

## **Cultivating A Personal Yoga Practice**

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Amid the challenges of daily life, most of us find it difficult to take time to nurture ourselves. The regular practice of yoga is a wonderful way to exercise the body, calm the mind and become more present and aware. Instead of becoming frustrated in your attempt to create a regular routine of yoga practice, try following these guidelines and learn to take some time for yourself each day.

### **Create a sacred space**

Set up an area of your home for yoga practice. Let this space be clean and inviting. Add to its beauty with a picture, a candle or other objects that inspire you. This spot will begin to beckon to you each day. Not everyone has space to devote a room only to yoga. Perhaps you will need to rearrange a few items to make space to roll out your mat. Keep your yoga props neatly displayed in plain view rather than storing them in your closet or car. Their presence will remind you to practice often.

### **Request time for yourself**

Avoid interruptions like phone calls and let the machine answer the phone. Let the people in your home know that you will be taking some time for yourself each day, and ask them not to interrupt you. This is especially challenging with children. Rather than closing the door, you can allow them to be near you or encourage them to try some poses for themselves. Request that attention remain on the practice unless there is an emergency. Not only will they become accustomed to your routine, they will learn through your example how to nurture themselves.

### **Practice on an empty stomach**

Wait two hours after a snack and three to four hours after a large meal before you begin your yoga. You should feel neither too full nor too hungry. Ideally, practice in the morning before breakfast and/or in the evening before dinner. In the morning, the body is stiffer, but the mind is clearer. In the evening, the body is more flexible, but the mind is more distracted. Both times are good for practice.

### **Practice with consistency**

It is more beneficial to practice for 15 minutes every day than for a longer amount of time every few days. Start with a small amount of time that you can do each day, even if it is only 5 minutes. The nervous system is soothed by a regular schedule. Consistency also makes it easier to keep your discipline because you become accustomed to the practice time as part of your routine, just like showering or fixing your lunch. Doing your practice in the same place at the same time each day is helpful. The habit of regular practice will get easier and easier, until you develop an appetite for it that you will want to satisfy each day.

### **Rejoice in your successes**

Too often, people give up on practice because of a couple of missed days. You can always begin again. You also might feel that you do so little, why bother at all? Every moment of practice done with awareness makes a difference. It is important to appreciate yourself each time you practice yoga. Noticing the improvements in how you feel, your energy level or your posture is a good way to stay motivated. Practice with diligence and patience, and enjoy the positive results.

### **Trust your inner teacher**

Sometimes students express reluctance to practice for fear that they will work incorrectly. Remember that your responsibility is to do the best you can with the understanding you have gained. As long as you study yoga,

the process of adjustment and correction will continue. Use your inner wisdom to be safe, and use your will and intellect to work with a balance of effort and ease. The questions that emerge can be answered in your next class. While all these recommendations are supportive to practice, they are not absolute. Experiment and discover what works for you.

### **Do yoga as a spiritual practice**

Yoga is an art, science and philosophy with goals that are spiritual in nature. While yoga can definitely bring health, beauty and fitness, these are all temporary. The word “yoga” means union, and the purpose of a yoga practice is to create harmony between body, mind and spirit. Let your yoga practice be connected to your faith tradition or belief system, and dedicate your efforts to the welfare of all beings. With this positive intention, you spread the benefits of your practice to help create a more peaceful and loving world.