

The ancient Indian art of yoga has become increasingly popular over the years, with people from all walks of life from pop stars to pensioners taking classes. A lot of people think yoga is just a difficult form of stretching exercises, but there's a lot more to it than that. Today most of the yoga practised concentrates on physical postures (asanas), Breathing exercises (pranayama), and meditation. Four areas are normally worked on in yoga classes, suppleness, strength, stamina and concentration. Other areas of yoga include yoga therapy, which has proved to be effective in helping stress related disorders like, migraine, headaches, tension, and other common disorders. Before taking up yoga you should inform your doctor if you are:

- Pregnant
- Are at risk of a detached retina, or have suffered from it in the past
- Have been inactive for a period
- Have a fever
- Have swollen joints
- Nauseous
- Take medication that might affect your balance or cause dizziness
- Haven't been cleared for normal activity after an operation

When visiting your doctor it is a good idea to take along some photographs or illustrations of the type of postures you intend to be doing at your yoga classes, so he can decide if this form of exercise is suitable. Yoga is not without its physical dangers, back injuries and twists and strains are quite common. Beginners tend to dive into things a bit too whole-heartedly and can find themselves attempting positions that are beyond their capabilities. This is certainly true of people who may buy a yoga video or DVD, to try and get fit or lose weight. Many people who buy this form of instruction are not generally fit anyway and the strains and stresses of some of the poses may cause muscle and back injuries. Things to Remember There are some precautions you can take to make your yoga experience a healthy injury free one. Here are twenty tips to help you:

- Always get proper instruction on the correct poses from a certified instructor.

- Find an instructor who is experienced, certified and cares about your physical well being.
- Learn about the types of yoga, and choose the right one for you.
- Tell the teacher about previous and existing health issues.
- Start in a beginner class or one in which the instructor moves slowly enough for you.
- Always keep proper head, shoulder and pelvis alignment.
- Learning to use one's muscles to support and not stress the back takes time, patience and commitment, too, don't try and rush things.
- Don't twist yourself into a yoga posture your body is not ready for, or not flexible enough for.
- Ashtanga and Power Yoga are generally too vigorous for beginners and inflexible people.
- Beginners should practice gentle forms of yoga, such as Kripalu, Viniyoga, or Integral Yoga
- Do ten minutes of warming up with easy movements to increase circulation, lubricate joints and ready your body to stretch.
- Never let an instructor try to force your body into any pose you don't feel comfortable with.
- Newcomers should avoid positions like The Plow, full shoulder stand, headstand and full lotus. These poses can place tremendous stress on joints and disks
- Keep your knees slightly bent and hinge from your hips when you bend forward from any standing position.
- If you feel any strain while doing sitting or kneeling postures, place a cushion or folded blanket under your bottom.
- When arching backwards, concentrate on opening the front of the body by lengthening from the navel to the sternum. Be careful not to over-arch your lower back as this will compress the lumbar disks.
- Protect Your Knees - Never lock your knees when in a standing posture.
- Don't hold poses so long you can't get out of them safely.
- Don't compare yourself to others.
- Be patient; don't expect instant results.