

ANUSARA YOGA PRACTICE NOTES FOR BEGINNERS

WHAT TO WEAR

Clothing should be non-restrictive. Shorts and a T-shirt, or a leotard are preferable to baggy pants or sweats. Bare feet are essential.

WHERE TO PRACTICE

Practice in a clean, level, warm, well ventilated and quiet place. Avoid practicing in direct sunlight.

WHEN TO PRACTICE

Schedule any block of time for your practice which best fits into your daily routine. It should be a time which is as free as possible from distractions.

It is best to practice on an empty stomach. Wait at least 1 to 2- hours after a light snack, or 3 hours after a full meal, before doing a strong practice.

In the mornings, the mind tends to be sharp but the body is stiff. Although the practice is not easy in the early mornings because the body is generally stiff, the stomach is empty and so the practice can have a very cleansing effect.

During the late morning and early afternoon, the body tends to have peak strength and flexibility and the mind is still sharp. Mid-day practices, when possible, are ideal.

In the evenings the body is flexible, but a little less energetic. In addition, the mind is generally not as sharp as earlier in the day.

BREATHING

The breath in each pose should be smooth, even and steady. The breath should not be held or restricted. Both inhalation and exhalation should be practiced through the nose, not the mouth. If the breath becomes too fast or labored while in a pose, then come out of the pose and rest. In between poses, focus on your breathing to quiet the mind and relax the body. The quality of the breath not only reflects the condition of the mind and body, but also can directly affect both mind and body.

EYES

In every pose, except Savasana, keep the eyes open. This will help you stay present and focused. Also, with the eyes open you can reference your physical position with the outer environment. Referencing your alignment with the floor, ceiling and surrounding walls helps to increase your awareness of your posture and makes balance easier.

While the eyes are open, they should stay soft and relaxed as you balance outward perception with an inner observation.

PROPS

Props, such as blankets, belts, a wall, blocks, etc. are used to modify poses in order to meet the needs of various levels and experience. Use the minimum amount of props necessary to achieve the highest level of integrity in each posture's alignment and expression. In many cases the use of props can improve your alignment, and can also teach you how to create balanced action and alignment without props. In general, props are best thought of as a temporary aid not a permanent affordance to a posture.

EFFORT AND SURRENDER

Any amount of effort in a pose should be balanced or tempered with a sense of release or surrender. The face should be relaxed and the eyes soft in every pose. One's heart should have a joyful, open and celebratory feeling and expression in every pose.

Advanced practitioners will express more of the state of surrender and freedom than effort, while beginners will need to focus more on effort and discipline. Effort without a sense of surrender or openhearted expression can lead to harsh and constrictive action, and therefore to injury.

"STRONG SENSATION" or DISCOMFORT vs. PAIN

As one puts forth effort to perform poses that the body and mind are not used to, there can be a resulting discomfort or strong sensation. A feeling of discomfort in a general area of the body while performing a posture with good alignment is not a problem. Discomfort or strong sensations are relative feelings. A beginning student performing the same pose with good alignment as an advanced student will generally feel much more discomfort than the advanced student.

Discomfort does not indicate injury. The feeling of discomfort will soften and lessen if one does not mentally fight the feeling.

Pain in a yoga pose, on the other hand, usually indicates a physical misalignment or imbalanced muscular action. A specific burning or intense localized sensation in the body is referred to as pain. If one feels pain in a muscle or a joint, one should immediately change or modify the posture until the pain is relieved. One should closely observe the postural misalignment that caused the pain, and correct the pose accordingly.

- Pain indicates that injury will probably occur if misalignment is maintained.

MENSTRUATION

Women should avoid strenuous yoga practice during their menstrual period. In particular, inverted postures, where the pelvis and feet are positioned above the heart, should not be performed during this time. Strenuous or inverted poses during the menstrual period can disrupt the flow and cause irregularities and disharmony in subsequent menstrual periods.