

Yoga for Relaxation and Flexibility

No. 20, August 2012

André Bentivoglio, Teacher; specialist in technology in the classroom and special education

Say it with me... mmmmmmm [relaxing meditating hum]. You've decided to try yoga at home. That's great! Yoga can increase flexibility, decrease the chance of injury and allow for quicker recovery from strenuous physical activity. Over time, yoga can also contribute to feelings of calm and relaxation. Things that benefit everyone! Your inner Zen will thank you.

Having said this, it may take awhile to convince your significant other, children or child with autism to persist through an entire session. This tip sheet will help you choose equipment in order to create a suitable environment for doing yoga at home.

Location Setup

1. A carpeted floor (everyone will likely be barefoot). An adjacent fireplace or indoor waterfall instantly ratchets up the Zen meter (as long as your child is not distracted by or attracted to these).
2. Space: You want at least 8' x 8' if doing yoga alone. 8' x 12' for doing yoga with your child. Ideally, you want to ensure at least a body length distance away from others or furniture. This helps ensure safety should someone not instantly master a balance pose and fall as a result.
3. Lighting should be dimmed. Diffuse or dim the lighting in order to darken the room. This reduces unnecessary sensory input, and creates a calming environment. Consider using battery-operated candles. They give off just enough light and are of course fire-safe.

Clothing and Equipment

4. A **large screen TV** allows everyone to see the instructor's poses with greater detail.

Try to use the largest one in your home (a room used as a home theater would be great, doing double duty as a home yoga area).

5. A **good quality yoga mat**. Avoid the use of exercise mats, as they are often too spongy for yoga. A good quality yoga mat helps prevent feet from slipping and is better for maintaining poses. It will also not curl up or slide on the floor.
6. **Yoga blocks**. These are usually constructed of wood or foam. They are mostly used as an option when one cannot bend far enough to reach the floor or balance adequately. They are also good for beginners.
7. **Yoga clothing**. No, one cannot wear designer jeans. This is, however, an opportunity to wear yoga pants for their intended purpose. Clothing should be snug but not constricting. Yoga clothing should bend and stretch with body movements and ideally wick away moisture (sweat).
8. **Try to diminish ambient noise** while doing yoga. It can be very distracting to have a loud dishwasher or washing machine thumping and thrashing away in the next room.
9. **Turn off cell phones** to help focus on the yoga. Putting phones on vibrate is not enough as they will still cause distractions and it's only natural to want to see who is e-mailing, texting or calling.

What Kind of Yoga and Where to get It

There are many different types of yoga with exotic sounding names: bikram, hatha and kundalini to name a few. My suggestion: beginner. You want to make first experiences pleasant and achievable. Avoid choosing a program that is so difficult it becomes overwhelming.

- Libraries have vast collections of yoga DVD's. Borrow a few at the same time. Don't like the first one? Pop in the second.
 - Cable/satellite providers. These companies have put a lot of resources into their "on-demand" services. Sometimes, they include "yoga" programs. Some are free while others are pay-per-use.
 - Online sources such as "iTunes" have yoga programs available to download and project in your home theater or simply on a laptop.
 - Nintendo Wii and Microsoft X-Box Kinect both offer yoga on their gaming consoles. These are quite interesting as they rely on input from the user. The Wii requires the use of the "Wii balance board", while the X-box uses the Kinect sensors to measure body positions. Either of these options may be a bridge to help convince your child to join in.
 - Regular TV. Many TV stations broadcast yoga classes for home use as part of their regular schedule. Can't wake up at 6 a.m.? Set the VCR or PVR and play it back at your leisure.
5. Start with a short time period and gradually increase the amount of time to help ensure success. A general rule of thumb is 'start low and go slow'.
 6. Break down a pose into steps (task analysis) and teach one step at a time to facilitate learning.
 7. Make the time a pose will be maintained concrete by counting out loud or showing fingers. Provide physical prompts if needed to achieve success.
 8. Incorporate the use of props to help teach certain skills. Yoga blocks are mentioned above. You may also consider using scent jars or stickers and a feather, cotton ball or bubbles to teach deep breathing.
 9. Consider using a visual countdown timer (an iPhone timer works well but be sure to put your phone in airplane mode to avoid being distracted by the incoming text message). The timer could signal that the desired length of time performing yoga exercises has ended. Your child can now advance the DVD to the end where he or she can enjoy the relaxation poses, lying on their back breathing slowly and calmly.
 10. Remember to include reinforcement for trying out the yoga and for sticking with it.

How to Encourage a Reluctant Child or Youth to Participate in this Activity:

1. Prepare him or her ahead of time for the activity by placing it on a visual schedule. You can also incorporate a mini-schedule to show the poses or exercises that will be done during the session.
2. Invite him or her to participate in choosing the type of yoga, length of activity and time of day to conduct the exercise.
3. Encourage him or her to help prepare the room, i.e. shutting off the lights (or dimming to their comfort level), closing the blinds, laying down the mats, etc.
4. Allow him or her to select comfortable clothing.

As with any new physical activity, it is important to exercise caution when starting out. Should you or your child have any pre-existing medical concerns or physical restrictions, consult with your health care professional before starting a yoga program. A good rule of thumb for anyone participating in a fitness activity is that if a movement is painful, re-adjust, slow down or stop altogether. Identify how your child can communicate that a movement is uncomfortable or painful. Consider consulting an expert before attempting that movement again as modifications may be required.

Above all, don't forget to relax, enjoy and "Namaste".

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