

Yoga for Men

Get Out of the Gym and Onto the Mat

by Anna Cipollone

Though modern yoga remains a female-dominated practice, more and more men are beginning to carve out their very own yogic niche. Many studios now offer athlete-friendly daily doses of yoga, with specialized classes aimed at encouraging men to explore the practice. While ancient yoga was exclusively male, it's about time more men discovered its long list of feel-good attributes.

Though beginner students require patience and perseverance, it doesn't take long to reap the benefits. Most men find postures particularly demanding due to their limited flexibility but stick it out in favour of opening and balancing all of their body's tissues. Even after your first session, you may feel frustrated by your limits but you'll be more aware of your posture, more calm and more comfortable in your own skin.

Yoga restores energy

levels, increases circulatory flow and strengthens and stretches muscles for a complete mind body exercise.

In vinyasa yoga, we link our movement with our breath. This action creates mind-body integration, making us more in tune with our physical rhythms and thought processes. It also offers men an outlet for aggression and a way to cope with stress. A regular yoga practice can even support other physical activities like developing breath retention in swimming, coordination in golf, and stamina in long-distance running.

As a tool to calm the nervous system, men who practice yogic breathing techniques have less trouble concentrating and are better equipped to face pressure head on. Yoga's philosophical teachings advise us to create an understanding of our own patterns in order to affect change in our lives. Giving

men a personal practice instead of the standard competitive opposition provides the space for self-reflection, goal setting, and building confidence. Helping you to push through personal boundaries, yoga also develops leadership skills and increases both physical and mental flexibility.

While sports and weight lifting keep the body in peak physical form, many styles of exercise leave tissues rigid and stiff. Yin yoga slowly stretches the body with long-held postures that demand determination, releasing tension therapeutically over several minutes. Many men gravitate toward this type of yoga, finding the simplicity of the poses and the depth of the holds to be more approachable for their tense builds. Over the past few years, yoga classes tailored to men and athletes have continued to pop up across the Greater Toronto Area. ■



If you're looking to try yoga for size, here are a few places to consider:

- > Yoga for Stiff Men at **Breathe Yoga Studio**
- > Jock Yoga at **Moksha Yoga Uptown**
- > Spynga Flow at **Spynga: The Yoga & Cycling Studio**
- > Athlete Flow at **889 Yonge**
- > Yoga for Runners at **Roots Yoga Studio**

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