



## Practicing yoga at work

Do you find yourself stressed at work? If you are, maybe you're wondering if there's a way to relax and add joy to your day.

Studies have shown that yoga can help relieve stress, improve your mood and increase your focus.

### Simple yoga, basic benefits

In its simplest form, yoga is a combination of physical postures and breathing, often combined with meditation.

Yoga focuses you on better breathing, which deepens and lengthens the breath, leading to physical, emotional and mental benefits. Deep breathing alone stimulates relaxation and an increased sense of calmness.

The combination of postures, breathing and meditation can decrease your blood pressure and slow your heart rate. In fact, you can feel these and other benefits by simply adding 15 minutes of yoga to your day, whether at work, home or school or by taking a class at a local fitness club or studio.

### The health benefits

For many people, the physical benefits of yoga become obvious the first time they try it. Most people will notice they feel more limber and relaxed. Other known benefits include:

- increased flexibility and range of motion in your joints;
- stretching not only your muscles, but your ligaments and tendons too;
- increased muscle tone, core strength and posture;
- increased awareness of your body;
- reduced likelihood of heart disease, stroke and hypertension; and
- improved sleep patterns, including for those who typically suffer from insomnia.

### Workplace yoga

Incorporating yoga into your workday is as simple as taking a class at your work location or nearby facility. You can even try "chair yoga" at your desk for a few minutes a day to experience some of the many health benefits.

For chair yoga, you don't even need a mat—a sturdy chair is enough to get started. Close your door and dim the lights if you wish. Deal with distractions first, so you're not interrupted. For instance, turn off your computer and cellphone. Try turning

on some relaxing music, and then take some time for yourself to follow your preferred yoga routines.

The Yoga at Your Desk video series from the Alberta Centre for Active Living is a good example of an online resource. The videos will take you through a series of yoga postures that you can do during your work breaks or over your lunch hour.

You can also download yoga routines from online video sites, or print off a series of postures from yoga web sites. If you have room near your desk, you can also use a yoga mat to do selected routines or postures.

Whether you practice yoga at your desk or on a mat, it can help to improve your mood and can increase your productivity by refocusing your mind. The more relaxed you are, the greater your capacity to handle stress. You might even find it easier to communicate with co-workers.

Practicing yoga regularly—at work or elsewhere—helps keep you healthy and balanced over time. It can also reduce your risk of illness and may result in fewer sick days.

### Going to yoga class

While there are many schools of yoga, you shouldn't worry too much about the details. At the beginner level, most types are easy to do and class instructors are generally ready to ease new participants into simple postures and exercises.

Don't be afraid to try a class. In most cases, a class will be a low-key, calming experience, often with relaxing music in the background. You'll find that instructors and other students are usually happy to talk about their experiences and share their knowledge about the benefits of yoga.

Here's a brief summary of several different types of yoga:

**Hatha:** A combination of breathing, poses and—sometimes—meditation. "Hatha yoga" is sometimes used interchangeably with "yoga."

**Lyengar:** This type of yoga uses props such as blocks and belts to aid in performing postures. The purpose is to develop concentration, meditation, strength, flexibility and stamina.

**Jivamukti:** Jivamukti yoga—or "liberation while living"—combines chanting, meditation, poses, breathing and music.

**Laughing:** Combines laughter with yogic breathing.

**Mysore:** Here, postures are given one by one, in sequential order, by the teacher. Each participant works at their own capacity.

**Power:** A general term for a vinyasa-style yoga, which emphasizes strength and flexibility and does not follow a set series of poses. Power yoga is found in many fitness centres.

**Vinyasa:** Sometimes called “flow yoga,” here postures are synchronized with breath and linked together like a dance.

**Anusara:** A school of Hatha yoga, characterized by a celebration of the heart, that looks for the goodness in all things. Anusara was begun by John Friend in 1997.

**Ashtanga:** Combines synchronizing breath with a progressive series of postures that produce intense internal heat and profuse sweat.

**Bikram:** A 26-posture series that works the entire body. Bikram yoga is practiced in a room heated to 40.5 C. It was developed by Bikram Choudhury from Hatha Yoga.

Check out the different yoga classes and instructors in your area or at your workplace. Consider asking co-workers or friends to discover yoga with you—having company when you go can be both fun and motivating.

## Why not?

Whether you choose to do yoga at your work location or join a yoga class—or both—you’ll be glad you did. People who

regularly practice yoga often notice physical and emotional improvements. They feel more relaxed and often report increased flexibility.

As they say, timing is everything, so find a way to schedule yoga into your day. If you can’t commit to a class regularly, doing yoga at your desk or on your own pace can be a great way to still get some of the health benefits you’re seeking.

## Learn more

### [Yoga @ Your Desk](#)

Three videos that teach you how to do yoga during short work breaks.

### [Yoga Association of Alberta](#)

Links to yoga teachers and studios across the province of Alberta.

### [Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology](#)

A number of resources and ideas for staying active at work.

### [Physical Activity @ Work](#)

The Alberta Centre for Active Living web site, which offers tools and resources to help employers and employees incorporate physical activity into the workplace.

Content provided courtesy of Alberta Health’s Healthy U initiative.



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