

10 REASONS TO START A YOGA PRACTICE IN MID LIFE

In her memoir, “Yin, Yang, Yogini,” author Kathryn Livingston describes the life-changing experience of the yoga practice that she began at age fifty. She’s not alone. Many people are turning up in yoga classes at middle age and beyond, even if they have never practiced before.

If you’ve wondered how to keep your mind sharp, your spirit healthy, and your body fit as you get older, consider yoga. Despite what you may think, the popular practice is not just a workout for young, athletic types in designer outfits. Yoga is becoming more and more popular among people of all ages.

The benefits of joining older yogis may surprise you. This ancient practice really does live up to all the hype. Here are ten reasons to start (or continue) a yoga practice at any age.

1. Yoga is adaptable to any fitness level and can even be practiced while seated on a chair.
2. A regular yoga practice can help increase flexibility and balance.
3. You’ll learn to breathe better, which will increase the flow of oxygen throughout your body, creating, among other things, more physical stamina so you can continue to be active.
4. Yoga techniques, including breathing practices, can actually change your brain chemistry, allowing the release of chemicals that promote a feeling of well-being. People who practice yoga often report improvements in mood and anxiety levels after practicing for only a short period of time.
5. Attending yoga classes will also give you an opportunity to socialize with others. This can be valuable since such opportunities tend to diminish as we get older.
6. Yoga builds physical strength that can save your life. Stronger bodies are less likely to be seriously injured, and, if you do become injured, being stronger will help you heal more quickly.
7. Yoga includes strength training in the form of resistance exercises that can help build back muscle lost with age.
8. Yoga can help people with joint problems and other aches and pains. Specific poses increase the strength and flexibility of joints and specific muscle groups.
9. Yoga is great for your heart. A study conducted at Yale University showed that people who practiced yoga and meditation daily had lower blood pressure and a lower risk for heart disease.
10. Weight bearing yoga poses can improve bone strength as well as agility and flexibility, reducing your risk for developing osteoporosis.

Where to Start

Most yoga studios offer at least one “gentle” class that is ideal for older practitioners. Some offer special classes like yoga for bone strength or therapeutic “slow stretch” classes. If your studio doesn’t offer these, or if you want a practice that’s a little more challenging, ask which class is recommended for beginners. It’s also a good idea to start in a smaller class so you can get individual attention from the instructor while learning the basics.

Try different studios and instructors if you need to. No matter what your goal or physical condition, there’s a yoga class out there that’s right for you! And while it doesn’t have to be your goal, don’t be surprised if you eventually find yourself in an advanced or even “power” yoga class, studying yoga philosophy, and even shopping for those trendy yoga clothes!