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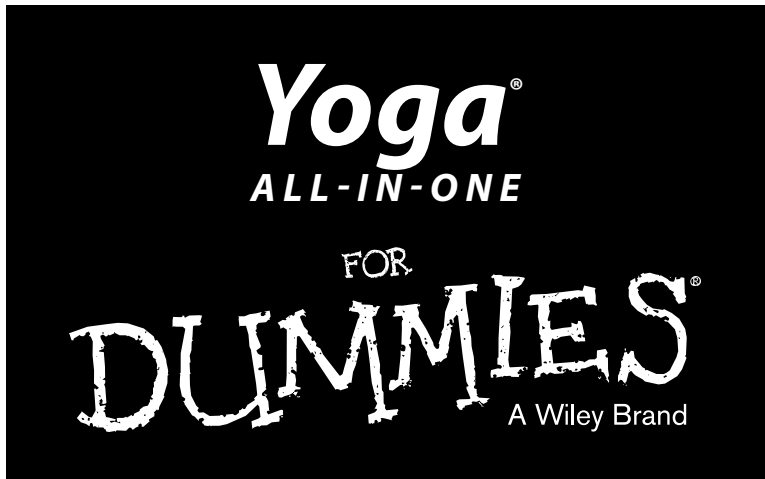
6 BOOKS
IN **1**

- Yoga For Dummies
- Power Yoga For Dummies
- Yoga with Weights For Dummies
- Meditation For Dummies
- Stretching For Dummies
- Mind-Body Fitness For Dummies



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DUMMIES
A Wiley Brand

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Introduction

Yoga is the ultimate mind-body practice. By its very nature, it leads practitioners around the globe toward greater balance and relaxation. Each yoga pose balances alertness and relaxation. By integrating physical movements, breath, and mindfulness, yoga produces both bodily and mental relaxation. The result? A welcome dose of enhanced well-being, which is one reason why yoga has never been more important. In today's hectic schedules, seemingly loaded with constant stimulation and stress, yoga can bring balance and even serenity.

Consider *Yoga All-in-One For Dummies* your complete guide to finding the health and peace of mind that yoga can bring. Whether you're looking for classic poses and routines, more-modern takes on this ancient practice, or ways to incorporate yoga into your life, this book can get you started and well on your way. After all, at its core, yoga is a timeless answer for anyone seeking deeper meaning in life and that elusive treasure called abiding peacefulness.

About This Book

Yoga — and its many schools and philosophies — offers a number of mental and physical benefits to those who practice it. Whether you're interested in becoming more flexible, more fit, less stressed, or more peaceful and joyful, this book contains the guidance you need and the routines that can help you achieve your goals. It takes you step by step into the treasure house of yoga, where you'll 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 this book shows you how to improve or regain the health and wholeness of both.

To help you fit yoga into your busy schedule, this book is organized in a way that lets you easily find the information you're looking for. You can read the book from cover to cover, or you can jump in at any section or chapter that interests you. Feel free to skip over the material marked with a Technical Stuff icon and the content in the sidebars; although these bits are interesting, they're not essential to your being able to practice yoga — or to do so safely. But if you see a Warning icon, take note — these tidbits offer suggestions to keep your yoga practice a safe one.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

The first assumption that guided the creation of *Yoga All-in-One For Dummies* was that you're looking for sound information about yoga in a no-nonsense presentation. Beyond that, here are a few other assumptions about you and the kind of information you want:

- ✔ If you're new to yoga, you want to start 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. The Additional Yoga Resources section online at www.dummies.com/extras/yogaaio and www.dummies.com/go/yogaaiofd can help you with that, but you get more on that later in this introduction.
- ✔ If you already have some experience with yoga, you want to understand the fundamentals more deeply or go beyond the traditional types of yoga to experience something new. For you, this book provides detail and a fair amount of depth across the yoga spectrum — all in plain English. It also includes some hot trends in yoga, like Partner Yoga and Hot Yoga.
- ✔ If you're looking for yoga workouts that will make you stronger, healthier, more balanced, and more flexible, you'll find information and step-by-step instructions on Power Yoga and Yoga with Weights, both designed to enhance physical fitness.
- ✔ If you're interested in mind-body connection of yoga, you want a more in-depth look at mindfulness and meditation, easy-to-follow meditation instructions, and info on how to use relaxation techniques to let go of stress.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you'll see icons in the margins. These icons are intended to draw your attention to particular kinds of information. Here's a key to what those icons mean:



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



Information you'll want to remember is marked with this icon. Making a mental note of this information can help you down the road in your understanding and practice.



Please take note of all warnings. Yoga is safe, but yoga injuries can and do happen, and you can avoid them by heeding the recommendations highlighted with this icon.



Consider this material “nice to know” information. It's interesting and can add to your experience, but feel free to skip it if you want to breeze through.



When you see this icon, prepare to stop what you're doing, take a few deep breaths, and start meditating. It's your chance to savor the real thing!



At www.dummies.com/go/yogaaiofd, you can find a series of videos that show you how to prepare for and move into several yoga postures. This icon highlights these postures.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this product also comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. You can access a Cheat Sheet that offers suggestions and information you can use to enhance your yoga workout: Discover how stretching can alleviate common aches and pains, find out why warming up before a yoga workout is vital, and be inspired by ways that yoga can improve your physical health. To access this material, go to www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/yogaallinone.

You also have access to additional articles at www.dummies.com/extras/yogaallinone. There you can find ways to avoid common back injuries and loosen tight muscles and discover how to evaluate your fitness level in order to choose a style of yoga that's best for you, how to incorporate a meditative mindset throughout your daily life, and more.

In addition to the additional articles about yoga that you can find online, you can also view ten short videos that introduce you to great ideas for improving your yoga practice, regardless of your age or physical abilities. Check out these tried-and-true poses and routines at www.dummies.com/go/yogaaiofd.

Where to Go from Here

This All-in-One is designed so that you get to decide how best to access the information, whether you prefer to read chapters one after the other and follow the yoga routines in order or you're more of a free spirit who jumps from one topic to another as the mood strikes you.

However, if you're a newcomer to yoga, spend some time with Book I, which lays the foundation for yoga practice, and Book II, which explains basic postures and key techniques you need to know for nearly all styles of yoga.

Beyond that, feel free to go wherever you like. Are you interested in basic yoga postures and techniques? Head to Book II. Want to check out some new yoga styles? Book VI offers yoga routines with a modern twist. And if you're not sure where you want to go, use the table of contents or the index to find the information you're looking for.

Book I

Getting Started with Yoga Principles

getting started
with

yoga



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Chapter 1

Yoga 101: Building a Foundation

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
-

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 transformation isn't your intention when you first step onto the mat. This chapter explains what yoga really is, describes how it relates to your health and happiness, and introduces you to the many different branches and approaches to yoga. 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 or stretching, fitness training, a way to control your weight, stress reduction, meditation, or a spiritual path. It's *all* these tools and a great deal more.

Taking a holistic view

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 and trim, control 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 sane method of exercise and physical therapy (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 only now rediscovering. This perspective appreciates the enormous influence of the mind — your psychological attitudes and beliefs — on physical health.

Finding unity

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 the 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. Unable to cope with the ordinary pressures 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.



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 helps 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.

Balancing your life

The Hindu tradition explains yoga as the discipline of balance, another way of expressing the ideal of unity through yoga. Everything in you must harmonize to function optimally. A disharmonious mind is disturbing in itself, but sooner or later, it also causes physical problems. An imbalanced body can easily warp your emotions and thought processes. If you have strained relationships with others, you cause distress not only for them but also for yourself. And when your relationship with your physical environment is disharmonious, well, you trigger serious repercussions for everyone.

Finding yourself: Are you a yogi (or a yogini)?

Someone who's practicing the discipline of balancing mind and body through yoga is traditionally called a *yogi* (if male) or a *yogini* (if female). This book uses both terms. Becoming a *yogi* or *yogini* means you do more than practice yoga postures. Yoginis 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.

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.

A beautiful and simple yoga exercise called the tree (see Book II, Chapter 3) improves your sense of balance and promotes your inner stillness. Even when conditions force a tree to grow askew, it always balances itself out by growing a branch in the opposite direction. In this posture, you stand still like a tree, perfectly balanced.



Yoga helps you apply this principle to your life. Whenever life's demands and challenges force you to bend to one side, your inner strength and peace of mind serve as counterweights. Rising above all adversity, you can never be uprooted. For more strategies on finding balance, relieving stress, and attaining mindfulness, head to Book VII.

Considering Your Options: The Eight Main Branches of Yoga

Picture yoga as a giant tree with eight 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. This section outlines the eight main branches of yoga and then delves a little deeper into Hatha Yoga, which is the kind of yoga focused on in this book.

An overview of the types of yoga

Here are the eight principal branches of yoga:

- ✓ **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, but Hatha Yoga approaches this goal through the body rather than 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 or training. This book focuses on this particular branch of yoga.