

love my yoga class.

But what about a home practice?

Attending weekly yoga classes is a great first step towards incorporating yoga into your life. Being able to transfer what is learned in class to your own home practice is a crucial next step. Tracey Wood offers some practical tips on how to develop a home practice.

We all know the benefits we gain from our weekly yoga classes, but how often have we promised ourselves we will start a home practice, only to find ourselves never actually doing anything about it? Our teacher suggests it, we read articles about its benefits and about how yoga changes lives, but we still don't get it together and find that all-important daily routine that will deepen and strengthen our practice.

Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet to start other than to start. However, hopefully this short article will help you on your path. The first thing to do is to talk to your teacher. Ask them if they can design a short morning and evening home practice for you. Let them know your daily routine so they can design something specific, be it a morning or evening routine, or both. A private one-on-one class might help you get started. Some teachers even offer short courses designed specifically for home practice.

Once you have established your home practice routine, there are three

things you can do to help it work for you:

1. Attend a class at least once a week. This not only teaches you new skills and allows you to fine-tune familiar ones, but it reminds you of the benefits of yoga.
2. Implement your home practice routine as soon as you have it. Try starting with two or three times a week. When you feel ready, increase the frequency to a level that you can sustain.
3. Set aside some time when you won't be disturbed – in a place that is either set aside for your practice, or which won't take long to set up.

Here are two suggested routines, one designed for morning and one for evening:

Morning routine (15-30 mins)

1. Set your alarm to wake up around 40 minutes earlier than your usual waking time.
2. Before you rise entirely from sleep, spend five minutes allowing your mind and body to adjust to a waking

state. Start by becoming aware of your body, and the sensations within, by letting your attention drift upwards from your toes to the crown of your head. Once you've gone through your entire body, become aware of your body as a whole. Take a few deep breaths, and then rise from bed. If you wake quickly in the morning, try repeating your sankalpa (your personal affirmation), and practise a short pranayama before you rise.

3. Practise asana, pranayama, and meditation in a sequence that suits you. Discuss this with your teacher if you are not sure where to start.

- Pranayama (2-5 mins): In Sanskrit, 'prana' means life force and 'ayama' means control. When we are tense or angry, the breath comes in short spurts and is shallow. When we are relaxed, our breathing is slow and deep. By breathing slowly and deeply, we can alter the state of our nervous system and the activity of the brain. Observing the breath for a few



minutes allows the mind to focus and the body to relax.

Centre your awareness on your abdomen, sensing the calming, rhythmic motion of your belly as you breathe in and out from your diaphragm. Feel your breath flow deep into your abdomen, expand, and then rise up to your chest; then let the breath out from your chest, all the way back down again. You can also place your hands over your navel to help you tune in to the practice and feel the effects.

- Short meditation in Easy Pose (Sukhasana) (2-5 mins): This will enable you to start the day in a calm and positive manner. Repeat your personal affirmation (sankalpa). To begin with, perhaps you could make it specific to your home practice, such as: “I enjoy and get great benefits from daily yoga practice”, or “My body, mind, and spirit are in harmony”. You could also think about what you are grateful for in your life during this pose.
- Asana (10-15 mins)

- Shavasana (Corpse pose) (5 mins): This pose allows your body to integrate and assimilate what you have just practised. It’s about letting go completely. Lie on your back and close your eyes, ensuring that you are warm and comfortable. Allow your whole body to become soft and heavy, as it relaxes into the floor. Scan the body, starting at the toes and going up to the crown of the head. Consciously release and relax any tension, tightness, and contracted muscles areas. To return to a waking state, wiggle the fingers and toes; stretch the arms, then the whole body. Bend the knees into the chest and roll to one side resting in foetal position. When you are ready, slowly lift to a seated position. Observe how you are feeling after your practice.

Evening routine (15 - 30 mins)

Practise asana, pranayama, and meditation in a sequence that suits you. Introduce pratyahara (sense withdrawal) to your evening practice. As with the morning routine, discuss this with your

teacher if you are not sure where to start.

Short meditation in Sukhasana (Easy pose) (2-5 mins): This will enable you to reconnect with your inner calm after the day’s activities. As with the morning routine, repeat a sankalpa such as: “This practise of yoga heals and nurtures me”, or, “My body is relaxed and my mind is silent”. You could also think about what gifts the day brought to you while holding this pose.

- Asana (10 mins)
- Pranayama (2-5mins): Breathe in and out from your diaphragm, feeling your breath flow deep into your abdomen, expand, and then rise up to your chest; then let the breath out from your chest, all the way back down again. Note: You can also use this time to practise the complete breath or specific breathing exercises learned in class. Discuss this with your teacher when they help you establish a routine.
- Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal) (2-5mins): Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the senses from

attachment to external objects. Normally the senses register a stimulus and the mind is drawn to it at once, making you want to look, listen, smell, taste, or touch. Pratyahara is practised by focusing on one sense at a time – looking, listening, smelling, tasting, or touching. When you are totally absorbed in one sense, the others automatically withdraw. The goal of pratyahara is to gain control over your senses, rather than being controlled by them.

- Shavasana (Corpse pose) (10 mins)

Go easy on yourself

Of course, these routines are only a guide. At all times, adjust your practice to your daily circumstances. And don't beat yourself up if you don't manage to practise as much as you would like to. Fine-tune your routine until it suits you. If you use a routine given to you by your teacher, let them know how you're going so they can help you make adjustments. This will enable you to gain confidence and feel comfortable with your home practice.

Modify your practice to suit your lifestyle

While it's important to move at a pace that's comfortable for you, do try to put aside the same time every day, to facilitate getting into a routine. If you have problems finding time for your home practice, decide what you can leave out of your day – there is always something. Getting into good yoga habits may require some reshuffling of your existing routine but it won't take long to establish and it will be well worth it. The other thing to remember is that when you experience a challenge or trauma in your life, rather than abandoning your practice, rely on it to see you through. Most of all, make sure your home practice is something you look forward to in the day, rather than just another task to tick off your list.

If all else fails...

There may be times when your routine is interrupted and it is beyond your control. For example, you may be away from home or in the midst of a life-changing event. If this is the case, then practise yoga

whenever you think about it throughout your day. This can mean simply returning to the moment with full awareness of where you are and how you are feeling. You could practise a few gentle asanas or stretches. Breathing exercises such as diaphragmatic breathing and alternate nostril breathing are easy to practise while you are in the middle of an activity, or on a break. If all else fails, just sit quietly by yourself for a few moments. Anything you can do to return to your centre and find calm will assist you to maintain your yoga practice and keep the benefits flowing.

The more you practise yoga, the more in tune you will be with yourself. With regular practice, you gain regular benefits that infiltrate all areas of your life.

Tracey Wood facilitates personal growth and inspires positive change through providing instructional self-help resources, and writing articles. Tracey lives on the Sunshine Coast, Qld. www.traceywood.com.au for articles and www.momentum7.com for resources.



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