



Information for new clients

Prior to doing yoga

It is recommended to leave approximately 2 hours after eating a substantial meal before doing yoga. A small snack 15 - 20 mins before hand is fine.

What Happens in a Yoga Class?

Preparation

British Wheel of Yoga classes begin with a short period of quiet to slow the mind and prepare mind, breath and body, followed by limbering moves and sequences to warm up the muscles and joints in preparation for asana (posture) work.

Asana

Asanas (yoga postures) strengthen and tone the body and improve the flow of energy, helping to regulate the physical systems of the body and breath, and stilling the mind for meditation. The asanas used in a class will vary from teacher to teacher and depend on the abilities of the students and the style of yoga being practised. The objective in asana work is not how far you can stretch or contort your body, but to combine stability (stira) with ease/relaxation (sukha). BWY teachers are trained to modify asanas to individual ability and to address medical conditions ranging from pregnancy to arthritis.

Working with the breath

Considering that our life depends upon our breathing it is remarkable that we have as much conscious control over it as we do. Breathing is fundamental to life. Man can live for weeks without food, days without water but only minutes without breathing. Breathing is controlled automatically by a respiratory centre in the brain. A nervous impulse sent from the brain causes us to inhale, breathing in essential oxygen as well as Carbon Dioxide (CO₂). As soon as the CO₂ reaches a certain level in our bodies an automatic reflex causes us to exhale. Human beings are unique in having a degree of control over their breathing. Automatic breathing allows us to be able to sleep; controlled breathing allows us to sing, talk and laugh!

Babies breathe deeply and healthily. The passage of time often brings a deterioration of the efficiency and effectiveness of our respiration. Lack of exercise can result in a loss of mobility and elasticity in the thoracic (chest) muscles and in the diaphragm (large muscle below the ribs which is important in helping to breathe

in and out). Poor posture, physical tension, emotional upheaval and unsuitable environments can also impact on our ability to breathe deeply. Shallow and restricted breathing results in less vital oxygen being drawn into the body. The majority of people regularly utilise only 25% of their breathing capacity. Yoga helps us to learn to exercise control over our breath. This not only increases vitality but also improves digestion, tones the nervous system and calms and concentrates the mind.

“If you would foster a calm spirit, first regulate your breathing; for when that is under control the heart will be at peace; but when breathing is spasmodic, then it will be troubled. Therefore, before attempting anything else, first regulate your breathing on which your temper will be softened, your spirit calmed.”

Kariba EkKen 17th Century mystic

“The mind is like a chariot, yoked to a team of powerful horses. One of them is breath, one is desire. The chariot moves in the direction of the more powerful animal. If breath prevails, the desires are controlled, the senses are held in check and the mind is stilled. If desire prevails, breath is in disarray and the mind is agitated and troubled.” Hatha Yoga Pradipika

In a yoga class you will practice breathing techniques to develop awareness and full use of the breath. These techniques are developed into 'pranayama' exercises to help control and move prana (energy) through the breath. Prana means 'vital' or 'life force energy'. Not all exercises are suitable for those with respiratory or circulatory conditions, so be sure to advise your teacher of any such conditions before you start a class.

History and philosophy

Most BWY teachers include history and philosophy in their yoga classes by introducing a 'theme'. This will help you understand how the yoga you are doing fits within the original spiritual context and history. Don't hold back in asking your tutor questions - in most yoga classes, discussion and feedback is actively encouraged!

Meditation

There are a huge variety of meditation techniques and styles. The ones you're most likely to come across will have the objective of stilling the mind by focussing your awareness on a single object – the movement of the breath, an image or candle, a sound or chant. Not all teachers will include meditation within a class.