



BEAUTY > Getting in Shape

Shape Up: Yoga Basics

It's not all about "ohms" and incense -- yoga can help you tone your abs and give you a longer, leaner figure. Terri Kennedy, PhD, chair of the Board of Yoga Alliance, president of Power Living Enterprises, Inc., and founder of Power-Living.com and Ta Yoga, gave us a yoga rundown.

What is yoga?

Yoga comes from the ancient Sanskrit word meaning "union." In the U.S., yoga is often seen primarily as a form of complex exercise. However, it's much more accessible and powerful than that. This 5,000-year-old science is really about stilling the mind. You get there by learning how to move the body, control the breath, and sit in meditation -- ultimately finding union with yourself.

How does yoga benefit the body?

The key benefit of most types of yoga is the ability to focus the mind while increasing the flow of essential energy, or *prana*. Regular practice of the physical yoga postures can build lean muscle, improve spinal flexibility, increase lung capacity, develop strength and balance, tone abdominal organs, release tension, and induce relaxation. Inversions -- postures such as the shoulder stand and headstand that require you to go upside down -- boost brain and heart function while offering a natural beauty treatment by increasing the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the skin and hair.

How can yoga specifically benefit a bride-to-be?

Yoga is the perfect antidote to a potentially stressful time. In addition to looking taller and leaner in her dress, the bride-to-be can maintain her inner balance by taking time for herself and learning to breathe deeply. Holding a yoga party for the bridesmaids is a healthy alternative to a ladies night out. Also, practicing with her fiancé is an excellent gateway to greater intimacy, and the added circulation and flexibility can be beneficial for honeymoon activities!

Do I need any equipment for yoga?

Although yoga is now a \$3 billion industry, the great thing about the practice is that you can do it almost anywhere without much equipment. Wear comfortable clothing, anything you can move in without restrictions. A sticky yoga mat is helpful, but you can also practice on a towel or carpet. If you're attending a class at a studio, you'll probably need to rent or borrow a mat. If you're participating in a very active style of yoga, you may also need a hand towel and a bottle of water.

What are the different types of yoga?

There are many styles of yoga, ranging from very active to primarily meditative. It's important to find a style and teacher that best suit your personality and individual goals.

Some popular styles are:

- **Ashtanga Yoga** A very active style of yoga
- **Integral Yoga** Primarily meditative
- **Vinyasa Yoga** A good blend of the two energies, a flowing style of yoga that links movement with breath

What are some good resources to get started?

Many local community centers and YWCAs now offer yoga classes instructed by qualified teachers. You may also decide to start at home with a beginner DVD, although it's beneficial to have a teacher available to adjust your alignment or offer modifications.

The Yoga Alliance sets standards for yoga teaching in the U.S., so my first resource recommendation is, of course, the Yoga Alliance website (YogaAlliance.org), which offers a registry to find a qualified teacher near you. There are over 18,000 registered yoga teachers (RYTs) and over 800 registered yoga studios (RYSs) in the YA listing. An RYT will have a minimum of 200 hours of specific yoga training, and an RYS would've also met certain basic standards.

-- *Anja Winikka*

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