

STYLES OF YOGA

There are many different styles of yoga being taught and practiced today. Although all of the styles are based on the same physical postures (called poses), each has a particular emphasis. Here is a quick guide to the most popular types of yoga that can help you decode the schedule at your gym and figure out which class is right for you.

HATHA

Hatha is a very general term that can encompass many of the physical types of yoga. If a class is described as Hatha style, it is probably going to be slow-paced and gentle and provide a good introduction to the basic yoga poses.

VINYASA

Like Hatha, Vinyasa is a general term that is used to describe many different types of classes. Vinyasa, which means breath-synchronized movement, tends to be a more vigorous style based on the performance of a series of poses called Sun Salutations, in which movement is matched to the breath. A Vinyasa class will typically start with a number of Sun Salutations to warm up the body for more intense stretching that's done at the end of class.

ASHTANGA & POWER YOGA

Ashtanga, which means "eight limbs" in Sanskrit, is a fast-paced, intense style of yoga. A set series of poses is performed, always in the same order. Ashtanga practice is very physically demanding because of the constant movement from one pose to the next. In yoga terminology, this movement is called flow. Ashtanga is also the inspiration for what is often called Power Yoga. If a class is described as Power Yoga, it will be based on the flowing style of Ashtanga, but not necessarily keep strictly to the set Ashtanga series of poses.

IYENGAR

Based on the teachings of the yogi B.K.S Iyengar, this style of practice is most concerned with bodily alignment. In yoga, the word alignment is used to describe the precise way in which your body should be positioned in each pose in order to obtain the maximum benefits and avoid injury. Iyengar practice usually emphasizes holding poses over long periods versus moving quickly from one pose to the next (flow). Also, Iyengar practice encourages the use of props, such as yoga blankets, blocks and straps, in order to bring the body into alignment.

KUNDALINI

The emphasis in Kundalini is on the breath in conjunction with physical movement, with the purpose of freeing energy in the lower body and allowing it to move upwards. All asana practices make use of controlling the breath. But in Kundalini, the exploration of the effects of the breath (also called prana, meaning energy) on the postures is essential. Kundalini uses rapid, repetitive movements rather than poses held for a long time, and the teacher will often lead the class in call and response chanting.

BIKRAM / HOT YOGA

Pioneered by Bikram Choudhury, this style is more generally referred to as Hot Yoga. It is practiced in a 95 to 100 degree room, which allows for a loosening of tight muscles and profuse sweating, which is thought to be cleansing. The Bikram method is a set series of 26 poses, but not all hot classes make use of this series.

ANUSARA

Founded in 1997 by John Friend, Anusara combines a strong emphasis on physical alignment with a positive philosophy derived from Tantra. The philosophy's premise is belief in the intrinsic goodness of all beings. Anusara classes are usually light-hearted and accessible to students of differing abilities. Poses are taught in a way that opens the heart, both physically and mentally, and props are often used.

JIVAMUKTI

This style of yoga emerged from one of New York's best-known yoga studios. Jivamukti founders David Life and Sharon Gannon take inspiration from Ashtanga yoga and emphasize chanting, meditation, and spiritual teachings. They have trained many teachers who have brought this style of yoga to studios and gyms, predominantly in the U.S. These classes are physically intense and often include some chanting.

FORREST

Headquartered in Santa Monica, California, and gaining popularity around the U.S., Forrest Yoga is the method taught by Ana Forrest. The performance of vigorous asana sequences is intended to strengthen and purify the body

and release pent-up emotions and pain so that healing can begin. Expect an intense workout with an emphasis on abdominal strengthening and deep breathing.

KRIPALU

The name Kripalu is associated both with a style of hatha yoga and a yoga and wellness center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Both were founded by yoga guru Amrit Desai, who came to the United States from India in 1960. Kripalu is a yoga practice with a compassionate approach and emphasis on meditation, physical healing and spiritual transformation that overflows into daily life. Kripalu also focuses on looking inward and moving at your own pace.

INTEGRAL

Integral yoga follows the teachings of Sri Swami Sachidananda, who came to the U.S. in the 1960s and eventually founded many Integral Yoga Institutes and the famed Yogaville Ashram in Virginia. Integral is a gentle hatha practice, and classes often also include breathing exercises, chanting, kriyas, and meditation.

SIVANANDA

The first Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center was founded in 1957 by Swami Vishnu-devananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda. There are now close to 80 locations worldwide, including several ashram retreats. Sivananda yoga is based upon five principles:

1. Proper exercise (Asana, focusing on 12 poses in particular)
2. Proper breathing (Pranayama)
3. Proper relaxation (Savasana)
4. Proper diet (Vegetarian)
5. Positive thinking and meditation (Dhyana)