

Planning For & Beginning Your Home Practice

Beginning a home yoga practice is a wonderful way to enhance the regular lessons or classes you participate in as a student of yoga. As each physical body, each mind, each student is unique and different, setting up and maintaining your home yoga practice will be unique and different for each student. Keeping this in mind, there are some concepts that will be similar for anyone who wants to begin practicing yoga on a regular basis at home. A home practice:

- ☯ Will become distinctively your own
- ☯ Requires a minimal amount of quiet space
- ☯ Doesn't take long amounts of time
- ☯ Enriches your knowledge of yoga and should be enjoyable
- ☯ Helps increase suppleness and range of motion
- ☯ Helps reduce stress and develops balance of body, mind and spirit

The old adage, "Keep It Simple" is an important thing to remember when planning your home practice. It is uncomplicated to break down the process into four basic steps - right time, right place, right lifestyle, right technique. Let's explore each of these points individually.

Right Time - Choose a time of day when you feel fresh and energetic - early morning if your muscles are not stiff and sore, or perhaps early evening when your muscles feel supple and you are not too tired. Dedicating a shorter amount of time to your practice and sticking to it will achieve more success than trying to devote a longer practice time or practicing too intensely in order to 'fit it all in'. As your knowledge increases and your practice deepens, you may find the time you spend in practice increasing and that you are enjoying it more. The time of day you choose should be a time where you can minimize distractions and practice in relative quietude.

Right Place - You won't need to plan for a large amount of space. The space you choose should be quiet, light and comfortable (temperature wise). Your practice space could be a corner of your bedroom; a sunny spot outdoors on the patio or in the yard during warmer months; a spot in your guest room or family room (when it's unoccupied!). Your yoga mat plus a few extra inches on all sides can serve as a guide to the amount of space you'll need. When I first began my home practice, the space at the foot of my bed was my quiet haven of yoga every evening. Even today, while I have indoor and outdoor studio space to practice in, my favorite spot is in a quiet corner of the patio where I can light a candle, chant an invocation, and greet the dawn with meditation and asana practice each morning.

Right lifestyle - Just as each student and each body is unique, so is lifestyle. Look carefully at how your days are structured, the work you perform, the needs of loved ones or family, your needs, when thinking about your home practice. Changing your lifestyle is not a requirement when establishing your practice. You may find the need to change your practice to a different time of day or place so it better fits into the rhythms of daily life. Occasionally, family members or loved ones may feel uncomfortable about your choice to practice regularly, especially if they have little or no knowledge of yoga or the benefits it can provide. As you continue to practice and gain suppleness, knowledge and balance, you may discover your loved ones see and sense the positive differences yoga is making in your life - and theirs.

Right technique - When practicing at home, keep in mind some of the same things that apply to your lessons or classes such as:

- ☯ Repetition - this is always important as it educates both the body and mind, bringing the two into balance. You might choose to repeat the same asanas in every practice, perform a specific asana several times during the same practice, or sustain the hold of an asana for a longer duration.
- ☯ Balance your practice by doing a moderate amount each day as opposed to having a highly intense or furious practice just once a week.

- ॐ If you practice in the morning, your practice can begin with warm-ups and escalate to more vigorous asanas before transitioning to some neutral, calming asanas near the end.
- ॐ If your practice is during evening hours, a less muscular or heating practice is recommended - for example, if backbends are included in evening practice, they should be supported and restorative.
- ॐ As you practice, be mindful and present and move slowly, remembering that yoga is a life's work that becomes integrated into your lifestyle.
- ॐ Practice on a fairly empty stomach as you would when going to your regular lessons or classes. Listen to your body's unique digestive process to learn when it is ready for asana practice.

In conclusion, here are a few thoughts about what to include in your home practice that balance what you learn in a lesson or class. Address the primary opening of the hips, shoulders and the spine; internal and external rotation of the hips and shoulders; flexion, extension, rotation and lateral extension of the spine. (Elsewhere in the student resources section of the website, there are several complete home practice sequences you can use as guides or make them your own.) Always complete your practice with savasana to give the physical body time to relax and the mind time to become quiet, calm and reflective. Remembering to include each of these actions will help you to achieve a sense of balance of the mind and body by the end of the practice.

Consider Your Practice a Gift - To Yourself, Those You Love, to the World