

Quick Tips for Safe Yoga Practice

Feel free to refer to this sheet before any yoga session, especially flow / vinyasa or vigorous styles.

1. Get the right starting point

- Talk with a health professional before starting yoga if you have heart or lung disease, uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma, recent surgery, significant joint problems, or are pregnant.^{[1][2][3][4]}
- Choose a class or video labeled beginner, gentle, or level 1–2 if you're new, returning after a break, or have pain or mobility limits.^{[2][5][1]}
- Avoid advanced poses (deep backbends, strong twists, arm balances, headstand/handstand) until you have a solid base of strength and mobility and, ideally, in-person guidance.^{[4][1][2]}

2. Warm up before you go deeper

- Spend 3–5 minutes on gentle movement (e.g., cat–cow, easy lunges, slow sun salutations) before deeper stretches or strong standing poses.^{[6][7][8]}
- Cold muscles and joints are easier to strain; a brief warm-up lowers injury risk and improves comfort.^{[2][9]}

3. Move smoothly—no bouncing

- Do not do ballistic (bouncy) stretching. This means bouncing or jerking at the end of a stretch to force extra range.^{[10][11][12]}
- Health and sports organizations advise against ballistic stretching for general exercisers because it can increase muscle and tendon strain risk.^{[11][12][13][10]}
- Instead, use:
 - Static stretching: ease into a position and hold it, breathing calmly.
 - Controlled dynamic movement: flow in and out of poses smoothly, without snapping or pulsing at end range.^{[2][14][11]}

4. Listen to your body's "red flags"

- Yoga should feel like manageable effort or stretch, not pain. Stop or modify if you feel sharp, stabbing, pinching, or "electric" sensations in joints, back, or neck.^{[1][2][15]}
- Always be mindful of your body's anatomical limits. Even during higher intensity yoga classes or videos, you should never push beyond skeletal structure, and you should always be mindful of your range of motion limits.^[6]
- End the session and seek medical care if you develop chest pain, severe shortness of breath, sudden dizziness, or new weakness or numbness.^{[2][9][1]}
- Mild muscle soreness after practice is common; pain that worsens, lingers, or limits daily activities is a sign to back off and get advice.^{[16][2]}

5. Protect your joints with alignment and props

- Keep knees roughly over ankles in standing poses (like Warrior or Chair) and avoid letting them collapse inward to protect knees.^[17]
- In weight-bearing poses on hands (Plank, Downward Dog), spread fingers, press through the whole hand, and avoid sinking into the wrists and shoulders.^{[17][18]}
- Use blocks, straps, a wall, or a chair to bring the floor closer, reduce strain, and support balance—props are a safety tool, not a sign of weakness.^{[6][19][20]}

6. Pace and breathing as safety tools

- Move at a pace that allows you to breathe steadily through your nose most of the time; choppy breath or breath-holding means you're pushing too hard.^{[6][7]}
- In vigorous or flow classes, it's fine to skip poses or rest in Child's Pose at any time; overexertion and fatigue are common contributors to yoga injuries.^{[2][16][19]}

7. Know when to modify or skip

- Consider modifying or skipping deep forward folds, strong twists, or full inversions if you have osteoporosis, significant disc disease, glaucoma, uncontrolled hypertension, or are pregnant—get individualized guidance.^{[1][2][3][4]}
- If a teacher or video cues something that doesn't feel right in your body, choose a gentler version instead. Respecting your limits is a core part of safe practice.^{[2][15][1]}

References

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