

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Physical Education Unit

Required/Elective PE Course

YOGA



Yoga was developed in India thousands of years ago. Yoga aims at integrating every aspect of your body, mind and spirit. Yoga is a disciplined adventure of self-discovery. The name of yoga means ‘Union’. When people hear the term ‘yoga’, they may relate to physical exercises known as “asana”. The goals and benefits of yoga practices are to achieve inner peace, good health, a flexible body and decreased stress levels.

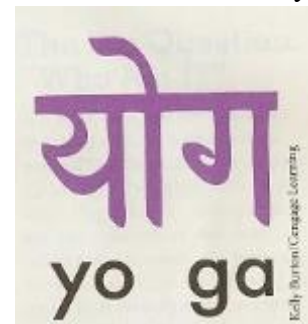
Asana and pranayama (breathing exercises) are the two main techniques of yoga. By gaining control of the physical, you begin to control the vital energy (prana) in your body. Through practicing yoga, you endeavour to purify your body, to strengthen your mind and guide your emotions into positive channels.

(A) WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga has been evolving and changing throughout its history.

The term yoga is derived from the literal meaning of "yoking together". The Sanskrit word *Yoga* derives from the root, “yuj”, to yoke or join together. Yoga is commonly translated to mean “union”. In many Yoga traditions, the “union” referred to is that of your individual self with your universal self. This bigger self is sometimes called your “spiritual self”, your “true self”, or your “soul”.

The Sanskrit words that connote this union are *jīva-ātman* (living self, individuated self), which unites with *parama-ātman* (supreme self).



“Yoga” written in Sanskrit script

I. Development of Modern Yoga

Yoga originated in northern India more than 5000 years ago. Archaeologists have found statuettes of men in yoga poses that are estimated to be 5000 years old. Yoga was developed by the ancient sages of India, it was not written down for many thousands of years, but instead passed down from teacher to student. Approximately 2000 years ago, a philosopher named Patanjali began to organize and write down the principles of yoga. Patanjali’s collection of yoga’s principles is known as ‘Yoga Sutras’. Many people consider Patanjali to be the ‘Father of Yoga’.

Along with the conflicts developed in Tantra Yoga has led the development of a simplified version, and exercise-oriented system of Yoga – Hatha Yoga developed. In the last sixty years, many yogis have further simplified Hatha yoga to a system of from fifty to about two hundred asanas and around four to eight breath control practices.

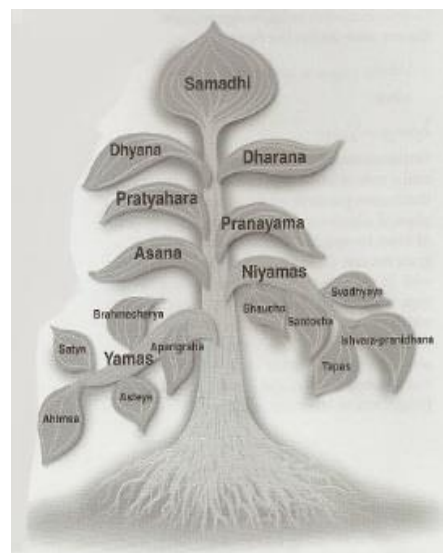
Nowadays, different styles of yoga have been developed, as Hatha Yoga, Bikram Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga etc. are popular. Although there are different styles of yoga, there is no good and bad. We should choose the yoga practice that suit us according to individual needs, and should not blindly follow the trend.

II. The Eight Limbs of Yoga

Patanjali divided the practices of yoga into eight categories, each category focusing on a particular of spiritual evolution.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

<i>Yama</i>	- guidelines for ethical standards and moral conduct
<i>Niyamas</i>	- character building observances and discipline
<i>Asana</i>	- yoga postures to balance the energy in the body
<i>Pranayama</i>	- special breathing techniques used to control the life force, or energy, in the body
<i>Pratyahara</i>	- practices that generate a mindful sense of introversion
<i>Dharana</i>	- concentration techniques
<i>Dhyana</i>	- meditation
<i>Samadhi</i>	- recognition and absorption of infinite nature through extended meditation



“.....the eight limbs of yoga as being a part of the great tree of yoga. Each limb connects to the trunk of the tree. Yoga is grounded and nurtured by its roots.”

(by Kappmeier & Ambrosini, 2006)

(B) PRACTICING YOGA

I. Benefits of Practicing Yoga

(a) Physical benefits

Yoga practices help to increase the flexibility of the various joints of the body. The asana lengthen and release tensions from your muscles and stimulate the lubrication of the ligaments and tendons while massaging your internal organs. In addition, by gently stretching muscles and joints as well as massaging the various organs, yoga ensures that an optimum blood supply reaches to all parts of your body. Breathing exercises can help to control mood swings while

developing the ability to stay calm in stressful situations.

(b) Psychological benefits

Regular yoga practices enhances mental clarity and calmness, increases bodily awareness, relieves chronic stress patterns, helps you to relax the mind and centers your attention and sharpens concentration.

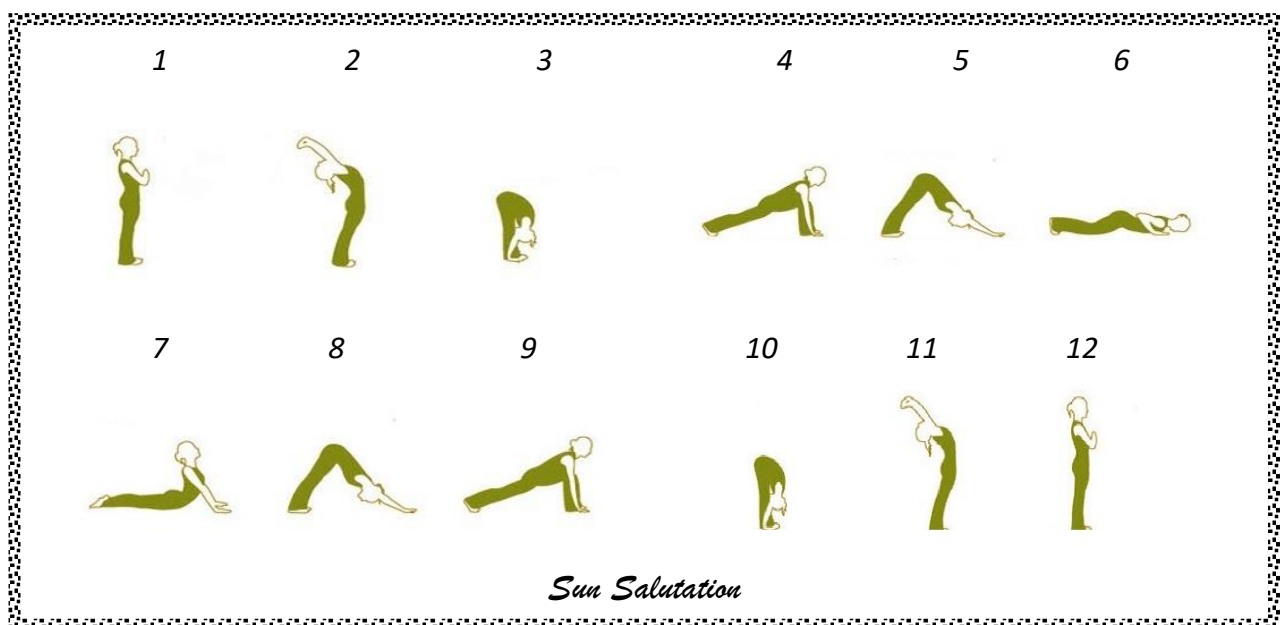
(c) Spiritual benefits

Yoga practice accelerates spiritual progress and one will be more aware of the ethical behavior. The yamas and niyamas form the foundation of yoga. Anyone who lives with and practices these values will find their behavior and thoughts beginning to change. The yamas and niyamas offer a way to live with deeper consciousness, integrity and joy.

II. Asana

(a) Name of Asanas

- (1) Basic Asanas (Appendix)
- (2) Sun Salutation



(b) Sequencing of Asana

A well-conceived sequence is the key to an effective practice. Such a sequence has the qualities of order, harmony, and efficiency throughout, each posture and adaptation being selected and placed purposefully to create an integrated whole.

General Principles for Designing an Asana Sequence

1. **Intention** - set a goal for your practice.
2. **Efficiency** - limit the number of postures and adaptations. Too many postures can dilute the effect of the practice.
3. **Breath** - use the breath to link your intention to the spine and to move the spine.

4. **Transition** - try to make the transitions smooth
5. **Cumulative stress** - use appropriate compensation for stresses that accumulate in the neck, shoulders, hips and knees.
6. **Risk** - usually riskier postures are placed toward the end of the practice, followed by simple counterposes to leave the body in neutral condition.
7. **Rest** - the position in which you rest should be one in which you feel relaxed and supported without residual stress. A longer rest at the end of the practice is important in order to both absorb more fully the deeper effects of the practice and to make a transition to the next activity.
8. Move from simple to complex.
9. Move from dynamic to static.

III. Pranayama (Breathing Practice)

Yogic breathing exercises are called “*pranayama*”. The translation of the Sanskrit word is ‘control of the prana’. Prana is the vital energy or life force that is known in Chinese as ‘chi’. Pranayama enables you to cleanse and strengthen your physical body while calming your mind.



Breathing Practice (Examples)	Special features
Dirgha breathing (Full yogic breathing / Complete yoga breath / 3 Dimensional Breath / Belly breathing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - long, slow, deep breaths bringing the breath into the 3 separate regions of the lungs - diaphragm muscle contracts and moves downward, causing air to enter the lungs and displacing the contents of the abdomen - this pushes the abdomen out and is often referred to as “belly breathing”
Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing / Channel Purifying Breath)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pranayama through one nostril at a time, retain the breath, and exhale through the other nostril. Alternating right and left - there are many variations of this breath, especially as it concerns the relative length of the four parts of the breath: inhale, inhale retention, exhale and exhale retention
Ujjayi Pranayama (Ocean Sounding Breath)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - taking long, slow deep breaths while slightly contracting the back of the throat in the area of the glottis - creates a hissing sound in the back of the throat that sounds like the rising and falling of the ocean waves - a meditative and soothing Pranayama

IV. Meditation

Meditation is the ultimate form of yoga practice and integral part of the entire path of discovering, loving, healing and transforming the totality of one's being. Meditation helps us to achieve a sense of relaxation and balance, bring a greater feeling of self-control and concentration and it also opens the windows of the mind to clearer consciousness.

(a) 3 Steps in Meditation

1. Still the Body
2. Still the Breath
3. Still the Mind

(b) Basic Meditation Techniques

- Breath
- Mantra
- Counting
- Chakras
- Light
- Mala

CAUTIONS *for meditation practice, if you are:*

- *taking prescription medications for mood disorders, or having medical conditions such as depression, consult a physician before beginning a meditation practice;*
- *influenced by recreational drugs, don't practice;*
*** Don't meditate for more than one hour per day unless instructed to do so by an expert instructor.*

V. Yoga Lifestyle

Yoga is not just about stretching on the mat, but how to get along with family, friends and relatives; how yoga is getting along with you, getting along with the moment and getting along with your life. If we want to achieve spiritual health, we must first have a strong body as a platform to lead us to explore life and find true self.

1. **Proper exercise** – Asanas rejuvenate the whole body
2. **Proper breathing** – Pranayama stimulates the energy reserves of the solar plexus, revitalizing body and mind.
3. **Proper diet** – choose foods with positive effect on body and mind, and least negative effects on the environment and other creatures.
4. **Proper relaxation** – Deep relaxation on physical, mental, and spiritual, can re-energize body and mind.
5. **Positive thinking and meditation** – are the yogic keys to peace of mind. Meditation techniques calm the mind and enhance focus.

**** The law of karma** – *everything happens for a reason and that every action has a reaction. i.e. a negative thought attracts a negative reaction and a positive thought attracts a positive one.*

VI. Yoga Injuries and Prevention

Common sites of injury in yoga are knees (inner knees), hamstrings tendons, lower back, neck and sacrum (sacroiliac joints). The major reasons are Misalignments or overzealous attempts to force your way into poses. Poses like, hero pose, lotus Pose, straight leg forward bend poses etc. are high risk poses. Therefore, stop go deeper and back off if you feel pressure or pain on your joints. Don't force yourself into the pose that you feel pressure.

To avoid injuries, try to do some modified poses instead of the full poses, e.g. doing modified standing forward bend instead of standing forward bend or using yoga props to help and support. Approaching to the pose gradually, and strengthening the muscle by practicing the relevant poses more are also help.

Use of Yoga Props

Props are useful when the capacity for movement is restricted due to structural limitations, and it helps to find stability and ease, so as to reduce the risk of injuries. *Yoga Props commonly used:* yoga mat, blankets, yoga strap, blocks, bolsters, eye bag, chair, wall etc.



References

1. Aldous S. H. (2004). Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries. Canada: Functional Synergy Press.
2. Dykema, R. (2011). Yoga for Fitness and Wellness. USA, Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
3. Kraftsow, G. (1999). Yoga for Wellness: Healing with the Timeless Teachings of Viniyoga. NY: Penguin Putnam Inc.
4. Kripalu School of Yoga (2010). Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training Manual. USA, Stockbridge: Kripalu School of Yoga.
5. Sean and Karen Conley (2010). Amazing Yoga : A Practical Guide to Strength, Wellness, and Spirit. Pittsburgh, PA: Westwood Books.
6. Stephens, M. (2012). Yoga Sequencing. Designing Transformative Yoga Classes. CA, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
7. Swan, L. T. (2012). Yoga-- philosophy for everyone: bending mind and Body. Chichester West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
8. Swami, S. (2011). Amazing yoga. London : Flash.

Websites:

Kripalu <http://kripalu.org/>
Yoga Journal <http://www.yoga-journal.com/>
Yogawiz <http://www.yogawiz.com/>