

ABC's of Yoga



Asana: A yoga posture—gentle stretching movements to balance mind and body

Branches of Yoga: Yoga of Postures; Yoga of Devotion; Yoga of Self-control; Yoga of the Mind; Yoga of Service; Yoga of Rituals

Chakra: Center of radiating life force or energy; Located between base of spinal column and the head; seven chakras: the “base” chakra, sacral chakra, solar plexus chakra, heart chakra, throat chakra, brow (aka “third eye”) chakra, and crown chakra.

Drishti: Focus of your eyes; focal point of one’s gaze to maintain concentration and balance

Ego: A pattern of habitual thought processes that may include self-judgment. Learn to recognize your ego—come to know your own mind.

Five Yamas of Yoga: Valued guides to lead a conscious, honest and ethical life. *Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, and Aparigraha.*

Guru: Spiritually enlightened soul; one who brings us from darkness to light; who can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee.

Harmony: An orderly or pleasing combination of elements in a whole; the combination of separate but related parts in a way that uses their similarities to bring unity and wholeness; In Yoga, finding a balance between becoming strong, stable, and steady, while also creating inner joy and relaxation.

Integrative Yoga Therapy: A method developed specifically for medical settings to help patients dealing with heart disease, emotional disorders, arthritis, etc.


Jnana Mudra: A gesture of knowledge in which the index finger is bent so that its tip touches the tip of the thumb and the other 3 fingers are spread out. (a common mudra is Anjali mudra—palms together at the heart center)

Kirtan: A call and response devotional chanting; a form of heartfelt meditation with music

Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™: Based on the 5,000-year-old yoga postures (called asanas) and breathing techniques, plus other Eastern and Western movements. Lakshmi has modified these poses, making the health and fitness benefits accessible to everyone. In addition to adapting the poses for use on a chair, this style of yoga is offered to accommodate varying levels of flexibility (or ranges of motion).

Mantra: Scientific use of sound to affect the consciousness; ‘Man’=mind ‘Tra’=tune the vibration. Also, a word or verse used in meditation to quiet the mind and balance the inner body

Namasté: A traditional Indian greeting of respect and thank you. “I bow to the divine in you.” or “May the light in me shine within the light in you.”

Om:  single-sound mantra that signifies the unification of the body, mind and spirit; a cosmic vibration of the universe.

Pranayama: Yogic breathing; ‘Prana’=life force; ‘Yama’=discipline or control. By practicing deep and systematic breathing through Pranayama, we reenergize our body.

Quietude: Rest; repose; quiet; tranquility.

Reflection: Bringing inner feelings and behaviors into our consciousness and then learning the lessons they have to teach us. Through sustained focus on our patterns, habits, and conditioning, we gain knowledge and understanding of our past and of how we can change the patterns that aren’t serving us, in order to live more freely and fully.

Styles of Yoga: All yoga styles aim to balance body/mind/spirit, but go about it in different ways. Differences in the postures and the focus with regard to mastering or holding each pose, breathing practices, flow of movement etc. Some use props; some add heat. Ashtanga, Bikram, Hatha, Integral, Iyengar, Kripalu, Kundalini, Sivananda, Tantra, Viniyoga...

Tadasana: Mountain pose, which is the foundation to help to strengthen legs and improve alignment and posture; it prepares the body for all other poses.

Ujjayi Breath: Also called loud breathing—involves drawing air in through both nostrils and exhaling through the back of the throat. Literally: “what clears the throat and masters the chest area.” Benefits: strengthens the nervous and digestive systems and helps remove phlegm.

Vinyasa Flow: Breath-synchronized movement; Student moves from pose to pose on an inhalation or exhalation.

Wandering Mind: Why does our mind wander, creating difficulty for us to stay in the present moment? It sometimes helps to count your breath—1, 2, 3, 4 to root yourself in the Now. Slowing down thoughts and noticing your chest rising and falling and belly expanding and contracting, with each breath can also help. This requires both concentration and determination.

Xtra Careful: Never push your limits to where you feel pain. If you feel a pinch, pull back an inch! But DO challenge yourself so you feel a beautiful stretch.

Yogi: Someone who follows the path of yoga. A female is a yogini.

Zen: A total state of focus that incorporates the complete togetherness of body and mind; A meditation or contemplation practice.

Compiled by Robin Goettel, Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga Instructor, “Become Strong, Stable, Secure, and Balanced with LV Chair Yoga™,” OLLI Course, Winter 2016.

Note: This is not a comprehensive listing, but rather a collection of selected yoga principles and definitions. I have found this to be helpful as an introduction to yoga as a life practice integrating mind, body, and spirit.