

Take a new view of yoga

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(HealthDay)—Want to add strength training, flexibility, and even stress reduction to your fitness plan?

Then it's time to consider—or reconsider, if you've shied away from it in the past—the ancient Indian practice of yoga.

Some 11 million Americans take part in one form of yoga or another. And, far from being a new-age type of [exercise](#), it's embraced by people from all walks of life—men as well as women, and even pro athletes, according to the American Council on Exercise. And you don't have to twist yourself into a pretzel to do it.

The most popular discipline is Hatha yoga, which stresses concentration and uses stretching and strengthening exercises. Many poses or asanas aren't complicated, but they are effective.

You can choose those specifically targeted to your needs. For example, the Warrior 2 pose improves hip flexibility and strengthens the quadriceps. The Tree pose is great at improving balance. As you hold each pose, you focus on your body, mind, and breathing. Keeping your mind in the moment can help clear your head and reduce stress.

Yoga can be good medicine, too. Research has found that it can improve [lung function](#) in people with the lung condition COPD. Other research shows that it can improve pain, disability, and depression in those with chronic low back pain, according to the U.S. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

Before starting a yoga class, make sure you know what you're getting into. Some types of yoga, like hot yoga or power [yoga](#), are more challenging than others. They may not be the best choices for beginners or people with certain health conditions.

So, ask questions before you commit to a class. Finding the right fit for you could benefit your [mind](#), body and spirit.

More information: The American Council on Exercise has more on the [benefits of yoga](#).

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