

HEALTH

Thinking about starting yoga? Read this first

By MEREDITH DELISO May 20, 2014

This time of year, yoga seems to be everywhere. There are Groupon deals aplenty and yoga sessions held all over the city in parks and even museums. In fact, if you find yourself at the Museum of Modern Art Thursday evening, hundreds of yogis will be taking over the atrium and garden for Lolë's "White Tour" session, where all participants will be decked out in the requisite white, to symbolize peace.

And though the practice has been around in some form for thousands of years, it's "just seeping into the mainstream," says Jason Wachob, founder of the health and wellness website MindBodyGreen and a practicing yogi for five years. "Yoga's become this thing that isn't taboo and something a lot of people use to supplement other practices."

If you've been thinking about dipping your toes into the yoga waters, here are some tips from teachers and practitioners alike to get you on your way. Come on in, the water's fine.

Try a lot of different classes

From more traditional practices like hatha and vinyasa flow to newer and more unconventional (think aerial or even nude yoga), there are many types of yoga classes out there, and it may take some experimenting to find the one that suits you.

"I tried many different styles of yoga, but nothing ever spoke to me or worked for me the way Baptiste Yoga does," says Bethany Lyons, founder of Lyons Den Power Yoga in TriBeCa, which teaches a form of hot yoga called Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga. Wachob recommends trying different styles, as well as teachers, to find one that you like.

"There's tons of different styles," says Wachob. "It's important to experiment and find what works."

Be prepared

When trying out classes, make sure you're ready to make the experience an enjoyable one. That means staying hydrated throughout the day and during class, which is especially important if you're doing hot yoga, and being mindful of what you eat beforehand.

"You don't want to come in after having a burger, fries and shake, or after not eating anything all day," says Lyons, who recommends having a snack, such as a banana, about an hour prior to class to give you some fuel.

During a class, you may also want to have a powder, like Ultima, or even some lemons, to help replenish electrolytes.

You'll also want to be wearing the right clothing so you're comfortable in class. Taking a 100-degree Bikram class? Avoid sweats and long sleeve shirts.

"I'm a big fan of a bandana," says Lyons. "So if sweat is running, it's not running into your eyes."



Listen to your body

Yoga will have you twisting and bending your body in ways you've never done before. To protect your joints and muscles, it's important to listen to what your body is telling you and not force anything.

"Everybody was a beginner once," says Lyons. "Don't expect it to be perfect, just have a good time with it."

If you need a break, go into the restful *balasana*, aka child's pose, or lie down on the floor and give yourself that moment.

Stick with it

With patience and practice, you can accomplish yoga poses that at first seemed impossible. But that means sticking with it.

"A lot of people aren't excited about jumping into a yoga class," says Wachob. "You want to be good at something, and that may not happen on day one."

Three times a week is the "magic number" to start seeing the benefits and improvements, says Wachob. Lyons also recommends that people come at least three times a week, if not more.

"If you're looking to make a change, a bigger commitment comes into play," says Lyons.

Don't judge it before you try it

Yoga isn't just about chanting "om" and meditation -- though that is a big component. If you think you're not the yoga "type," you may want to think again.

"Sometimes people have a misconception of what yoga's all about," says Jess Gronholm, founder of [Dirty Yoga](#), which offers online yoga classes. "They think it's just sitting there with your eyes closed, but yoga can be many things and a fantastic way to exercise."

Lyons herself never really considered yoga seriously until a random workout changed her mind.

"Even if you've never done yoga before and don't think you're a yoga person, you might be surprised," says Lyons. "You don't have to fit a mold to practice yoga."