

Inexpensive yoga classes? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

A friend of mine bought me a month's worth of yoga classes over the summer. I loved it! I've never found an exercise/fitness regimen that I actually WANTED to stick with. It helped with a lot of my long-standing physical issues (balance, back pain, stress, fatigue) and was a perfect balance of stretching and strengthening for my fitness goals. The only problem is that now that my month is over... I can't really afford to do it anymore. I've looked all around for inexpensive and conveniently located studios, but I can't find anything that's in my price range or fits in my schedule. What resources are there for broke aspiring yogis? Are there any guidelines for practicing yoga at home? Are there any exercise routines that are similar to yoga (i.e., low impact, stretching + strengthening) that are less expensive or easier to do without an instructor?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Congratulations on finding a way of moving your body that you want to stick with and truly enjoy! To answer your question — your yoga practice doesn't have to suffer now that your month's worth of classes has run out. Taking classes can be expensive and time consuming, but with the growing popularity of yoga in the US there are a number of ways you can access this practice.

If you prefer to attend an in-person class, it might be worth checking out local community centers, parks and recreation departments, and university clubs and student organizations to see if they offer free yoga classes. Some private studios offer free or discounted classes during off-peak hours with teachers-in-training; others may have promotions for new members. There are also studios that are donation-based and operate under the principle that yoga needs to be accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status. Another option is to check if a particular studio you like offers discounts for bulk purchases (e.g., buying 10 to 20 classes at once). Finally, it may be worth asking if you can help around your favorite studio (such as front desk work, cleaning, or publicity) in exchange for free yoga classes.

If you prefer practicing yoga in the comfort of your home, there are plenty of free or low-cost videos available online. Further, there are a number of benefits that aren't just financial. Some individuals may feel self-conscious in group classes so doing yoga at home could mitigate that, it

can provide you extra time to focus on the poses you prefer or want to work on, or you may find it easier to focus your attention inward and help you establish awareness of the relationship between the mind, body, and breath. Before you swan dive into at-home yoga, you could consider the following tips to get the most out of your practice:

- Block out time in your schedule for at-home practice just as you would an in-person class. For example, you might try 30-minute sessions three to four days a week — research shows that that consistency, not the duration of the practice, helps build routine.
- Consider purchasing a yoga mat, block, and strap for home use. This equipment does involve an initial investment but can pay off the more you practice at home.
- Look for instructors who explain what poses feel like, in addition to demonstrating them. This can be helpful when instructions aren't available in person.
- If you're able to do the practice in front of a reflective surface (such as a mirror), it may help you see if you're doing the poses the same way as the instructor.

Other types of physical activity, such as Pilates, dance, barre, and tai chi, function similarly to yoga in that they focus on stretching, strengthening, and mindfulness. Like yoga, you may find that these activities require some initial guidance, but you can typically move to an at-home practice in time. Having a working combination of these practices incorporated into your regimen may help to address your various needs.

Good luck!

Alice!

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