

September Is National Yoga Awareness Month

TRTA members can reap the rewards of yoga including the benefits of greater flexibility, improved balance and better sleep. More senior citizens are discovering this safe and effective way to enhance their physical health and overall wellness.

Yoga cultivates a mind-body connection, combining stretching and strengthening postures with deep breathing and relaxation. Specific benefits include better balance through strengthening the abdominal muscles and improving core stability, improved flexibility and increasing range of motion, enhanced breathing and expanding lung capacity, stronger bones and improved bone density, reduced anxiety and lowering the levels of the stress hormone cortisol, alleviating sleep disturbances and reconnecting with your mind, body and spirit.

There are eight types of yoga. Hatha concentrates on slow paced sitting and standing poses and is suitable for beginners. Lyengar concentrates on proper form and includes props to get in proper alignment. Restorative cultivates relaxation and contentment with poses held for a long time. Yin is slow and focuses on stretching deep connective tissues. Vinyasa matches breathing with continuous movements and is physically vigorous. Ashtanga is fast paced and physically challenging. Bikram is done in a room heated to more than 100 degrees with 40 percent humidity and flushes out body toxins. Kundalini combines poses, breathing exercises, meditation and chanting.

A non-traditional option is chair yoga. This may be appropriate for seniors who have mobility or balance issues. Many poses can be modified to be performed from a chair.

Before you start a yoga program, evaluate your physical condition. Certain medical issues like glaucoma may limit positions and poses. It's crucial to talk with your doctor and instructor before starting a program.

Gather your gear before starting your program. Stretchy clothing that doesn't fall into your eyes is preferable. Yoga is typically performed barefoot, but you may wear non-slip socks or sneakers. You will need a yoga mat. Most mats are 1/8 inch thick and portability is a concern if you travel to sites away from home.

Before starting a class, you may want to sit in and observe the instructor. Once you decide to start the class, be sure to discuss any physical limitations you may have with the instructor. Then start slow! Ease into the positions and breathe deep. Rest between poses. Focus on going at your own pace. A yoga posture should never hurt. You may need to ask your instructor for a modification. Using props such as blocks may be helpful.

In order to find a class and instructor for seniors you may contact studios, community centers, health clubs, YMCAs, YWCAs, community colleges or universities nearby. You may search on Yoga Class Near You (<https://www.yogaclasnearyou.com/yoga-classes-for-over-50s>) website. You may also choose to begin by practicing yoga using books, DVDs or online videos.

Now that you are aware of yoga, TRY IT OR CONTINUE IT THIS SEPTEMBER!

Source: Great Senior Living, Yoga for Seniors: How To get Started (and Why You Should), last updated January 6, 2022.