



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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Welcome to my first Karuna Yoga Newsletter. Karuna Yoga was founded many years ago by my teacher Ruth White. Taught by yoga master B.K.S. Iyengar and with his permission, Ruth formed her own School of Yoga, which she called *Karuna Yoga*. Karuna is the Sanskrit word for 'compassion' and so her teaching is Iyengar - inspired yoga with an emphasis on compassion and devoted action to helping others become strong and healthy. I qualified as a Karuna Yoga teacher and have continued to teach in this tradition.

## What is Iyengar Yoga?

Yoga has been around for thousands of years and has become extremely popular in the Western world in the last fifty years. When first coming to yoga, students are introduced to asanas (postures). There are hundreds of yoga postures but in Iyengar Yoga the beginner student is introduced to the 'easier' postures with particular emphasis on the standing postures. Iyengar Yoga is a scientific, disciplined and deeply researched system developed over sixty-five years by the yoga master himself and places special focus on developing strength, endurance, flexibility and relaxation in addition to correct body alignment in every posture. This attention to detail and alignment brings increased mobility and co-ordination, improves circulation, concentration and mental clarity, reduces stress, and tones and rebalances the body's vital organs. B.K.S. Iyengar recommends the use of props in his style of yoga. Objects such as walls, chairs, belts, blocks and blankets help the student to practice their yoga in a relaxed way and allows the postures to be held easily and for a longer duration, without strain.

## Common Questions Asked By New Yoga Students

### Don't you have to be really flexible to do yoga?

No, yoga is non-competitive which means that every posture is practised to the best of each person's ability. I wasn't flexible as a child – I never did cartwheels, handstands, Chinese bends or the splits. I never went to ballet classes or gymnastics. Even though I was pretty active in my twenties with aerobics classes I became even more inflexible. Sitting all day in front of a computer didn't help matters so that by the time I started doing yoga in my forties I couldn't even sit cross-legged properly! Now, some four years later, I still can't quite manage a handstand but my hips are gradually beginning to open and my hamstrings are stretching so that I can at least touch my toes. As your yoga practice progresses and you take it slowly and practice regularly, you'll find that your flexibility will improve greatly. As one of the great master yoga teachers, K. Pattabhi Jois, once said, 'Practice and all is coming!'

### What are the physical benefits of practicing yoga?

Yoga is a powerful discipline that can improve health and fitness. Yoga asanas can increase flexibility, stability, stamina and strength and help bring proper alignment and good posture. They also bring a feeling of well being to the entire body by stimulating the organs and improving circulation. As the body works more efficiently, problems like headaches, back pain, stiff hips and digestive disorders can all be alleviated.

### Who can practice yoga?

Everyone from children to those in their senior years, to people of both sexes and of all ages, races, religions and abilities. Yoga is not a religion – it is a science.

## Weekly Stretching Routine

It is important to breathe normally and easily when doing yoga postures – in through the nose and out through the nose. If it becomes difficult to breathe then come out of the posture – above all don't hold your breath! It is also important to stretch the hamstrings and open the hips at the start of every class by doing the specific postures for this purpose. Your flexibility will increase significantly if you practised this ten-minute routine at home whenever possible. You can use a tie or a scarf if you don't have a yoga belt. Just ask if you want a copy of this routine.

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## Posture of the Month - TRIKONASANA (Extended Triangle Pose)

In this asana, your body takes the shape of an extended triangle, giving an intense stretch to your torso and legs.

1. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose).
2. Breathe in and as you breathe out, jump or step the legs wide apart. Raise the arms to the sides, in line with your shoulders, palms facing down.
3. Turn the left foot in slightly and the right foot out making sure that the right knee is in line with the right foot.
4. Breathe in and as you breathe out stretch to the right sinking into your right hip. **Beginners** - place your right hand on your right leg and your left hand on your left hip. **Intermediates** – Place your hand either on the floor or behind your leg making sure you keep the front of the body open. Roll your left shoulder back opening up the front of the body. Raise your right arm and slowly turn your head and look up at your thumb.
5. Stay in this posture for 3 breaths (Beginners) or 5 breaths (Intermediates).
6. Breathe in and as you breathe out, slowly come out of the posture and return to Tadasana.
7. Repeat on the other side.

### Benefits of this posture

- Relieves gastritis, indigestion, acidity and flatulence
- Improves the flexibility of the spine
- Alleviates backache
- Corrects alignment of the shoulders
- Massages and tones the pelvic area
- Strengthens the ankles
- Reduces discomfort during menstruation



## 10 Ways To Get More Out of Your Yoga Class

**DO arrive early.** Getting to class at least 5 minutes early can help you settle in and prepare yourself for the class.

**DO avoid eating at least two hours before class.** If you practice yoga on a full stomach you might experience cramps, nausea, or vomiting. Digesting food also takes up energy that can then make you lethargic.

**DO drink water before and after the class.** Your body needs to be hydrated while practicing yoga. It is also essential to drink lots of water after the class to flush out any toxins that have been released into your bloodstream.

**DO let your teacher know about injuries or conditions that might affect your practice.** If you are injured or tired, skip postures you can't or shouldn't do, or ask for a modified version.

**DO switch off your mobile phones.**

**DO try and be quiet.** Avoid unnecessary chatting with friends, which can be distracting to yourself and others.

**DO bring a towel** if you normally sweat a lot, and arrive clean and free of odours or heavy perfume that might distract or offend others.

**DON'T push it.** Instead of trying to go as deeply into a posture as others might be able to do, do what you can without straining or injuring yourself. Do not move into the pain zone. You'll go farther faster if you take a loving attitude toward yourself and work from where you are, not from where you think you should be.

**DO take time afterwards to think about what you did in class**, so you can retain what you learned. Review the postures you practiced, and note any instructions that particularly made sense. Even if you remember just one thing from each class, you'll soon have a lot of information that can deepen your own personal practice.

**DO enjoy the class** and remember that laughter relaxes the diaphragm and so helps to improve breathing. Laughter also helps us all to remember that while your yoga practice is important, it shouldn't be taken too seriously.

I always end my class by saying 'Namaste' (Nah-mas-teh), an Indian form of greeting and farewell. It has various meanings but my favourite translation is: 'The light in me acknowledges the light in you'.

**Namaste**