

FAQs About Iyengar Yoga

What is Iyengar Yoga?

Iyengar Yoga, named after one of the premier yoga masters responsible for introducing yoga to the West, BKS Iyengar, author of the classic yoga treatise *Light on Yoga*, who began teaching in Pune, India, in 1936 at the age of 18. Deeply grounded in the yoga sutras of Patanjali, an ancient summation of the path of yoga considered to be at least 2,500 years old, BKS Iyengar's intense practice and decades of teaching have produced significant innovations in the art and science of yoga. Today, in his 90's, he continues to teach and inspire students all over the world. His daughter, Geeta, and his son, Prashant, are also accomplished teachers and authors of yoga texts. Iyengar Yoga is one of the most widely practiced forms of yoga. To learn more about B.K.S Iyengar, visit www.bksiyengar.com.

Is Iyengar Yoga tough?

Iyengar Yoga is demanding, but it is not tough. Correct yoga requires being totally involved physically, mentally and emotionally in one's practice. As Yoga is concerned with the growth and development of the individual, this means extending one's current comfortable limits. Thus yoga requires that one work beyond what is necessarily easy but obviously not to the point of distress. Yoga should be a constant challenge but never an assault.

Why does Iyengar Yoga emphasize precision of alignment in the yoga poses?

People tend to stretch from their more flexible areas which rely on the better-developed muscles for strength, reinforcing postural habits. Iyengar Yoga encourages weak parts to strengthen and stiff areas to release, thus awakening and realigning the whole body. As the body moves into better alignment, less muscular work is required and relaxation increases naturally.

What are props and why are they used?

Props include sticky mats, blankets, belts, blocks, sandbags, chairs, and other objects that help students experience the various yoga poses more profoundly.

BKS Iyengar introduced props into the modern practice of yoga to allow all practitioners access to the benefits of the poses regardless of physical condition, age, or length of study. Props help all practitioners create optimal body alignment, enhance personal understanding of a pose and its effects and to develop skill and confidence.

What are the benefits of Iyengar Yoga?

Everyone can benefit from practicing yoga - from managing stress to recovering from injuries or improving health and fitness. It can give one a philosophical perspective of life, bringing tranquility and mental strength. When you practice yoga you will find that it works on all levels of the body, mind and spirit.

In the beginning you will experience the practice of yoga as a form of physical exercise that enables you to improve your strength, flexibility, stamina and balance. You will also feel an increased sense of well being and vitality as the body is exercised organically; the inner organs, circulation, joint action are all worked to improve their function and efficiency. One may overcome many symptoms of an imbalanced modern life, such as headaches, stiff neck, lower backache, insomnia, and digestive disorders, and to harness one's energy bringing vitality to everyday activities. Thus health as opposed to merely fitness improves also.

As one progresses one becomes aware of the mental and emotional benefits occurring within one's self also.

How does Iyengar Yoga differ from other styles of yoga?

The Iyengar method develops strength, endurance, and optimal body alignment, in addition to flexibility and relaxation. This method also develops self-awareness, intelligent evaluation, and profound inward reflection.

Standing poses are emphasized to build strength and ease of movement, increase general vitality, and improve circulation, coordination, and balance. Poses for deep relaxation are introduced. Gradually, sitting and reclining poses, forward bends, inversions, backbends, twists, arm balance, and flowing sequences are introduced.

Unlike more experiential approaches where students independently find their way in the poses, an Iyengar Yoga class is highly verbal and precise, with misalignments and errors actively corrected.

Is meditation taught?

Meditation is not taught as a separate subject in Iyengar Yoga classes. Meditation is a state where one "becomes one with the universal spirit." One has no mind, intelligence, feelings or experiences when in this state and so no question of expressions of one's experiences. Thus true meditation (*Dhyana*) and the subtler mental states are things which cannot be taught; it is a state of being which comes of itself when the practitioner is ready.

The body must be trained to sit alertly and attentively through the practice of poses. The mind and senses must be trained to become quiet and steady through the practice of pranayama. *Yama* and *Niyama* provide the discipline and self restraint necessary for these achievements.

In "meditation classes," what is generally taught is how to settle into a mental state of relaxation, go into trance, visualize mentally or perform some similar mental activity. A true meditative state is none of these but rather where mind and body are silent but vibrant with energy.

Within the lay understanding of "meditation," students learn to cultivate a quiet, relaxed and tranquil state of mind in Iyengar Yoga classes which provides the foundation for meditation to be experienced.

How long does it take to learn Iyengar Yoga?

Yoga is not a subject where you reach a certain level; it has a beginning, but no end. The more one progresses in one's practice, the subject of Yoga opens and the student continually realizes that there is more to learn, absorb, and apply.

Who can practice Iyengar Yoga?

Anyone regardless of age, sex, nationality, religion or social status can practice Yoga. It is not recommended that children younger than 7 practice yoga. Although younger children can playfully be introduced to yoga, they should never be forced because their bodies are still developing.

Yoga can be practiced by women during menstruation and pregnancy, although poses need to be modified. Certain poses are extremely helpful to overcome menstrual disorders and to withstand the physiological and emotional changes accompanying menopause.

Yoga practice during pregnancy is beneficial to the mother as well as the unborn child.. The spine is well exercised easing back pain and the pelvic floor strengthened. The pelvic area is expanded encouraging circulation around the uterus and ensuring there is space for the baby to move. Pregnant women should feel no strain or tiredness during or after yoga. In practice the poses help relieve tiredness and tension How one practices needs to change as the pregnancy progresses. If in doubt it is best to leave the practice of yoga until the baby has been born so there is no risk.

After pregnancy, yoga practice will help the mothers body return to normal shape and strength more quickly.

How often should I practice Iyengar Yoga?

The more one practices, the more benefit and improvements one will get; the rewards correspond to the effort put in. A daily routine, even if only for a few minutes, is more beneficial than one long session weekly. A daily routine builds its own momentum and encourages one to continue rather than bursts of irregular, intense practice. Once a regular practice has been established, increase the duration of the sessions.

Can I do Iyengar Yoga if I have health concerns or limitations?

Yoga is open to people of all ages and all levels of physical condition. No one is too old, too stiff, too fat, too thin, too tired, etc. Yoga has something to offer everyone.

How you attempt to do a pose with your body limitations is most important. Yoga aims to develop one's understanding, alignment and awareness through subtle adjustments made to the body while in a pose. The aim is to attain firmness, stability and a feeling of exhilaration in an asana, to make "the effortful effort becomes an effortless effort."

Advise your teacher of your concerns before class so that teachers may modify and suggest alternative poses to enable you to practice safely and intelligently.

Will my health improve through Iyengar Yoga practice?

Medical research has shown that many yoga techniques are therapeutically potent. They can restore health to an ailing body, to some extent slow the aging process, and even reverse some of its effects.

Health is not just a disease-free state, but a state of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Since diseases may be dormant, interrupted or in a fully active stage and each individual is able to detect the disease depending upon their sensitivity, most will realize that they have a problem only when symptoms start to show. In such cases, students may get symptomatic relief; however, it is with continued practice that builds the character of tolerance in the practitioner, strengthen the nerves and quiet the mind. Prashant Iyengar states, "Yoga helps cure what need not be endured and endure what cannot be cured."