

Discover yoga: it's for everyone— but find the right instructor for you

Yoga has been around for thousands of years. It is not a religion, it is a way of life. People of all ages and fitness levels can benefit from doing yoga, and you do not have to be flexible to begin a yoga practice. Yoga improves balance, coordination, flexibility and strength. It stimulates all the internal organs, calms the nervous system, restores and rejuvenates the body. Yoga reduces stress and makes you feel better both physically and emotionally. Yoga is also beneficial for weight loss and recovery from injury.

Finding a yoga instructor can be a daunting task. You may have a friend who loves a certain yoga instructor, a certain style of yoga or the ambiance of a certain yoga studio. It can all become quite confusing and quite a bit overwhelming.

When looking for a yoga instructor, be sure to investigate the yoga studio first. Ask questions of the yoga instructor such as:

Q: How many classes do they teach a week?

We all know that practice makes perfect and a seasoned yoga instructor will teach more than one class a week. In fact, it is common for serious yoga in-

structors to teach over 10 classes per week.

Q: How long have they been teaching?

It is advisable to seek out a yoga instructor who has at least 2,000 hours or three years of teaching experience.

Q: Where did they study yoga?

As yoga begins to grow in popularity, many fitness organizations are offering weekend yoga courses. You will want to make your decision based on the number of hours the instructor has studied, whether they teach yoga as a whole (meaning they do not teach just the physical postures, they understand and embrace the philosophy of yoga), and whether they continue their yoga studies. Ask who they have studied with, and for how long. It takes about two years for a yoga instructor to become certified.

Q: Do they practice yoga themselves?

Learning never ends. A yoga instructor should have their own personal practice which they do 3-5 days a week (some practice yoga every day).

Q: Are they certified with a governing body?

Although there is no govern-



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ment regulations in Canada for becoming a yoga instructor, there is a governing body that many instructors belong to. The instructor certified with this governing body must adhere to strict guidelines and uphold continuing education credits per year in order to hold on to their designation of a Certified Yoga Instructor.

Q: Do they teach a variety of classes / specialize in a particular style of yoga?

Yoga is yoga. In the Western culture, we concentrate more on the physical aspect of yoga through asana (physical postures).

Like anything that grows so quickly in popularity, many people have adapted their own styles of yoga and have given them

names: Ashtanga, Power, Hot, Yin, Jivamutka, Svaroopa, etc. etc. The style of yoga you seek will be individual to you. Don't get too hung up on the names or the levels.

Many studios will affix a 'level' such as 'level 1, level 2' or 'beginner', 'intermediate', 'advanced'. This is just a guideline for you. Remember that you are taking on this new adventure for yourself and a good yoga instructor will conduct the class to the students in the room. They will advance you at your pace. You will advance yourself at your own pace.

Someone who is athletic, flexible and does yoga on a regular basis can be considered "beginner" if they come to class stressed out, with a cold, or tired. They will adapt their practice to the 'beginner' mind (and perhaps not challenge themselves that day) and experience yoga as it was meant to be: as an individual, for the individual.

Q: Do they follow a set routine?

Again, a well educated yoga instructor who is passionate about helping others will gear the class towards the students in the room. You may enjoy tak-

ing a class that is the same every time and that is okay for you. Variety is the spice of life! Try something new.

Q: Do they know how to deal with limitations and injuries?

If you have an injury or limitation, it is very important to inform your instructor so that they can give you modifications for each pose. Get to know your instructor by asking questions. They may have experience dealing with your condition or know someone who does.

As you contemplate your new yoga experience, remember that yoga has many physical benefits but what is really important is how it makes you feel. Yoga will enhance your mental and emotional well being, improve your concentration and mental clarity. Your reaction to stress will be reduced and you will find that inner peace and calmness that everyone is talking about.

For more information on yoga certification visit: www.yogaalliance.org

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