Yoga

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Do you consider yourself a "traditionalist"when it comes to exercise, but find yourself more and more intrigued with yoga these days? You are not alone. Originating in India, yoga is a combination of breathing exercises, physical postures, and meditation that has been practiced for more than 5,000 years. According to a 2003 survey, 13.4 million Americans practice yoga and 1.6 million are 55 or older. So, why do yoga? Studies show that yoga reduces stress, increases flexibility and strength, fosters a mind-body connection and improves balance and coordination.

Yoga Styles — If you don't know your "downward facing dog" (a yoga position) from your "vinyasas" (a series of postures), take heart. There are a variety of different yoga styles to suit a variety of ability levels. ***Hatha*** yoga is the most widely practiced yoga in the United States and good for beginners. These workouts include basic introductory poses and the movements are slow, gentle and smooth. ***Lyengar*** yoga focuses on body alignment and balance, and students hold poses longer than most forms— also a good choice for beginners. ***Bikram*** yoga is for those who can take the heat— upwards of 95 to 100º. The warm environment helps loosen tight muscles, promotes sweating and facilitates body cleansing. Vinyasa yoga focuses on sun salutations, the connection of breath and movement and aggressive stretches. Ashtanga yoga is a fast, intense yoga style. Students are constantly moving, but there is some flexibility to work at your own pace.

Yoga Equipment — A ***yoga mat*** is a necessity to offer slipresistance and cushioning. Many yoga studios rent mats for a nominal fee. Foam ***blocks and wedges*** will help you get into some of the postures with good body alignment. ***Yoga straps*** help with stretching and holding poses and are especially useful for less flexible beginners. Bring a ***t towel*** for perspiration or to roll up and support your neck. Also, wear unrestrictive, appropriate clothing. You will be bending, twisting…and may be upside down.

Yoga Classes — The average yoga class lasts 75 minutes, which includes a period of breathing and warming up and a relaxation period at the end. Classes range from $10 to $20 and some offer a one-time, drop-in rate to try a single class. Always check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.
Yoga classes are now offered at the Eisenhower Renker Wellness Center. Call 760-773-2030 for more information.

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