

YOGA *Special*

From relieving anxiety to
whittling your waist – our team of
experts share their top yoga tips



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THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF YOGA – HOW DO I CHOOSE?



James Duigan, personal trainer and founder of Bodyism (bodyism.com), says: Yoga is a physical, mental and spiritual practice. There are many different types of yoga, however, each one includes a routine of physical poses and breathing techniques which help you to develop an awareness of your body and to really focus the mind.

The three main structures of yoga – exercise, breathing and meditation – are the focus across all types of yoga to achieve a permanent sense of balance, harmony and peace. In order to find out which type of yoga is best for you, try to think about what you want to do yoga and what your goals are. Is it for fitness as well as to explore your mind and body? Do you have an injury? Is the meditative aspect the most important element for you? These are all questions that can be asked prior to choosing which type of yoga is right for you. Here are some of the most common yoga practices...

IYENGAR is a great starting point for beginners. It's slow-paced, very detail orientated and props can also be used in order to get you into the correct positions.

ASHTANGA, on the other hand, is a good option for strengthening as it incorporates well-known yoga moves, such as the up-dog, down-dog and chaturanga (push up) which are good for targeting muscles all over your body. This type of yoga is challenging, quick-paced and can be repetitive as it involves continuously performing a set of poses in the same order.

VINYASA is a sequence of flowing asana movements. Teachers of this class move from pose to pose without stopping making it more challenging.

The Clean & Lean Lifestyle recommends practising yoga at least once or twice a week for a healthy, balanced body and mind.



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WHAT TONING YOGA MOVES
CAN I TRY AT HOME?

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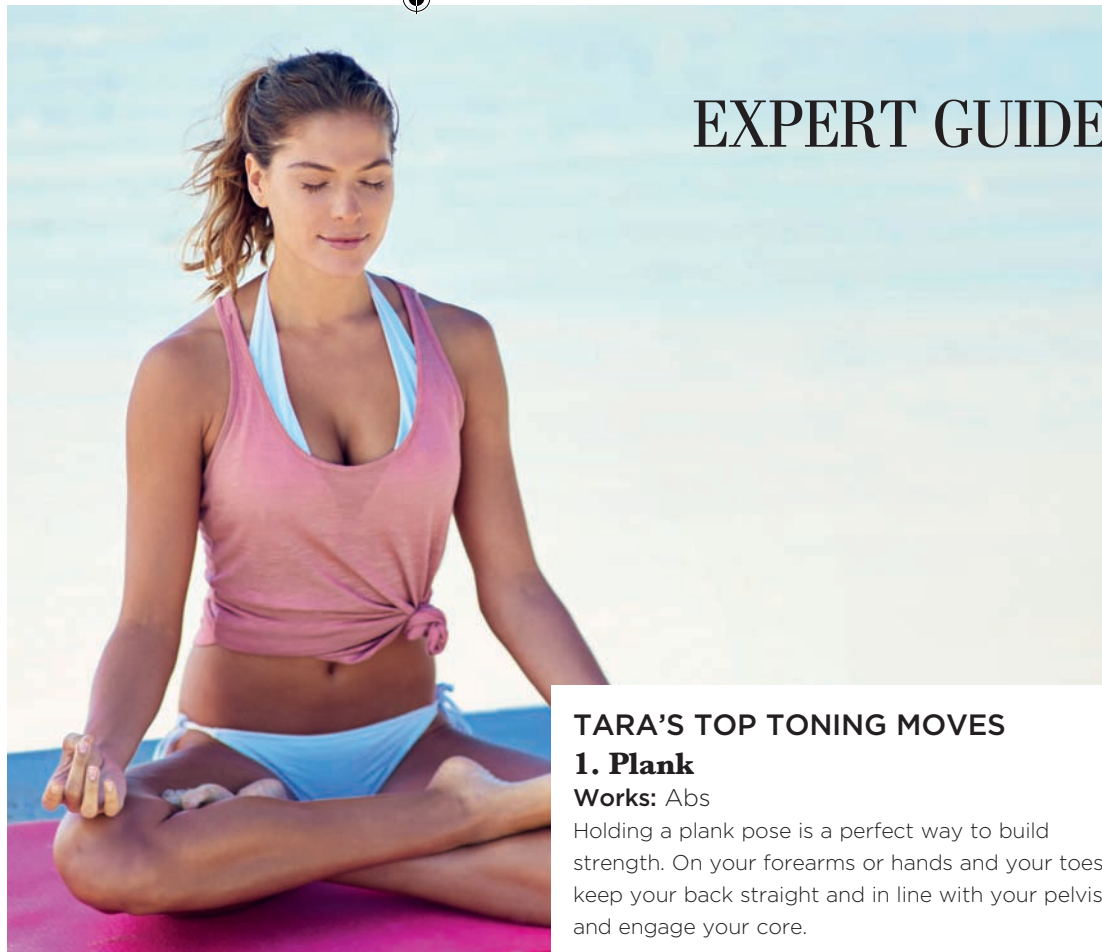
A Tara Stiles, founder of Strala Yoga and Reebok ambassador (stralayoga.com), says: People assume that yoga is very slow and relaxing, but it builds strength, flexibility and focus whilst carving out a long, lean, strong and confident body. Yoga not only helps you to lose weight, but improves your whole wellbeing. You will lose weight with yoga because everything just starts to work better and you start to eat healthier as a result.

The yoga classes I run can be really energetic – everybody sweats buckets! Lots of our students at Strala are former gym members, but they realised that our classes build strength, flexibility and can burn more calories than their gym workouts.

Combined with other sports, yoga is hugely beneficial for supplementing your training and combats issues that may arise from other forms of sport. It can also help strengthen your skills for other sports.

The move that you perform in yoga will make you more open, flexible and focused as you're training your mind back to a natural state of calm and the result is a more capable you.

The beauty of it is that it can be so easily incorporated into your daily routine – even if you just start each day with some simple stretching exercises you will feel instantly energised and prepared for a great day ahead.



EXPERT GUIDE

TARA'S TOP TONING MOVES

1. Plank

Works: Abs

Holding a plank pose is a perfect way to build strength. On your forearms or hands and your toes keep your back straight and in line with your pelvis and engage your core.

2. High lunge arms up

Works: Thighs

Come into a low lunge. Press down through your feet and bring your torso up, aligning your shoulders above your hips. Inhale and lift your arms straight up. Relax your shoulders downward. Stay here for five long, deep breaths.

3. High lunge twist

Works: Thighs

From your high lunge with your arms still lifted, exhale and open your torso toward your right and open your arms. Sink your hips lower. Stay here for three long, deep breaths and come back to your high lunge.

4. Warrior 3

Works: Legs

From your high lunge, tip your torso forward so it's parallel to the ground. Shift your weight over your right leg and lift your back leg off the ground so it's parallel to the ground. Extend your arms straight out. Lengthen out through the top of your head and back through your back heel. Stay here for five long, deep breaths. Do the routine on the other side.

5. Down dog split

Works: Core

From down dog, lift your hips and belly high and bring your right knee to touch your forehead. Hold here for one long inhale and exhale press back down to dog split.



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HOW CAN I EMBRACE THE TEACHINGS OF YOGA?



A Chris James, yoga teacher (chrisjamesmindbody.com), says: When hearing the word yoga, the first things that come to many peoples' minds is physical exercises, stretching, and well-known poses. However, yoga is much more than a workout. The real meaning of yoga is 'union' – the coming together of our mind, intellect, emotions and body, as well as the connection of the individual with the universe. It is a physical, mental and spiritual discipline originating from ancient India.

While yoga poses (also called asanas), play a vital role in aligning our mind and body, the focus on the practitioner's body – the stretching and the long periods of calm – can reduce stress and enhance health. But if you limit your practice to only yoga exercises, you are missing out on the incredible depth of knowledge and experience available in the study of yoga.

In India this ancient science is a philosophical system for attaining a unity of consciousness. In the larger context, the yoga asanas are intended to facilitate concentration and meditation by quietening the body and nervous system.

It will not be until you delve into the practice of meditation that you will gain the most from the rich practices of yoga. The ancient writings of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* speak of eight different components of yoga, also known as the Eight Limbs of Yoga.

- Yama**
Behavioural guidelines or ethics towards others.
- Niyama**
Behavioural guidelines or ethics of the individual or towards oneself.
- Pranayama**
Meaning life force, this is the practice of breathing exercises.
- Pratyahara**
This refers to the withdrawal of senses from the external world. In other words, the outside world is not a distraction from your own inner world.
- Dharana**
This means focusing on a particular thing. It is the ability to remain centred in your mind on one point, regardless of both internal and external distractions.
- Dhyana**
This is meditation. Like dharana, it involves the ability to focus. However, rather than paying attention to one thing, it goes a step further and means all encompassing awareness. In essence, it is being mindful of all things around you.



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IS IT TRUE THAT CAN ALLEVIATE ANXIETY- IS THIS TRUE?

Johanna Francis, head of dynamic reformer Pilates and lead master trainer at Ten Health & Fitness (ten.co.uk), says: Anxiety and the attacks that come with it can strike anywhere, anytime and completely without any rational explanation. Some are mild while others are so severe that they can make your heart race to the point that you're rendered speechless, or worse, pass out.

Any exercise has amazing psychological benefits that will alleviate anxiety. What makes yoga and Pilates particularly beneficial for anxiety sufferers is the focus on techniques that build our resistance to symptoms and the tools they can provide us with to draw upon if an attack does strike.

RETURN YOUR FOCUS TO THE BREATH

Most anxiety sufferers know that their psychological symptoms won't subside until the physical ones do. One of the best ways to do this is through regaining control of your breath and understanding the powerful role it plays in our state of mind.

Exercise is essentially moving the body along with the breath – in Pilates and yoga this becomes fundamental. Every movement is linked to an in or out breath and, without correct breathing (shallow, mindless day-to-day breathing) it's hard to master the exercises. However, regular yoga and Pilates practice can provide anxiety sufferers with breathing techniques to draw upon to alleviate their symptoms and make deep, controlled breathing second nature.

ENCOURAGE MINDFULNESS

Anxiety hates nothing more than the here and now. It thrives on fretting about things that haven't happened yet (and probably never will) and irrational interpretations of the past. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is the act of paying attention to the present moment and it's that focus that makes it so effective at stopping anxiety in its tracks. It's a word that has been in the press a lot recently and there's an assumption that it's primarily for people with a passion for rice cakes and herbal tea, but mindfulness is for everyone and if you're exercising regularly, you might already be practicing it.

What makes yoga and Pilates particularly powerful vehicles for mindfulness practice is their inherent focus



on both technique and body visualisation. A good instructor will encourage you to concentrate on the specific abdominal muscles you are contracting during a Pilates hundred or to picture a golden thread tugging you up from the sky to adjust the alignment of your spine during mountain pose.

COMBAT PERFECTIONISM

Anxiety can often strike when 'how things are' clashes with 'how we think things should be' – which is often impossibly perfect. Ultimately, Pilates and yoga can help people alleviate anxiety and daily stresses because neither is about perfection. Like all exercise, you'll see amazing changes in your body through them too, but the mental connection and control they build is unrivalled by any other activity.



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CAN YOGA BALANCE MY HORMONES?

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Emma Macdonald, yoga teacher (theyogapause.com), says:

If the quest for balance has become your personal holy grail then it's time to get on a yoga mat. Modern day life is hectic and the demands of our busy lives can play havoc with our hormones and health in general. Yoga isn't just a form of exercise; it's the key to finding balance on an emotional, mental and physical level. It works with our bodies to benefit our muscular, skeletal and nervous systems, and importantly, our endocrine system (the collection of glands responsible for our hormones).

HORMONES: OUR BODY'S MESSENGERS

The entire human body is controlled by hormones. They are the chemical messengers that travel through our blood bringing signals to our organs, tissues and cells for our body's day to day functions. Produced by the glands of the endocrine system – such as the thyroid, pituitary, and adrenal glands – hormones have a dramatic effect on human physiology and psychology.

THE MAGIC OF YOGA

The bending and twisting actions of many yoga poses directly manipulate our endocrine glands, subtly compressing and decompressing them to improve their functions. Through yoga, we can massage the endocrine glands and improve the circulation of blood to them, stimulating them to maintain a healthy hormone balance in the body. By building a varied yoga practice of your own that incorporates standing and sitting poses, twists, inversions and backbends, you will engage all of these glands and optimise your hormonal levels. You don't have to do hours a day, even just half an hour three times a week will help, but you do want to keep things varied.



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BALANCING YOGA MOVES

WHAT? Rabbit pose (Sasangasana)

WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR: Stimulating all the endocrine glands of the body, boosting your overall wellbeing.

HOW? Start by sitting back on your knees and grab your heels. Engage your core and round down, placing the top of your head on the ground towards your knees so that your forehead is touching your knees. Stay here for at least five breaths, and slowly come up the same way you came in

WHAT? Shoulder stand (Sarvangasana)

WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR: Engaging the thyroid gland for a healthy metabolism
HOW? Bend your elbows and bring your hands to the back

of your pelvis and then slide your hands up to your lower back. Make sure your legs are straight but your knees aren't locked and your feet are directly above your head. Press your elbows and the backs of your upper arms on the floor for support. Relax your neck.

WHAT? Seated forward bend (Paschimottanasana)

WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR: Supporting the adrenal glands to relieve stress and fatigue
HOW?: Start in a seated position with your legs straight in front of you. Keep your torso long as you reach forward toward your heels. Aim to bring your stomach to your thighs, rather than your head to your knees.

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I STILL CAN'T TOUCH MY TOES – WHAT AM I DOING WRONG?

Elodie Frati, Lululemon ambassador

(lululemon.com), says: We seem to be in a time where we have become obsessed with flexibility. One of the questions I get asked the most is “how long will it take me to get more flexible?” And my answer is it depends how much work you are prepared to put in. But first and foremost, why do we want to touch our toes so much? Whilst a degree of flexibility is a great thing for overall joint health and range of motion, there is such a thing as too much of a good thing with hyper mobility leading to less stability in the joints, and therefore an increased risk of injury.

One simple solution to touching your toes, is to simply bend your knees! In our quest for flexibility, most of us focus on our hamstrings, but if these are tight, the back rounds, and we end up in a posture similar to that of the desk hunch position that most of us spend the day in.

There are many different ways of stretching and of increasing range, but they can mainly be divided into active and passive stretching and it is good to combine both. Always start with a warm up. Stay away from any bouncing in your stretches (known as ballistic movement) - it will not increase your range and is likely to cause more harm than good. Look into ways of incorporating active stretching into your workouts (dynamic yoga, martial arts and Animal Flow all provide this) and look into some myofascial or rolling techniques that can really help to free up the body. It is good to consider that most research has found that 30 seconds is the desired time to hold a stretch. This means that stretches held for less than 30 seconds are likely to be less effective. And before you spend the whole night in the splits, do know that a two minute hold will not yield much better results than a 30 second one.

If you are still dying to touch your toes, then it is worth knowing that stress is an important factor in how open the body might feel; so a great time to stretch is after a bath, in the evening (make sure you still warm up).



Flex it

As we fold forward in Uttanasa, we firstly need to focus on getting that hinge in the hip (incidentally, it is the same hip crease that we look for in seated forward folds), and keep the spine long. If in doubt, turn side on to a mirror and check for any rounding in the upper back. Once you find your maximum range with an open chest and long spine, but your hands do not touch your toes, bend your knees until they do. Your weight should be mostly in your toes, and engage your quads so your hamstrings can relax. Keep your breath smooth, and feel yourself softening with each out-breath.



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WILL YOGA HELP ME TO LOSE WEIGHT?

Michele Pernetta, director chief instructor of Fierce Grace (fiercegrace.com), says:

Yoga has long been criticised for not being an efficient way to lose weight by those simply measuring calories burned without taking into account yoga's ability to calm the mind, reduce stress and reduce appetite – all of which contribute to weightloss.

It's hard to ascertain how many calories a yoga class burns, as muscle mass, body weight and how hard one works all determine this, but a strenuous class for an average person burns anywhere between 400 and 600 calories per hour. It may seem less than more intense forms of exercise, but what you get out really depends on what you put in. Having taught hot yoga for 23 years I have seen how some people go through the motions of a class barely exerting themselves, while others engage their muscles and work as hard as an intense gym workout. The latter is how you can get the very best out of a yoga class as the more muscle you build, the more calories you will burn and will continue to burn compared to someone who has very little muscle. This is why initial weight loss results in yoga can be slow, but as you start to build more lean muscles, the quicker you will burn calories.

Although exercise is vital in the quest for weight loss, if our diet choices aren't healthy too, the body can become congested with toxins making calorie burn obsolete. Ayurvedic medicine states that undigested food builds up in the body as 'ama' a sticky substance that inhibits the body's ability to remove physical, mental and emotional waste. It's widely believed that unprocessed emotions can lead to overeating and making poor food choices. However, yoga has been documented to calm the nervous system and reduce our 'fight-flight' response bringing balance to our metabolism and glandular systems.

Although high intensity exercises are great, they have a very short life span as they put a huge amount of stress on our joints. However, yoga can create strong and agile limbs that enable us to be able to continue practising yoga well into our 80s.

Calories in — VS — Calories out

Many people report that high intensity exercise makes them so hungry that they eat too much afterward, cancelling out the calories they've just burned.

Yoga, on the other hand, rather than exhausting the body, energises it, and our appetite becomes regulated so we are less likely to overeat.



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