ashtanga Yoga but doesn't have a set series of postures. It emphasizes flexibility and strength and was mainly responsible for introducing Yoga postures into gyms. Beryl Bender Birch, Bryan Kest, Baron Baptiste, and Sherri Baptiste Freeman are all closely associated with Power Yoga. In a similar manner, *Vinyasa Yoga* and *Flow Yoga*, developed by Ganga White and Tracey Rich, are variations of Ashtanga Yoga.

- » **Kripalu Yoga** is a three-stage Yoga approach tailored to the needs of Western students. The first stage emphasizes postural alignment and coordination of breath and movement; you hold the postures for a short time only. The second stage adds meditation and prolongs the postures. In the final stage, practicing the postures becomes a spontaneous meditation in motion. Swami Kripalvananda (1913–1981) created Kripalu Yoga, and his disciple, Yogi Amrit Desai, further developed it and later went on to create his own school of Yoga.

THE SACRED SYLLABLE *OM*

The best-known traditional mantra, used by Hindus and Buddhists alike, is the sacred syllable *om* (pronounced *ommm*, with a long *o* sound). It's the symbol of the absolute reality — the Self or spirit. It consists of the letters *a*, *u*, and *m*, joined by the nasal humming of the letter *m*. The *a* corresponds to the waking state, *u* to the dream state, and *m* to the state of deep sleep; the nasal humming sound represents the ultimate reality. We introduce several other traditional mantras in Chapter 23 in our coverage of meditation.



©John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- » **Integral Yoga** aims to integrate the various aspects of the body-mind using a combination of postures, breathing techniques, deep relaxation, and meditation. Swami Satchidananda (1914–2002), a student of the famous Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, India, introduced this type of Yoga at the Woodstock festival in 1969, where he taught the baby boomers to chant *om*. Over the years, Integral Yoga has attracted thousands of students.
- » **Sivananda Yoga** includes a series of 12 postures, the Sun Salutation sequence, breathing exercises, relaxation, and *mantra* chanting. It's the creation of the late Swami Vishnudevananda (1927–1993), also a disciple of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, India, who established his Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center in Montreal in 1959. He trained more than 6,000 teachers, and you can find numerous Sivananda centers around the world.
- » **Ananda Yoga** is a gentle style that prepares students for meditation. Its distinguishing features are the silent affirmations associated with holding the postures. Ananda Yoga is anchored in the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda