

## Stretch Your Definition: Explaining Yoga



**IT TURNS OUT** a bunch of folks aren't doing yoga, because they think they'll have to wrap their legs around their head. But, really, all they need to do is wrap their heads around the fact that the ancient practice is more than just pretzel poses.

The Yoga Alliance ([Yogaalliance.org](http://Yogaalliance.org)), a national education organization that registers qualified teachers and schools, just released the results of its 2010 Yoga Insight Survey, which found that half of Americans who don't do yoga have some pretty big misconceptions: They think it requires Gumby-like flexibility, is a form of religious worship and isn't a workout.

"These headlines show it's our task to explain what yoga is," says Terri Kennedy, a Yoga Alliance board member who's dealt with many of these myths at her studio in Harlem. And that's a range of things, from gentle forms like yoga nidra to vigorous ones like vinyasa, so there really is something for "everybody and every body." "The beautiful thing about the practice is it meets you where you are," she adds.

But it's no surprise to other people in the yoga community that these beliefs are still out there, even after practitioners have worked for decades to demystify what they do on the mat.

That's why the team at YogaWorks ([Yogaworks.com](http://Yogaworks.com)) -- which is both a chain of studios in New York and California and a specific style of yoga -- just released its first DVDs. The motto, "For everyone," was a driving force behind the three-title collection, says senior teacher Kori Fletcher, who's featured on the cover of "Body Slim" (\$14.98, Lion's Gate). "One of the biggest reasons people don't try yoga is because it's intimidating," she explains.

It's hard to be that scared, however, of something you can do in your living room along with extremely detailed descriptions of the movements (the goal was to make the instructions so clear you wouldn't have to look at the screen at all). Fletcher's favorite part: "Each one has a learning guide. So, as you move through the poses, you can break them down," she says.

If even that's too much for beginners, Fila yoga ambassador Kristin McGee has put together a short yoga practice you can do at your desk (see it here: [Bit.ly/53sHcs](http://Bit.ly/53sHcs)) to break up a hectic workday. It's her response to people who say, "I always thought yoga had to be done barefoot with the lights a certain way."

By twisting your spine, opening your hips and stretching up your arms for just a few minutes, you'll feel better, McGee promises. And if it convinces you to try a class and learn more about yoga, she'll feel better, too.

### » HOT FOR TEACHER

Anyone with stretchy pants can decide to be a yoga teacher, so it's up to students to figure out whether they want to follow the leader. Before going to a class, Kennedy recommends asking questions about the style to see whether it's what you're looking for — Is it fast, slow, meditative, goofy? — and then finding out about the teacher's background. For new students or those with injuries, it's critical that the instructor be knowledgeable about modifications.

*Photo by Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post*

Posted By Vicky Hallett at 12:00 AM on January 19, 2010 Tagged in [Fit](#), [Fit Newsletter](#) <http://www.expressnightout.com/content/2010/01/yoga-stretch-your-definition.php>