

Tips given for knee-friendly yoga

Dear Joan,

I am recently taking up yoga again after a year-long hiatus (rough pregnancy), and for no apparent reason (except maybe age!) I'm really having trouble with my knees — I can't seem to cross them!

Even the simplest poses seem to cause a lot of pain in the inner part of my left knee — I could never do a pose like the cow you show this month. Can you give me some suggestions on how to ease back into things? I really miss the stretch I used to get in my hips — are there any "knee-friendly" poses?

Thanks! Sandy

Dear Sandy,

This is a perfect case for Iyengar! Iyengar-styled yoga uses props of various sorts, which are particularly helpful for those with injuries. The pose you refer to that was featured in the last Yoyoga issue involves the knees crossed on top of each other. This pose is a more advanced pose for knees and is not recommended for those with knee problems.

Standing poses help strengthen the tendons of the knees. It's important to align the legs so that the knees stay directly over the ankles. For those of us with weak ankles, the knees tend to sway in or out.

Do not hold the poses long. Hold the yoga pose for several comfortable breaths and then release. When your breath becomes strained or uneven, it's time to come out of the pose. This is a general observation to make in any yoga poses.

I would also recommend purchasing a copy of Iyengar's latest book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health." I was the U.S. consultant on this book. It is an excellent book, which thoroughly explores the use of props in the poses. Props, such as blocks and belts, can help to take strain off of joints and ligaments. Their use can help us relax into a pose. It's a gradual approach to deepening the physical approach to the poses. "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health" is an excellent reference book for home study and is sold in all major bookstores.

Joan

Hi Joan,

I was excited to find you and have someone to ask my question. I am a home yogi and have been loving yoga for about a year and would like to learn some modifications to help me work into doing a headstand. This is one of the few poses I can't seem to do. I do not want to use

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a wall since it defeats the purpose of strengthening the muscles needed. Besides, I don't have available wall space in the needed area.

I have watched several different tapes of this pose and getting in and out of it. One time I flipped over and rather scared myself. I really want to do this and meet the challenge. Do other people take a while before mastering headstand? What is the best way to achieve it?

Thank you! Ellen

Dear Ellen,

Headstand against the wall does not defeat the purpose of the pose. The muscles are still being strengthened. Using a wall simply helps in balance. It helps prevent injury. I'd highly recommend using the wall when beginning the study of headstand. Even though I have been doing this pose for years, I still often use the wall. On days when I am feeling off balance or tired, I find it comforting to know there's a wall behind me to prevent me from over-tuning.

Headstand is considered an advanced pose. I remember watching others go effortlessly up into headstand and thinking to myself that learning that pose would certainly be a key to deepening my yoga practice. I found it extremely difficult and I wondered if I would ever learn it. To prepare myself for headstand, I did the dolphin movement for many years. This is a movement that strengthens the arms and abdomen.

Dolphin Movement:

- 1) Downward dog on your elbows (Body forms a triangle with floor, elbows and soles of feet on floor. Hands clasped together on the floor, forming a "V" with elbows.)
- 2) Move your chin toward your wrists.
- 3) Lift back into elbow dog.
- 4) Repeat this back and forth movement — elbow dog, then chin to the wrists, gradually increasing repetitions.

After several years of doing the dolphin movement, one day I tried headstand and poof! I went up. It was very satisfying. I felt great, so I understand your feelings of wanting to master it.

I also want to encourage you that in due time it'll happen. You can still be a master yogi whether you go up into headstand against a wall or not. In fact, you can be a master yogi without going up into headstand at all! Perhaps though, you will have to go up into headstand to realize this.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Yoga poses can help relieve shin splints

Dear Joan,
I read with interest your discussion regarding the thumb. I was wondering if you know of a technique for reducing and preventing shin splints. My daughter, who is a runner and teacher, is constantly plagued by shin splints and cannot seem to resolve them.

Thank you so much, Donald

Dear Donald,

The main cause of shin splints is pronation of the foot. Pronation is a turning outward of the foot at the ankle. The tendency then is to walk on the inner border of the foot.

This puts undo strain on the muscles of the legs. Tiny tears in the muscles begin to develop to compensate for the imbalances.

Worn soles of shoes or poor construction of shoes can cause this condition. Excessive pounding, as in running on pavement, also can contribute.

You mention your daughter is a runner. Combine running with poor shoe construction and you have a strong foundation for shin splints.

The only way to heal this condition is to stop the pounding on the



pavement so the tears in the musculature can heal. I know how difficult it is to tell a runner to stop running, though.

Orthotics are often recommended for shin splints. This is a very good recommendation, as it will start to balance the weight distribution while standing on the feet. Because hatha yoga is about bringing the physical body into a balanced state, a regular yoga practice also can help this condition.

Tadasana, or mountain pose, is a good beginning point. It is an intimate study of how the body balances on the feet as we stand still.

Correcting imbalances through subtle and slight adjustments is what practicing this posture involves. This study can be done most effectively

through the assistance of a qualified yoga teacher.

Standing tall, relax your shoulders down away from your ears. Raise your sternum, the center bone in your rib cage. Soften your belly. Lift up on your kneecaps by slightly tensing the thigh muscles.

Stretch your toes from the base to the tips. Keep your arms close to your side. Keep your fingers together. Breathe steadily and evenly.

Now, do this all simultaneously. Notice how easy it is to lose attention in one area when you bring focus to a different area. There are so many parts of the body working together, yet also separately. This is the ultimate study in balance.

Tadasana is an important pose to base the foundation of your yoga practice on. Standing Forward Bends also can help you to bring more awareness into the knees that lift the muscles from the shins.

Tadasana and Standing Forward Bends are the only postures I would do until the leg musculature is more aligned. After alignment, I would recommend poses like Bridge and Bow to help strengthen the muscula-

ture of the legs. These poses do not involve the downward pressure of gravity on the legs the other standing poses require.

At the point of inflammation in shin splints, you want to relieve some gravitational pressure. Headstand, although an advanced pose, can help to relieve some of the constant gravitational pressure on the legs.

I can't go into the details of all of these poses in the limited space of this column. A personal yoga teacher can help guide you into all of these poses in ways most appropriate for your body.

So, wrapping it up, here are my suggestions: Tadasana, Forward Standing Bends, Bridge pose, Bow pose and Headstand. As your body becomes acclimated to these poses, more can be included.

I hope you'll find these suggestions useful, Donald. I wish you and your daughter a new year of healed splints.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Yo Joan addresses alignment problems

Dear Joan,
I'm relatively new to yoga; I've been doing Pilates for almost a year and yoga every day for the past month. I love it, and I'm in for life!

I've noticed that in postures such as the Triangle and the Gate, where I have my legs apart and straightened, I have a hard time finding the proper amount of tension in the knee of the extended leg(s).

I want to have a long, solid, extended leg with a nice amount of tension in the hamstring, but I find I can only go in one of two ways: either my knee remains

slightly bent or I am "collapsing" into the knee and that feels unsupported and unsafe. Any advice?

Many thanks!
Rachael

Dear Rachael,
My advice is to find an Iyengar teacher in your area to help you with this specific problem. Iyengar-styled yoga is very focused on alignment.

It sounds like you may be overextending in Triangle pose. You are bringing the upper body

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too far to the side. Only lean over to the degree that you can keep your legs straight. In Triangle pose, the legs are three feet apart. The upper body leans to the right as the left arm comes up to the sky. The right arm comes down toward the leg. The pose can also be done leaning in the opposite direction and reversing the movement of the arms.

A different yoga pose called Side Angle is a very good stretch that requires the knee to be bent. It also

helps develop the knees. In this pose, you will be able to stretch to the side more fully. This pose is the same as Triangle, except then when you lean to the side, you bend the knee you are leaning toward. The foot faces the same direction in which you are leaning.

Remember that yoga is a gradual process. It is not the degree of your stretch, but the quality of your movement that permits the body to unite with the soul. Yoga, after all, means union. Yours in peace, Joan

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Advice on yoga for the heart

Dear Joan,

Hi. I've been diagnosed with 'atrial fibrillation,' heart problems in plain English.

Do you know if there is any yoga one can do despite it? Of course I understand that it's not so wise doing challenging and upside down asanas — and I won't — but am I still allowed to move my body?

L

Dear L,

Atrial fibrillation is the irregular beating of the heart. Certainly, you can still move the body and this is a very good thing to do!

I would recommend slow movements that don't overtax the body. Athletic heart monitors do not register irregular beats well, so wearing one will not be of much value to you. However, getting to know your body better and learning to read its intimate signs will be of great value to you. This is why yoga is excellent for you.

According to BKS Iyengar's new book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health," Downward Facing Dog is a pose that stabilizes blood pressure and heart rate.

To do this pose, simply come to your hands and knees on the floor. Lift your knees off the floor and your

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tailbone to the sky. Your body forms a triangle to the floor. It's not necessary to hold the pose long at first. In time, you'll find it easier to hold it longer.

Downward Dog strengthens the heart and improves circulation. I wouldn't recommend full inversions such as headstand and shoulder stand because they can overtax your heart if it's not strong enough. But, Downward Dog is a partial inversion that with regular practice can bring about many, if not all, of the benefits that a full inversion can. The key is a steady practice.

Keep me posted on how your heart is doing as you continue to move and groove to the yoga beat.

Yours in peace, Joan

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Practice safe yoga with heart condition

Dear Joan,

I have a friend who recently started doing yoga with me. I've been practicing for about three years, but I am not a qualified teacher. Before we started I asked her if she had any health issues and she told me she had poor circulation due to mitral valve prolapse — a heart condition that her cardiologist has told her is very minor in her case.

She is becoming interested in inversions, but I have advised her to hold off for now until I find out more. I've read about both benefits and precautions for sirsasana (headstand) and sarvangasana (shoulderstand) for people with heart problems.

Her doctor has told her she should be fine, but to seek a second opinion from a qualified teacher.

On her behalf, I'd like to know your opinion of the effects and possible precautions of those postures on someone with heart and circulation problems. Of course, I understand there are issues of liability, so

I'd like to reiterate that I am taking the information you provide as only informed opinion, and not advice, and will not hold you liable for any outcome.

Thank you for your time.

Namaste, Matthew

Dear Matthew,

Mitral valve prolapse is not an uncommon condition. It affects about 20 percent of the population, a majority being women. The valves of the heart propel blood into the arteries of the body. When these valves don't function properly, they can cause circulation problems. Sometimes blood can slightly leak back into the heart causing a heart murmur that a doctor hears in a stethoscope. Even with this prolapse, the heart usually has enough blood to function properly and this condition does not get worse over time.

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I think you're wise to question your friend about her health problems and to be open and honest about your teaching abilities. As a friend, it certainly goes beyond liability issues, because you sincerely want your friend to be

healthy and not in any danger. I want this for your friend too, and I want you, my friend, to be confident in your care and concerns.

This mitral valve prolapse condition, of itself, does not warrant special treatment in yoga postures. The concern would be if this condition created other circulatory conditions. Some people have mitral valve prolapse their whole life and it doesn't affect their health in a negative way at all. Some people develop other heart conditions that would warrant special care.

Yours in peace, Joan

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Lifestyle

Joan shares tips on finding yoga classes

Dear Joan,

I am writing to request information regarding yoga classes offered in the area of Oak Brook, Elmhurst and Villa Park. My brother and I are encouraging our mother to explore yoga as an alternate form of exercise, relaxation and stretching. We would like to share the positive experience we have had with her. Ideally, we would like to find a studio with both individual and group classes. Your suggestions as to locations within the western suburbs would be valued.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Peter

Dear Peter,

There are just too many classes to mention here. Check out the Yoga

Chicago Newspaper on the Web and also available free in most health food stores. Be sure to speak to yoga instructors beforehand to determine how they teach.

There are many ways to teach yoga postures, some may be too demanding for your mother. Assure your mother that if one class or teacher is too difficult, a different class or teacher may be more appropriate.

Hi Joan!

I'm relatively new to yoga: I've been doing Pilates for almost a year and yoga every day for the past month. I love it, and I'm in for life!

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I've noticed that in postures such as the triangle and the gate, where I have my legs apart and straightened, I have a hard time finding the proper amount of tension in the knee of the extended leg(s). I want to have

a long, solid, extended leg with a nice amount of tension in the hamstring, but I find I can only go in one of two ways: either my knee remains slightly bent or I am "collapsing" into the knee, and that feels unsupported and unsafe. Any advice? Many thanks!

Rachael

Dear Rachael,

My advice is to find a yoga teacher trained in Iyengar yoga to help you with this specific problem. I could give you general suggestions, but I always think it is best to work under the direct supervision of an instructor. Let me say though, that it sounds like you may be overextending in triangle pose. You're bringing the upper body too far to the side. Only lean over to the degree that you can keep your legs straight. Remember that yoga is a gradual process. It's not the length of your stretch, but the quality of your movement.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Joan discusses moves for the sacral region

Dear Joan,

I read in "Anatomy of Hatha Yoga," older men often develop a condition where the sacroiliac joint becomes ankylosed (form a complete or partial bony union). Are there yoga postures to help this condition or is it too extreme so that there is no help for the problem, and therefore are there postures they should not do which may cause further difficulty and pain?

Darlene

Dear Darlene,

Downward Dog (hands and feet on floor, lift tailbone toward sky looks like and upside down V), Butterfly (seated, knees bent and falling out to the sides, holding soles

of feet together with hands), and assorted Spinal Twists help to increase flexibility to the sacral region (the lower spine). All of these poses should be practiced under the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher to ensure you are practicing them correctly. Once you understand the movements and the extension appropriate for your body, bring these postures into your daily home practice.

As we age, gravity, metabolic changes and reduced physical activity can also cause an increase in weight. Generally, men tend to gain weight in the abdominal region. This

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can cause an undo strain in the lower back. Keeping your weight at a balanced level can help structural imbalances in the sacral region.

Dear Joan,

I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for doing what you do. I bought the "Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" about a month ago and it has really opened my eyes to many new and wonderful things. Thank you.

On a completely unrelated note, how do you pronounce your last name? Is it Budda-luv-ski, Booty-love-ski?? When I meet people and

tell them about your work and I tell them your name, I am not quite sure how to pronounce it.

TJ

Dear TJ,

It's so funny that this question comes to me just as I've gotten married! My husband's name is Ben Kuzniar. Kuzniar is so much easier to say, right? However, I haven't changed my name, so there! There's various ways to pronounce my name. I like Buddha-LOVE-ski, accent on the LOVE the best.

Yours in peace,
Joan Budi-LOV-sky

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Lifestyle

Joan discusses ways yoga can help the spine

Dear Joan,
I bought your book fairly recently and I have been implementing the poses. I'm a 28-year-old male. My problem is my lower back. It doesn't seem like it has an arch. Is this normal? I have seen yoga videos in which it seems the lower back almost right up to the butt itself has an arch. I don't have that at all. I was curious as to the possibility of it ever having an arch via yoga.

Thanks ahead of time.
Al

Dear Al,
Yoga exercises (asanas) can help strengthen and flex the spine. A healthy and youthful body is connected to a healthy and youthful spine. In this way, it's not a matter of years that determines one's age but rather the health of one's spine. There are also considered energy centers along the spine. These energy centers are called chakras. If the spine is not functioning properly, it can affect the way energy moves in the body.

Because of different body types, it's not always possible to see the full curve of the spine. Our musculature,

our posture or our extra cushioning (fat) can hide the curve. Looking in the mirror does not always give us a true picture. I have no doubt medical conditions exist of no curve in the lower back. The vast majority of us, though, do have a curve there. Too much of a curve in the back or too little a curve in the back can create a backache. Our bodies are incredible works of art. They are created with utmost balance. The curve in the spine absorbs much of the downward pressure the spine takes when we walk. For one thing, this curve literally protects the spine from breaking.

Yes, yoga can help you develop a stronger back. It can help you develop a stronger arch to your back as well. Not necessarily a larger arch but an arch that supports the balance of your body.

Hello Joan,
How's married life so far? Once again, I wish you and your husband the best of luck and happiness. My

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question is about the neti pot, which you've suggested me using in the past. I've been able to finally find a comfortable position to use the pot; however, each time I blow my nose after using it, some of the water gets into my ear cavity. Any suggestion on how to prevent this? Many thanks in advance for your help.

Lulu

Dear Lulu,
My only advice is to slow down your practice. Neti pots are little pots created specifically for rinsing out the nasal passages. As you know, the nasal passages are delicate. Be gentle with the pot and the intensity of the water. The water should be

warmed but not hot. It should be of a light saline solution but not too much salt. The key word again is balance.

Do not force the movement of the water. For example, do not use the pot when you are rushing out to work in the morning or in a hurry before you rest at night. Instead, take your time. Make the cleansing of your nostrils an act in devotion. It might be helpful for you to keep a journal as well. This may make you more aware of your emotions and the intensity of your approach to the neti pot, as well as other parts of life.

Try these suggestions and then let me know how you're doing with the pot. And thank you, Lulu, for your continuing good wishes. All is well.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Joan describes nuances of spinal twist move

Good morning, Joan,
I have been doing the sun salutation for about a month now and feel that it invigorates my whole being. I love it. I repeat the motions four times.

Recently I added another exercise/asana. I can't remember the name of it, but a person extends one leg, bends the other over the extended leg, twists to the extended side and places an elbow on the bent knee while twisting to see behind. I hope I have described it correctly.

My problem is that now my spine hurts about two thirds of the way down my back and even to the touch. It didn't hurt when I did the exercise, only afterward. Do I continue to do it? I am not a flexible person. Even as a child I was not flexible. I could never sit in the lotus position. My knees won't go down without putting my left hip out. Do you have any suggestions to help with flexibility? I am 49 years of age. Is it possible to become flexible now at this late stage? Thank you for your time, Joan.

Barbara

Dear Barbara,

It's possible to become more flexible at any age. The twisting pose you describe is simply called a Spinal Twist. A regular practice of this pose increases the flexibility of the spine. You are probably doing something wrong for it to hurt you. Perhaps you're twisting too far or perhaps your spine is not properly aligned when you twist. Since I can't tell what exactly the problem is without seeing you do it, I'd suggest a new way of doing the pose. Try this pose lying

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flat on your back with your spine straight.

Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor. Your back remains straight on the floor.

Bring your palms together in front of your chest in a prayer

like position called "namaste." Straighten your arms out toward the sky, keeping your palms pressed together. Now, let your whole body fall to the right, your knees and your arms fall to the right. Your arms should be extended out in front of your eyes.

Bring your left arm over to the other side of your body while keeping your knees facing right. Your arms form a "T." Look toward your left arm.

You're now in a spinal twist supported by the floor, aided by gravity. It's gentler on your spine and reduces the upright pressure. After you have rested here comfortably for a number of breaths, twist your knees to the left side and let your head look to the right. Rest here for several comfortable breaths.

If you find that your backache continues, check with your doctor. Not all poses are for everybody. You may have just found one that is not right for you, or, you may have found one that is exactly right for you. You may simply need to realign the way you are doing it. I always advise students that if they are in pain to come out of the pose. You mention that the pain comes after practicing the pose and not during it. This makes me think that you're twisting improperly. I hope my suggestions on alignment and a way to reduce the upright pressure on the spine through the support of the floor will help.

Yours in peace,

Lifestyle

Trigger point therapy could locate cause of shoulder strain

Hello, Joan -

I have intermittent trouble with my hands falling asleep in shoulder stand after about three minutes, which is preventing me from increasing my duration in the pose. I don't have great circulation in my hands to begin with. When this happens, they get tingly and nearly numb, although I usually come down before finding out if they will go totally numb. The interesting thing is that this doesn't always happen, but it becomes something I fear will happen, so it always affects the pose. Am I pinching

something?

Dear Kristine,

You may certainly be pinching something. How about going for a shoulder and neck massage to find out exactly which muscle it may be? A qualified massage therapist will be able to pinpoint areas of muscle tension and through appropriate pressure and massage technique actually relax and release the tension. This type of massage is

Thanks,
Kristine

called trigger point therapy. Muscle tension in the body can create bundles of tension that actually forms what appears to the touch as little knots in the muscles. An experienced massage therapist is trained to locate these trigger points. These trig-

ger points can hide under many layers of muscles. A qualified therapist works through these layers to release these deep trigger points. Many people are not even aware that a chronic pain can have its basis in a trigger point. A massage therapist is also trained to provide you with stretches that you can do at home to continue to release muscle tension. In essence, a massage therapist can be a blessing to a pain in the neck.

As you know, yoga poses can also release muscle tension so you are indeed right to explore more closely how you are doing this pose. Do you use blankets when in shoulder stand? The blanket should be neatly folded under your shoulders so that your neck is resting off of it. The proper placement of a blanket

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can take pressure off the neck and release undo shoulder strain. A strain in the shoulder can cause problems in the arms and hands. You can find pictures to fully illustrate the correct placement of a blanket for shoulder stand in my latest book, "The

Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga, Illustrated Third Edition."

A combination of massage and the aid of a blanket can help alleviate stiffness associated with the yoga pose of shoulder stand. However, if this problem persists, a physician should be consulted. The cause of numbness in the arms and hands can be as seemingly simple as a muscular trigger point or as serious as a heart condition. Rule any serious concerns out by having a check up with your doctor. Rule out muscular concerns by adjusting your pose and seeing a qualified massage therapist.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Questions to Joan can be sent to her
Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Wide range of benefits are available for adults and children at yoga retreats

Dear Joan,

I wonder if you know of any yoga summer retreats for children as well as adults. I would like to go on a retreat with my son who is 6.

We are both keen to do more yoga but any retreat I know of caters just to adults. Ideally I would love something in Europe but would be grateful for any information.

Hope you can help and I look forward to hearing from you.

Very best wishes,
Mags

Dear Mags,

There is a European Yoga Festival in Fondjouan, Blois, France, Aug. 3-11. It includes a children's camp with yoga activities specifically aimed at children's needs.

More information is available at www.Yogafestival.org. This program features Kundalini Yoga, which is a style of yoga that includes an extensive focus on breath work.

There is also the option of attending a Yoga Ashram. I have vacationed at several where children have also attended with their families. Recently, I stayed for several days at the Sivananda Yoga Ashram in Paradise Island, Bahamas.

Several young couples had brought their children. It was a joy to see the children playing and having fun at the ashram. They were well treated by all and brought a special joy to the environment that only children can. They didn't attend the adult yoga classes, but they did have a lot of fun on the beach. There were some attendants who were willing to watch the children while the parents attended some of the classes. You would not be able to count on this though because many of the people

come to the ashrams particularly for these classes.

A letter to the ashram you'd be interested in attending might better answer some of your questions. The families that I met at the ashram were living in tents. The accommodations vary between tents, dorms and single rooms. Each has varying prices as well.

I think an ashram experience would be really wonderful for your child. It's a place for peaceful contemplation within an environment of beauty and simplicity. There are no phones or televisions. It's a place of vegetarian diets, proper exercise and wholesome living. There are many ashrams around the world. The ashrams I'm most experienced with are the Sivananda Ashrams at: www.sivananda.org

Yours in peace,
Joan

Letters to Joan can be sent to www.yoyoga.com.

Joan offers guide to learning ancient language of Sanskrit

Dear Joan,
I am reading the "Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" and I notice that you use many Sanskrit names that I am not familiar with. Can you recommend a book to increase my Sanskrit? Is there a dictionary or the like available?

Thanks for your help,
Nancy

Dear Nancy,
There are more and more people interested in learning the ancient sacred language of Sanskrit. Although my use of it is minimal, in our book, we tried to honor the origins of yoga by utilizing and giving pronunciations for many of the Sanskrit terms from which the ancient study of yoga originated.

Sanskrit is an ancient language that is no longer a common language. In fact, it was never really common, it was a language for the upper castes of India and also used in the sacred teachings of the monks. It is now much more open to study than it was thousands of years ago, yet the correct pronunciations in our American cul-

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ture are not easy to come by.

Some schools of yoga use the Sanskrit terms of the postures exclusively. The Iyengar School of yoga training is one school that does this. I have several of their audio-

tapes that help with pronunciation of the postures.

Pronunciations can vary significantly because India consists of many languages and dialects. India has an intriguing reputation of a wide assortment of dialects and accents that can certainly influence the Sanskrit interpretations.

In addition to the knowledge of Sanskrit gained through experienced yoga teachers, there's also the American Sanskrit Institute. It offers fantastic home study courses. More information on this Institute is available at www.americansanskrit.com

Shanti = Peace

Namaste = Honoring the light within

Yours in peace,

Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky may be sent via her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Joan explains different approaches to yoga

Dear Joan,
I'm confused about the different types of yoga. There seem to be so many and it's hard to figure out which to study. How can they all be so different? I've gone to several different yoga classes and feel like I'm studying totally different things in each class. Could you help me figure this out?

Sincerely,
Cheryl

Dear Cheryl,
I completely understand your confusion. I'd probably confuse you more by naming the many different approaches to yoga.

Let's start with the word, "yoga." Yoga means, "to come together" or "yoking." Its spiritual application refers back to the ancient Indian literature of the Taittiriya-Upanishad of the second millennium BCE.

Nowadays, when people refer to yoga, they usually refer to the physical postures. This most often comes under the study of "Hatha Yoga." Hatha Yoga involves liberation of the physical body. Through this liberation one develops deeper self-awareness. Even though

some of the yoga postures may appear quite challenging and difficult, the study of Hatha Yoga is non-competitive.

In recent times, there have been a number of teachers who've created specific styles to the study of the postures.

Although their styles may be unique and novel, their approaches fall under the study of Hatha Yoga. For example, "Bikram Yoga," "Iyengar Yoga" and "Forrest Yoga" refer to the yoga teachers. Mr. Bikram, Mr. Iyengar and Ms. Forrest all have created approaches to the study of the Hatha Yoga postures that have their individual stamp of personality and style.

Every teacher brings to class his or her unique style. Even though your teacher may not be famous, you'll have a version of Jean's yoga, Tom's yoga or Jody's yoga. As with friends, one teacher may influence you more than another. Yoga is traditionally handed down from teacher to student. A master would orally hand the teaching down to a disciple

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who would eventually become a master and hand the teachings down to his/her disciple, and so the tradition goes. If you've ever played the game of whispering a secret in a circle and then heard how the secret changed by the time it reached

the 10th person, you'd understand how time and speech could alter teachings. This is why it's important to also study the ancient texts of yoga, "The Upanishads," "The Bhagavad Gita," "The Sutras," etc. In yoga philosophy, this is called, "Svadhyaya," which is the study of sacred texts.

As you continue your yoga studies,

ask yourself these questions:

- Is my study of yoga deepening my understanding of the relationship between mind and body?
- Is my study of yoga deepening my sensitivity to all sentient life?
- Is my study of yoga creating more peace in my life?

These are questions to help you find the right teachers along the way. Teachers who'll challenge you on many levels, not only the physical level.

This is the path of yoga.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Joan addresses 'best' times to practice yoga

When is the best time to practice yoga? I regularly get asked this question. Let me start by saying that perhaps it's best to practice in the morning when the body is first awakening. For those of us who've basked in the beauty of a posture as the sun climbs into a new day, the preciousness of a morning practice is evident.

Yet, perhaps it's better to practice during the afternoon, when daily movements have already warmed the body. How gladly the body moves after it's been heated by gestures and gait. Still, it might be even better to practice in the evening, to exhale the stresses of the day into a more restful sleep.

Actually, any time of day or night can reap the benefits of a yoga practice. Yet, before you figure out an answer to the best time of day to practice yoga, let's explore more closely what your yoga

practice is.

Most people consider yoga to be the practice of the physical postures. The human body is a vehicle in our journey through life, but it does not comprise the totality of who or what we are. The mind is also an essential component to our physical well-being. According to the "Sutras of Patanjali" — a yoga text originating out of India and written several hundred years B.C. — yoga is defined as "the cessation of the constant fluctuations of the mind." There are eight "limbs" to the study of this yoga. This eight-limb study is referred to as ashtanga yoga. The eight limbs consist of:

1. Yama (abstentions)

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- 2. Niyama (observations)
- 3. Asana (postures)
- 4. Pranayama (breath control)
- 5. Pratyahara (detachment)
- 6. Dharana (concentration)
- 7. Dhyana (meditation)

8. Samadhi (pure consciousness)

According to Patanjali, the practice of asana, or yoga postures, helps a person to weather external difficulties (such as aging, climate, stress, etc.) with grace and ease. Yet, asana is only one limb of eight. The other seven limbs are also essential to the practice of yoga.

The yamas and niyamas are subcategorized further. The yamas consist of the practices of:

- Ahimsa (non-violence)
- Satya (truthfulness)
- Asteya (non-stealing)
- Brahmacharya (non-lusting)
- Aparigraha (non-hoarding)

The Niyamas consist of the practices of:

- Saucha (purity)
- Santosha (contentment)

- Tapas (discipline)
- Svadhyaya (self-study)
- Ishvara-Pranidhana (devotion)

Let's look at the first yama of non-violence. Does your yoga practice involve this? Are you competitive in your movements? Do you judge how far you move by berating yourself or another for not moving further? We live in a competitive society. Success is often valued in outward manifestations: the number of degrees, the number of cars, the number of yoga postures.

When yoga is defined as the cessation in the movements of consciousness, we come to the realization that less is more. Each of the limbs requires a deep inward glance into removing the veils of illusions as to whom we really, really are.

So, what is your yoga practice? As you continue to develop your practice, each hour of the day and night becomes ever more meaningful.

Yours in Peace,
Joan

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Lifestyle

Yoga can help fight depression in many ways

Hi Joan,
I am wondering if you think whether it is possible to heal depression through yoga.

When I read about the truth within the path and how you can meditate and realize that we are all united and all one and that our thinking is really what creates the illusion of the so called "reality," which if it is wrongly focused creates disease (note the word dis-ease), then it becomes clear that even depression can be healed.

However, doctors say that there is a chemical in the brain that when out of balance causes the sickness. What are your thoughts?

Claudia

Dear Claudia,

I think both avenues have something to them. Depression can certainly be a chemical imbalance and may progress to the point where medication is necessary. However, it is still important to try to discover if there is an emotional source of your pain.

Kahil Gibran said it so well, "Your

pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding." What is your depression saying to you? Is your love life in a crisis? Is your work troubling you? Are hurtful past memories disturbing you?

Even knowing the answers to these questions does not necessarily solve the depression. There are many more questions. Each question leads to another. Curing emotional depression often requires deep introspection, the kind many of us are not willing to do. It's so much easier to flip on the television and zone out into complacency. Yet, even television is only a Band-Aid when it comes to depression. It may give temporary relief but when the telly is turned off, the blues turn back on.

Hatha yoga is the study of the physical body as a means to a more peaceful life. It's a form of natural healing.

Here is a simple study to demonstrate how your physical body can

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affect your mood. Hunch your back and round your shoulders. Notice your emotions as you do this. Now, bring your shoulders in line with your ears and down away from your neck. Open your chest. Bring

your chin parallel with the ground. Unclench your teeth. Notice your emotions now. Simple movements like this can affect your mood.

Many of us are not aware how deeply the simple ways we hold the body affects us. The study of the yoga postures increases our awareness to our movements, making us more aware of our individual flexibilities and strengths. The length of time we hold yoga postures helps remind us of the vast possibilities within us.

Each posture is balanced with another. For example, a forward bend is balanced with a backward bend. This balancing adjusts every aspect of our being — bodymind. The mind engages with body as it focuses on

the breath. Clearing and balancing the bodymind through yoga postures releases mental and physical phlegm. Holding a yoga posture opens the breath as it opens the spine, but it doesn't stop there; it also opens the heart and opens the mind.

An additional difficulty in uncovering the source of depression is the inactivity that goes along with the blues. How are you going to get to the source of your depression if you can't even get out of bed? Taking a yoga class can help to motivate you to get physical. At home, you may find that doing even one breathing exercise is exhausting. A yoga class can help motivate you to stick with an important balancing exercise that you might have given up on at home.

In this column, I touched on some of the ways yoga can help in depression. In the next column this month, I will give some specific yoga exercises to try.

Yours in peace,
Joan Budilovsky

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Joan offers ways yoga can help fight depression

In the last column, a reader wrote in with questions about how yoga can help heal depression. This column I have some additional tips.

Yoga is one way to get to the root of depression, but there are other ways as well. The physical yoga postures help to clear the mind and focus the attention. When one is depressed though, it's much easier to say "Get moving" than to actually get up and get moving. A feeling of listlessness usually accompanies depression, which makes movement in itself a difficult venture. Here are five tips to help you get to the root of your depression and into a deeper, more joyful creative awareness:

- Try slow steady postures (vinyasana) and deep breathing exercises (pranayama) to activate the body's healing metabolisms in ways that are calming and not jarring.
- Listen to relaxing music or mantra to aid the body into peace.
- As difficult emotions or past experiences surface, write them down. Share your writings with a trusted friend or counselor who will not judge you but who will listen to you.
- Schedule weekly massages to remind yourself that you are worthy of

human touch. If massages are too expensive for your pocketbook, check with your local massage school. Schools often offer less expensive massages by students through their massage clinics.

- Turn to sacred literature to ease the burden of answering the problems of human existence alone. Ponder on the difficult questions raised in the many stories of great literature through the centuries. For example, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra 1.33, written several thousand years BC, gives significant guidance in working with depression: "In daily life we see people around who are happier than we are, people who are less happy. Some may be doing praiseworthy things and others causing problems. Whatever may be our usual attitude toward such people and their actions, if we can be pleased with others who are happier than ourselves, compassionate toward those who are unhappy, joyful with those doing praiseworthy things and remain undisturbed by the errors of others, our mind will be very tranquil."

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At the end of the day, review your experiences with others using this simple sutra. Did you have an encounter today with someone who was unhappy? Were you compassionate toward them? Did someone make a mis-

take today in how they dealt with you? Were you undisturbed by their error?

Did you experience or see someone today in an act of kindness or great joy and did you let your heart sing with theirs?

Wishing you and yours a journey of ever-increasing joy.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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Lifestyle

'Tis the season to uncover hidden blessings

It is the season of Thanksgiving and I want to thank each one of you for being a part of this Yo Joan column through your readership and your letters.

Each one of us has so much to be thankful for. If you think not, try uncovering the hidden blessings that exist even amid the difficulties in your life. Blessings are there if you search hard enough. To demonstrate, I have enclosed a thank you letter I recently wrote. Perhaps it might inspire you to write your own note to the

company you keep.
Happy Thanksgiving to all.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Dear Phone Company,
It was a hassle waiting for your company to repair our phone lines. We'd been without phone service in our house for three days. I had lots of work to

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finish at the office, yet I had to wait many hours at home for your phone repair service to arrive. I know your time is valuable, but please permit me to take just a moment of it now to tell you what happened with my time that day.

Annoyed with the situation, I sat down to read the paper. Suddenly upstairs, I heard a loud yelp. I hurried up the stairs to find my one cat under the bed and the other staring at him from across the room. Obviously, they had gotten into a little tussle, but the situation now appeared calm, so I retreated to my cozy chair and newspaper.

As I perused the troubles overseas, one of my cats limped over to the couch across from me. Why was he limping? I came closer. He was breathing very heavy. His one front paw hung loosely. It looked like he'd broken his leg. Cats are incredibly agile. I never thought about either cat breaking anything in their bodies, they were too busy breaking things outside of their bodies. Cats have such wonderful ways of reminding us to be less materialistic.

I immediately called my vet who referred me to a closer vet. Eventually I found someone who could help. As I was on the phone making these calls, I saw the phone repairman outside. I never got a chance to speak to him, but he obviously fixed the phone problem, well, because there I was on the phone making numerous emergency calls. Eventually, I got my cat the help he needed. It turned out not to be a broken paw, but an even more serious heart problem that needed immediate attention.

As irritated as I originally was with your phone company for keeping me from going into the office that day, I realize now my presence at home helped my cat in receiving the important medical attention he needed. Yes, even irritations can be blessings in disguise. In fact, my husband often tells me to be grateful when my buttons are pushed because my irritable responses simply demonstrate what I need to work on — qualities I need to develop within myself to transcend my ego and deepen my compassion.

So, thank you dear Phone Company. Because of your services, and lack of services, you helped to save my cat's life.

Sincerely,
Joan Budilovsky