

Yoga For Teens

By Lauren Parsons, age 17, Santa Barbara City College

Sometimes my life can be hectic with school, work and many other responsibilities and activities. As things start to pile up it's hard to find an hour or so to take care of myself. I know if I take the time to do my yoga practice everything else seems to fall into place.

If you haven't tried yoga, it's never too late to start. People of all ages, shapes, flexibility and strength can do yoga. Yoga is a great way to get strong, balanced focused and feel better.

I've been teaching yoga for two years and I love having this healthy way to get together with friends. I am certified through my family's Let It Go Yoga studio. Both of my parents have been teaching yoga since before I was born. Their school is nationally registered with the Yoga Alliance. I currently teach classes at the Santa Barbara YMCA as well as at the Let it Go Yoga Studio in Goleta. These are basic classes for people of all ages who want to practice yoga in a fun and non-competitive environment. We explore yoga postures standing, sitting, lying down and with a partner.

Yoga might be new to some people but this ancient practice originated in India, about 6000 years ago. Anything that has been around this long must be good! There are many different styles of yoga. Yoga can be done in a gentle way and it can be a workout, too. There are some vigorous poses that can make you break into a sweat. Standing postures, such as Warrior and Sun Salutations definitely raise your heart rate.

You'd think after 17 years of yoga I'd be pretty flexible but that's not always the case. My body can change dramatically from one day to the next. Some days my hands don't come close to the floor when I try to touch my toes in forward fold and other days it's no problem. I've found that, just like anything else, if I practice every day I improve.

In a stressful situation, yoga breathing will calm you down and help you to focus. Breathing is what yoga is all about. You could say since I breath all the time, I'm doing yoga all the time! There is a little difference, though. In yoga there are many different ways to breath. Probably the easiest one to remember is diaphragmatic breathing. This a full, deep breath and the breathing that singers use. You fill up your lungs and use your full diaphragm.

Yoga hurts! Well, it shouldn't hurt too much. The best way to know if you're doing the poses correctly is if you feel an edge. The edge is the place where you feel a good stretch. One that's working your body. You have to be careful not to injure yourself by pushing too hard. If you're trying to look exactly like the pictures in a book, you might need to back off. No one's picture perfect and yoga is not about what it looks like. It's all about how it feels to you. Some bodies are flexible and can bend into complicated postures with ease. If you're flexible you'll have to stretch further into the pose to find your edge. The edge is a personal choice and only you can decide if you've found it or not.

Yoga is fun! While yoga can be serious and calm, it's also can be exciting and silly. When else would you ever twist your right arm under your left and wrap your one leg around the other? Pretzel poses are funny and it's OK to laugh and have a good time in my class. A little chuckle always makes me feel better.

Ongoing classes at the Santa Barbara YMCA are on Mondays from 3:30 to 4:30 pm. Classes at the Let It Go Studio in Goleta begin in January, 2008. For more information on Lauren's classes go to www.YogaByTeens.com or call 685-8079.

