

YOGA FOR ARTISTS



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED
BY CYN NARCISI

Visual artists such as illustrators and comic book artists spend most of their day sitting at their drawing boards. It's the only way to get the job done. It can often be a sedentary lifestyle resulting in stress and strain on the body. Unsupportive chairs, desks that aren't adjusted properly to the artists height, or poor posture while sitting can contribute to a whole lot of discomfort over time.

**OW! OW! OW! IS
THERE ANY PART
OF ME THAT
DOESN'T HURT??**



EMPTY IBUPROFEN BOTTLE
NOW A CAT TOY-->

Most artists just get used to dealing with the pain, even if it lasts a lifetime, which it often does.

While working, artists tend to sit or stand in awkward positions. The shoulders like to roll inward when we're drawing, which pulls on the trapezius and rhomboids. Over time, this can also shorten the pectoralis major, decreasing flexibility in the shoulders, chest, neck, and upper back. This poor posture can also create other problems. Ow.

- It can weaken the abs and lower back, especially without some kind of daily exercise.

- Sitting puts 4 times more pressure on the spine than standing which could even contribute to premature degeneration of the spinal discs. Not good.



- Prolonged sitting can shorten the hamstrings and quadriceps as well as the hip flexors. When the psoas (hip flexors) becomes tight, it can noticeably decrease the range of motions in the hips and thighs.

- It can shorten the IT bands, which will put strain on the hips and knees too.

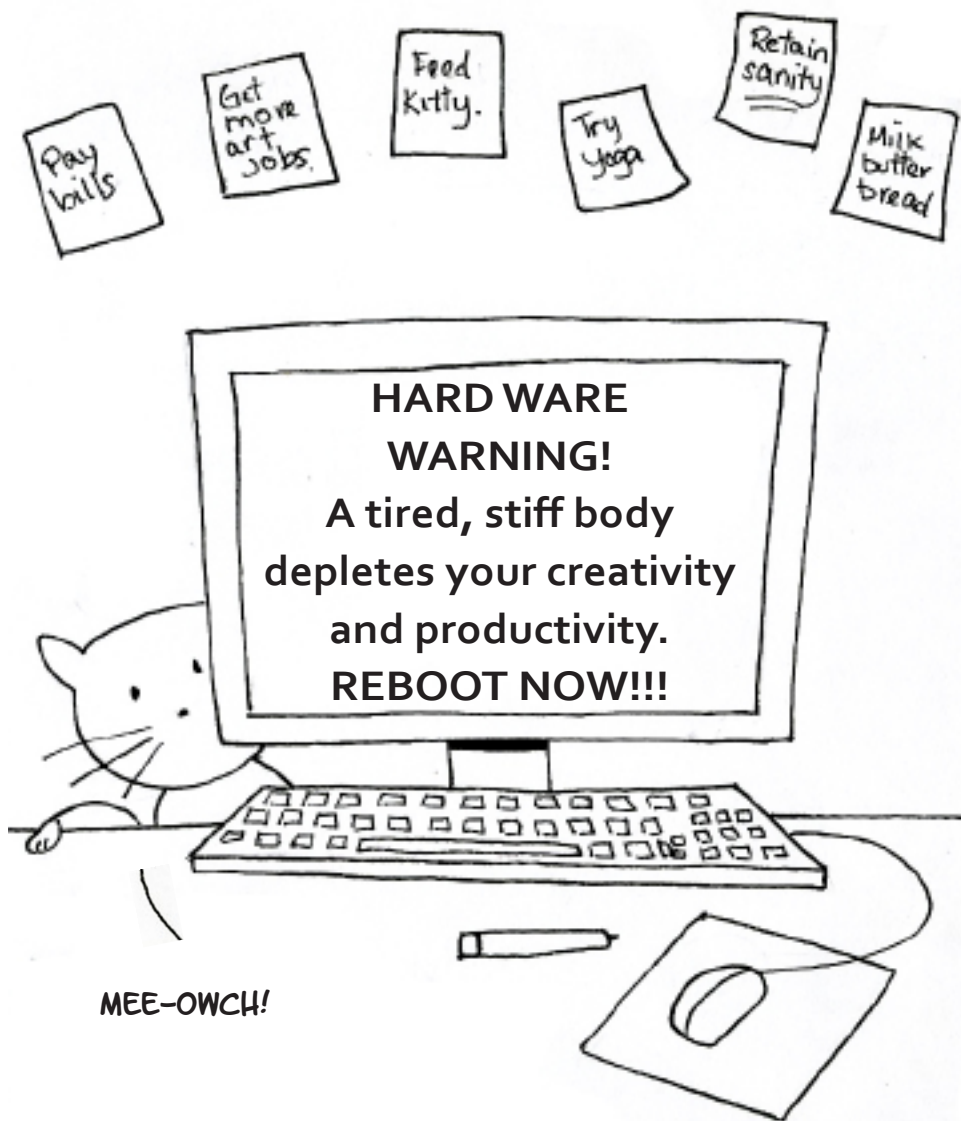
- It can also possibly result in reduced lung capacity, digestive problems, and increased fatigue due to weakened blood flow (one possible reason artists tend to feel really tired after drawing all day).

And as if ALL THAT wasn't bad enough....



What's an artist to do?

Every day, more and more artists add digital art to their creative arsenal. Great for their careers but not so great for their bodies. ALL the extra sitting compounds existing aches and pains, and will almost certainly create some new ones. Without taking time to counter stretch all the sitting, slouching, and slumping, the body becomes tight and imbalanced.



Real Quotes From Real Artists with Real Pains

The most common discomfort is the mid to lower back. Sometimes the neck aches. And my butt doesn't feel so good when I sit for longer than a couple hours. My middle finger that helps me draw often hurts after a extended periods of time while drawing as well.

-Lak Lim

www.lakcoo2u.deviantart.com/

I can get a stiff neck/trap area which causes shooting pains behind the ear from drawing too long. Have to pop some advil when that happens.

-Craig Yeoung

www.csyueng.deviantart.com/

My wrist pretty much always hurts or feels like it needs to be popped. When I sit too long, my tailbone kills me.

-Dane Ault

www.monkeyminionpress.com

Carpel tunnel, mid back pain/burning between my shoulderblades....and knee pain from sitting too long.

-Jim Kyle

Upper back and neck pain, especially if I don't take the time to get out of the chair once in a while, probably because I hunch when painting. In the past year, that hunch is becoming stubborn. Making the effort to stretch several times a day seems to help. Occasionally, really long hours seem to trigger ocular migraines, but I don't really know if it's the hours, the tiny details, the computer or sitting position that triggers it.

-Ingrid Hardy

www.rabidhorse.com

My hands & wrists get sore. Then shoulders & neck to compensate. Oh, & butt from all the sitting ;)

-Tara Reed

www.tarareeddesigns.com

Lower back pain, slight pain in neck and shoulders.

-Tony Perna

www.comicartfans.com/tony_perna

My upper back, shoulders, and neck on the right side (my painting side.) And my wrists.

-Shayla Maddox

www.shaylamaddox.com

Shoulder blades (especially left side), when I paint on an upright easel. I'm right handed. Left base of thumb when I sculpt w/clay.

-Jen Mathis

www.jenmathis.com

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Yoga Poses You Can Do In Your Art Studio

These poses (asana) are commonly practiced in yoga sequences. However, you can also practice these stretches individually when you need a break. Take your time in each asana. Listen to your body. Don't stretch beyond what feels comfortable. You can learn in detail how to do each of these asanas at www.yogajournal.com



**Child's Pose
(Balasana)**

Let the stress and tension roll right off your back in this pose! You can do this anytime during the day. It also calms the mind.



**Seated Forward Bend
(Paschimottasana)**

A nice lower back and hamstring stretch. Great after a long day at the drawing board. Ahhhh!!!!



**Cow Face Pose
(Gomukhasana)**

This pose stretches the ankles, hips and thighs,



Cat/Cow Pose

A great pose for releasing tension in the back. Start in a neutral position, then alternate beginning with cow (dip your back and hold for 5 breaths), then arch back for cat (5 breaths).



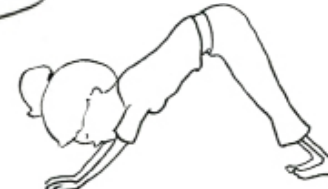
**Seated Wide Leg Forward Fold
(Upivishta Kamasana)**

This will stretch your inner thighs and relieve tension in the low back.



**Cobblers Pose
(Baddha Kanasana)**

This pose is great a way to stretch the inner thighs and it opens your hips. It also relieves pain in the low back.



**Downward Facing Dog
(Ardha Mukha Svanasana)**

Sending blood to the brain, this mild inversion will energize you. It's also a great way to strengthen your arms, back, and legs.



**Crescent Pose
(Ardha Chandrasana I)**

Excellent for stretching both sides of the body. This is a nice counter stretch to slouching at the desk all day. Keep both feet on ground. Lean left (5 breaths), then right (5 breaths).



**Standing Forward Fold
(Uttanasana)**

In this pose, you'll stretch your tight hamstrings, your back, and also send blood to the brain. If you can't grab your toes, place your hands on your shins or ankles



-Runners Lung-

This nicely stretches the hip flexors aka psoas muscles, which tighten after prolonged sitting. Tight psoas muscles can cause all kinds of tension in the legs and back.



**Seated Spinal Twist
(Ardha Matseyendrasana)**

This is a wonderful spinal twist that will refresh and invigorate you. It also relieves tension in the shoulders, neck, and upper back.



**Tree Pose
(Vrksasana)**

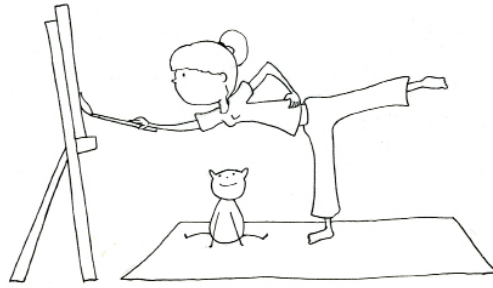
This is an excellent pose to help calm and center the mind, as well as improve your balance. When mind and body are balanced, creativity flourishes even more!

Something for the Wrists Too!



Aching wrists are common among artists, either from gripping pencils and brushes too tight, or over-use at the computer. Try this simple pose. Sit on all fours with your hands on the floor, directly below your shoulders. Turn your finger tips in so that they are facing you. Slowly, mindfully, lower your butt towards your heels. You may not get very far at all, but you'll feel a nice stretch in the wrists and forearms. Hold for five slow breaths. Then repeat 3 times.

**Yoga Is
Good for
Creativity!
Hit the Mat!**



Half-Moon Pose
(Ardha Chandrasana II)

Yes, that's right! Practicing yoga is good for your art!

- It calms your mind. And a calm, centered mind is a conduit for creativity.
- It sends blood and oxygen to all parts of the body, which will invigorate you and positively impact your productivity.
- It relieves tension headaches which will make it easier to get the art done on time.
- It improves concentration which means staying ahead of tight deadlines.
- You'll tone up and slim down, which can be a confidence booster when meeting with clients.
- It helps you feel better when traveling long distances by plane to conventions and tradeshows.
- It gives you a break when you need it most. Yoga is always there for you. When the stresses of freelancing add up, you can always hit the mat and take some time for yourself, then come back to your art refreshed.

A Short Yoga Sequence for Busy Artists

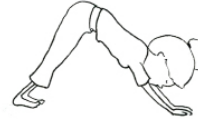
You'll need a yoga mat or rug. Remove your shoes and socks. Move slowly and deliberately through each pose, holding each one for 3-5 breaths. This should take you about 15 minutes. Do this mid-day and after a full day of drawing.



Come to the floor in child's pose. Take 5 slow, long deep breaths. Stretch the arms and fingers.



Come to all fours and do 5 rounds of Cat/Cow pose. Remember to inhale on Cow, and exhale on Cat.



Press yourself back into Downward Facing Dog. It's ok to keep your knees bent. Alternately pedal your feet to stretch your calves. Keep your back flat and press through the fingers. Take 5 deep breaths here then lower down onto all fours. Sit back in child's pose. Take 5 long slow deep breaths in child's pose. Repeat Down Dog.



Gently come to a seated position for Cobblers Pose. Press the soles of the feet together. On an inhale, slowly hinge forward from your hips, keeping your back straight. If your knees hurt, don't do this pose. Or, you can place yoga blocks or folded blankets under your knees to support them. Take five long deep breaths here. Keep your shoulders soft.



Next, cross your right leg over your left. Place right foot flat on the floor in front of you. Gently place your right arm on the floor behind your back. Place left elbow against outside of right knee, then slowly look over your left shoulder to the wall behind you. Take several deep breaths in this pose, then slowly unwind and do the other side. This spinal twist will release a lot of tension you've been holding in your shoulders, chest, & back day all while drawing.

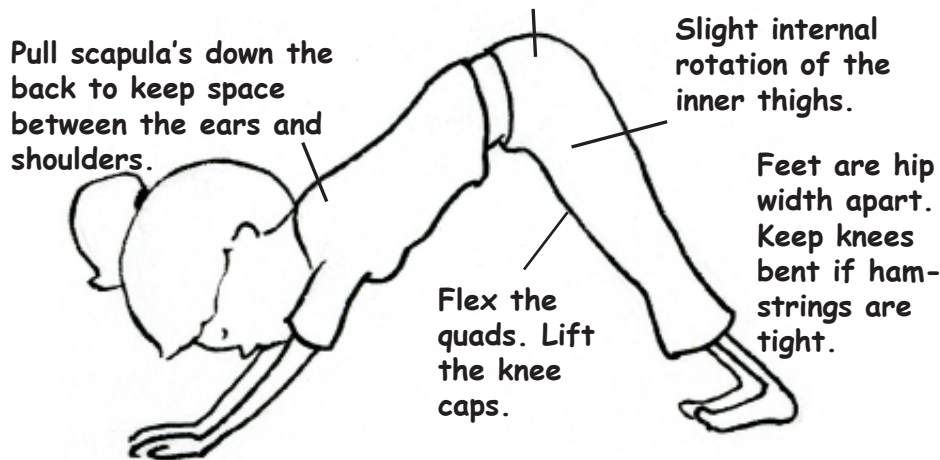


Unwind, then come forward into child's pose for as long as you like. Sink your hips towards your feet. Outstretch your arms and fingers to make this an active pose. Take your forehead to the floor and enjoy. Thank yourself for giving yourself this time to stretch and relax!

A Closer Look At Four Poses: Downward Facing Dog

Art school anatomy will come in handy as we explore these poses a bit further. These four poses can be practiced in your studio when you need a break from all the sketching. To get into Downward Dog, start on all fours (on hands and knees aka table top position). Curl your toes under, then press your pelvis up and back. Hold for 3-5 breaths, then come down to child's pose, and repeat.

Lift pelvis upwards. Slightly tuck sacrum.
Activate glutes.



Evenly distribute weight through fingers. Press into the fingertips to take pressure off the wrists. Spread your fingers wide.

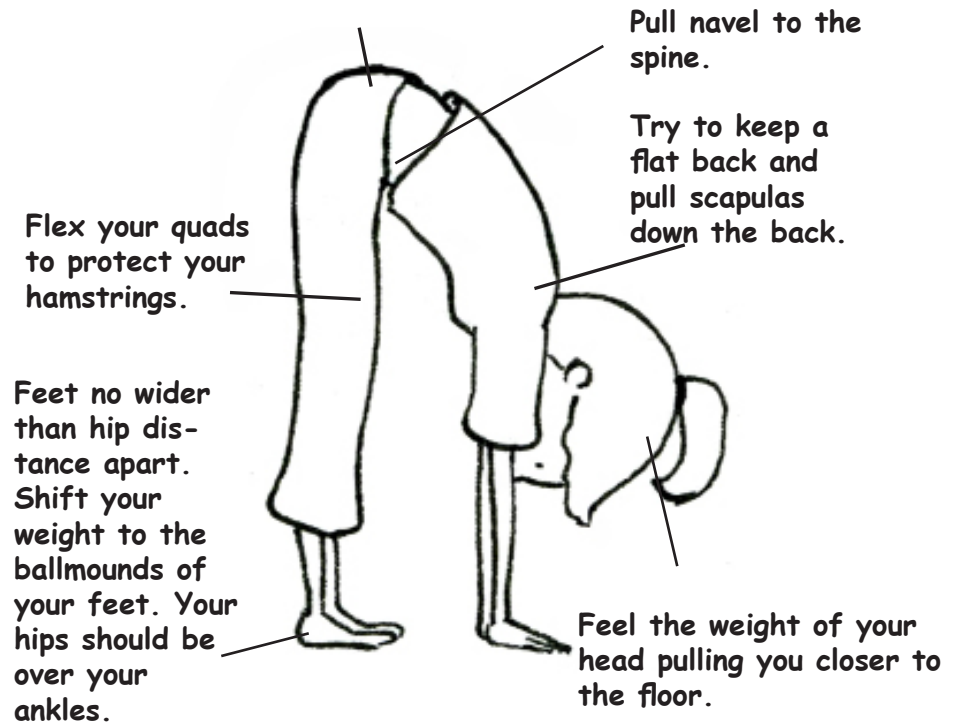
Try to press heels to the floor. Feet should be no wider than hip distance apart. If hamstrings and gastrocnemius are tight, it's ok to keep a slight bend in the knees, or heels slightly off the floor.

How will this pose help your art?
It'll send lots of blood to the brain. Inversions invigorate and restore calm to the mind. A calm mind is a creative mind!

Standing Forward Fold

To get into this pose, start by standing with feet hip distance apart. Slightly bend the knees. On an exhale, slowly hinge forward from hips, placing your hands on the ground, shins, or ankles. If possible, straighten knees and drop the head. Remember to breath in and out through the nose in all asanas.

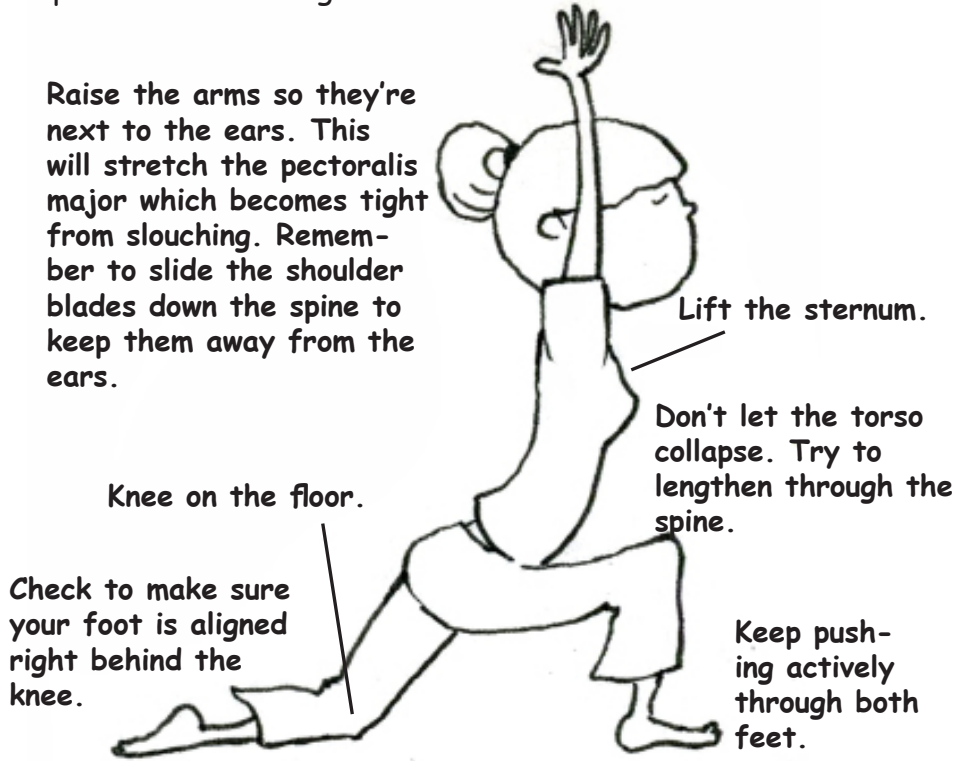
Pelvis lifts upwards. Tuck the sacrum.
Mildly squeeze the glutes. This will help you bend forward more.



Once again, another wonderful inversion to calm and relax the mind! Stretching your hamstrings and back can result in less discomfort from sitting for long periods of time.

Runners Lunge

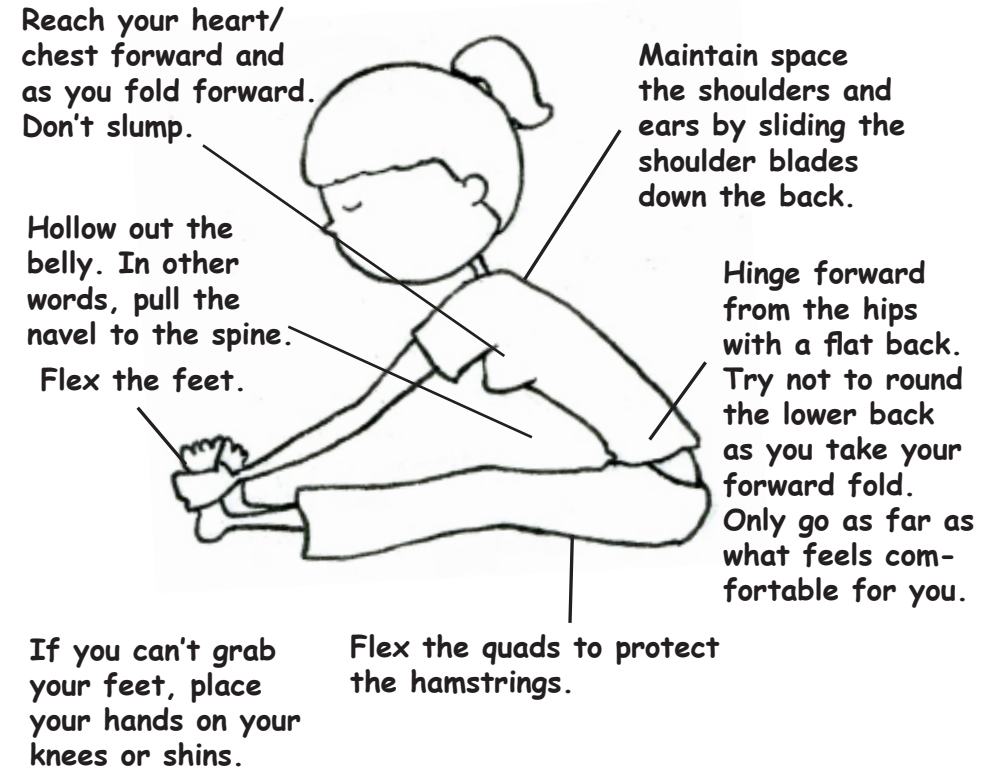
All kinds of wonderful things happen in this pose. Getting into it is easy. Start with your feet about 3 1/2 feet apart, one foot behind the other. Slowly lower down onto your back knee. Place the top of the back foot and knee on the floor. Place your hands on the knee in front. Slowly sink forward, and feel a niiiiice stretch in the hip flexors. Raise your arms for a deeper stretch through the chest.



How will this pose help?
You'll open your hip flexors (the psoas muscles). They're a large group of muscles connecting the hips to the thighs. When they get tight, they can make your back and your legs hurt. Keep these muscles flexible and you'll be able to sit for much longer with less discomfort. By raising the arms, you're opening the chest and stretching the shoulders.

Seated Forward Fold

This is a great stretch for your lower back and hamstrings. If your hamstrings are super tight, and you can't reach your toes, you can place your hands on your shins, or your ankles, and bend your knees. You can also wrap a yoga strap or towel around your feet and use it to gently pull yourself forward. The key to this pose is to remember to breathe. Deepen the stretch on each exhale. Take at least 5-10 breaths in this pose.



How will this pose help?
You'll be giving your lower back, upper back and hamstrings a much-needed stretch. It will relieve the strain of sitting all day.

Don't Hesitate to Meditate!



Meditation can have wonderful effects on your creativity. Start each day with 10 minutes of sitting quietly, right there at your desk or on the floor in your studio. It'll be the best 10 minutes of your day!

- Sit cross-legged on the floor, on a yoga mat or rug. Or sit in a chair with your feet on the floor. Sit up straight.
- Close your eyes, and take 5-10 long, deep breaths.
- Notice the sound and warmth (or coolness) of your breath as you inhale and exhale through your nose.
- Don't judge your thoughts, or cling to them, or even try to stop them. Just observe them and let them go.
- If you become focused on your thoughts, take your attention back to your breath. The goal is to quiet the chatter in the mind, to make more room for creative ideas to flow in.
- When you're done, thank yourself for taking time to just sit with yourself. Ahhh.....

Why Yoga?

- It reduces your stress and decreases anxiety.
- It increases your lung capacity.
- It improves your balance, strength & flexibility.
- It improves your concentration and focus.
- It will positively impact your creativity.

Yoga can be practiced on a purely physical level or it can be part of your spiritual practice.

What Yoga Isn't

- Yoga isn't about how flexible you are. You don't have to have the flexibility of a gymnast or any flexibility at all. Every pose can be adapted to your needs and level.
- Yoga isn't just for young or athletic people. You can begin your practice at any age, with any level of experience.
- Yoga isn't a competition with yourself or with others. No one is judging you or your ability when you come to class.

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The best results come from practicing at least 3-5 times a week. When you're new to yoga, start slow, perhaps once or twice a week. In every practice, be mindful of each movement. Pay attention to what your body may be signalling to you. Every time you practice yoga, the experience will be completely different from the last time. That's the beauty of yoga.

Want To Try A Yoga Class? Here's Some Things To Know

Almost all studios allow you to pay for classes on a drop-in basis. Fee's generally range from \$12-\$20 per class.

Bring a water bottle and towel to class with you.

Yoga is practiced barefoot, so remove those shoes and socks. You'll be able to balance better when you're barefoot.

You'll need a mat which you can purchase at most Barnes & Noble bookstores, Whole Foods, sporting good stores, and online at www.gaiam.com

It's ok to try different instructors when you're new to Yoga just to see who you like. Every instructor has their own style and approach to teaching.

Yoga routines are commonly referred to as sequences.

Poses are also called postures or asanas (a Sanskrit term meaning posture or seat).

Yoga blocks and straps and bolsters are commonly referred to as props. They are used to support you in certain poses or to help you deepen your stretch.

Teachers will often use Sanskrit terms and English translations for poses.

There are many different styles of Yoga. If you're new, a good class to learn the ropes would be a basic or level 1 Hatha Yoga class.

To find a yoga center near you, visit www.yogaschoolfinder.com.

About Cynthia

Cynthia started practicing Yoga in 1998 at a small studio in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago, but admits it took many years before it became a regular practice. In 2009, Cynthia traveled to India for a month to deepen her understanding of the Yogic lifestyle and philosophy. It was then that she realized her calling to teach Yoga as a way to be of service to her community and to further her development as a creative, spiritual individual.

In May 2010, Cynthia completed 200 hours of teachers training at North Shore Yoga in Northfield, IL under Sharyn Galindo. In June 2010, she also completed an additional 25 hours of teachers training with Manju Jois. She currently teaches Yoga at LA Fitness and the YMCA in beautiful Evanston, IL.

Cynthia has been a professional visual artist for 20 years and has lived with varying degrees of pain and discomfort that comes with the job. She hopes to encourage other artists to add Yoga to their lives.

Cynthia's art is online at
www.cynnarcisi.com and
www.cynnarcisi.blogspot.com

