

# WD's Guide to Yoga

Get the basic info on this beneficial exercise

By [Abigail L. Cuffey](#) Posted January 29, 2010 from [WomansDay.com](#)



Photo: © iStockphoto

Thinking about trying yoga? Smart idea. The benefits of yoga range from better flexibility to less stress. In fact, a recent study found that practicing yoga regularly (once or twice a week) may lower a number of harmful compounds in the blood as well as reduce inflammation linked to aging and stress. Yet starting out in the yoga world can be intimidating because there are so many different styles and types to choose from. Terri Kennedy, MBA, PhD, founder of [Ta Yoga](#) in New York City and board member of the [Yoga Alliance](#), breaks down the six main styles to make your choice a little easier.

## 1. Vinyasa Yoga

A flowing (and active) style that has a lot of variety. There are no set sequences, so each class can be a totally new experience, which teachers can tailor for beginner or advanced yogis. The classic vinyasa sequence starts with the standard 12-position sun salutation, which includes moves such as downward dog, cobra and lunges. To make it more challenging, the teacher may add a warrior pose or two into the middle of the sequence.

**Best For:** Those who like to dance would find this style appealing, and it is accessible for all levels.

## 2. Iyengar Yoga

A therapeutic form that focuses on concentration, flexibility and balance. Not necessarily easy, the poses are very specific and focus on alignment. The movements are subtle and do not flow from one to the next. A classic Iyengar pose is the triangle, which is when you stand with legs spread about 3 1/2 feet apart with one hand reaching down toward the same side's foot and the other hand reaching straight up toward the ceiling. The classes tend to be more directed as well.

**Best For:** Beginners, seniors and anyone who needs to take it easy due to injury.

### 3. Kundalini Yoga

It comes from ancient tantric tradition and involves a lot of chanting and rapid repetitive movement. The movements are done in conjunction with very specific breathing techniques. For example, you might hold a bow pose (torso on the floor, both legs bent and hands reach back to hold feet) while doing the rapid Breath of Fire (deep breathing powered by abdominal contractions).

**Best For:** Those with an open mind (because of the chanting and repetition) who are already trained in the traditional styles. Total beginners might feel a bit uncomfortable in a Kundalini class.

### 4. Integral Yoga

A classic and gentle style that involves light chanting, breathing and meditation. It can be tailored to the individual and his or her difficulty level.

**Best For:** Anybody, but particularly complete yoga newbies and anyone who hasn't been active in a while.

### 5. Bikram Yoga

Also known as “hot yoga” because it is practiced in a heated room (usually around 100 degrees), this style has its own 26 poses. In each class you do the sequence of poses twice. People either love it or hate it because the heat makes it very challenging. A classic Bikram pose is the standing bow pose (one leg on the ground, the other bent back and in the air with the same arm reaching back to grasp foot), which requires balance, focus, strength and flexibility.

**Best For:** Those who really want to sweat, release toxins and are physically active. It's also good for someone looking to stretch muscles because the heat really helps with flexibility.

### 6. Ashtanga Yoga

A very active style—also called power yoga—that consists of six set sequences. It is very fast-paced and can be vigorous. The classes are often a little less guided, meaning you will learn a sequence and then practice it yourself.

**Best For:** Someone who is athletic, physically fit and wants to sweat! Ashtanga is probably not the best way to go for absolute beginners or seniors. For more information about each style and which one is right for you, visit [YogaAlliance.org](http://YogaAlliance.org) or go to [WomansDay.com/articles/topic/yoga](http://WomansDay.com/articles/topic/yoga) for beginner yoga poses.

<http://www.womansday.com/Articles/Health-Fitness/Workout-Routines/WD-s-Guide-to-Yoga.html>