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Beginning a yoga practice is a great way to relax, improve your flexibility and calm your mind – particularly during these difficult times. How do you get started though, particularly when you can't attend a class in person?To help you along the way, we spoke to Kat Bayly – owner and instructor at Kalindi Yoga. Below, she explains the benefits of starting a yoga practice and what you need to know before you begin, before taking you through a series of beginner-friendly poses that will help improve your posture and relieve stress.Finally, we've recommended some useful tech that can help you make yoga a regular part of your day. It's not essential (and Bayly explains everything you need to know about more fundamental equipment), but it can help you track your progress and even give you live feedback on your poses.Let's get started with Kat Bayly's advice...The benefits of yogaIn this global pandemic, many people are experiencing stress and anxiety and for some, these emotions can feel overwhelming. Having a daily yoga routine that you can practice at home can help relieve stress and anxiety.Yoga works by dropping us into our parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). This is our rest and digest function. Stress and anxiety place us in the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). This is our fight or flight response.When we are in this response, we have increased levels of cortisol and adrenaline pumping through our body. These increased levels of cortisol and adrenaline have a huge impact on the body if experienced long term. If our hormones are out of balance, it can lead to illness. Therefore, we want to access our PNS as much as possible so our body can bring itself back into balance and we can stay healthy. Yoga gives us access to the PNS and helps to rebalance the bodily systems. If our body feels good, our mind follows.If you're new to yoga it's a good idea to order a yoga mat, blocks or bricks and a yoga belt. There are lots to choose from so you may need to do a bit of research before buying. A thinner mat works better for standing balances. I would advise against using a Pilates mat as these tend to be too thick for standing postures. If you do require any padding under your knees when kneeling or on all fours, you can always use a blanket.Make sure you wear clothing that is comfortable and stretchy, such as gym clothes. You also want to make sure you are going to be warm enough but not too warm. You can work up a sweat during a yoga class! You may also want a blanket nearby to use as a prop or to cover yourself with when you relax at the end.Joining a live online classSince the pandemic, yoga teachers have reverted to holding live online classes. These work similarly to group classes but you'll need to set up a space in your home. Choose a part of a room that is clutter free. Ensure you have enough room around you to stretch your arms up and out to the sides without touching anything.I tend to use props a lot during my classes so it's a good idea to have them next to you at the start of the class. This way you don't need to disappear and search for them during the session. You'll be asked to complete a brief health questionnaire before attending a class with me. Once completed, you will be sent the link to the Zoom meeting prior to the class time. It's advisable to join 10 minutes before the start to ensure you're visible on the webcam.During the live online class, I will be practising with you to demonstrate the postures but I will also keep an eye on each individual to ensure they are safe. No one else can hear you when you practice as all participants will be muted and no one else is going to be watching you either! As I cannot be physically in the room with you, you are required to listen to your body carefully and if something doesn't feel right, take the variation offered or sit it out. Anything else I should know?Body// Yoga looks easy but some of the postures are tricky. Use props whenever you need to make the postures accessible to you. Remember, yoga is there to reduce our stress levels so don't force the body into something it isn't ready for. This will only stress your body out more. Approach your first class with an open mind, you may be surprised at what comes up for you. The more you practice, the more you will experience the benefits so try and make this a daily routine. You could tag the stretches onto the end of your run, for example.This half forward bend brings energy into the legs and stretches the hamstrings and calf muscles (Image credit: Jason Parnell-Brookes)1. Open the backs of your legsStanding with your feet hip distance, place your blocks in front of you, shoulder distance apart. Bring your hands to the blocks making sure your wrists are stacked under your shoulders. Lengthen your chest forward and shoulders away from the ears. Take as much height under the hands as you need to keep the legs straight. Hold for a minute, breathing deeply.Cobra pose opens the front of the body helping to relieve shoulder and neck ache which can be caused by stress (Image credit: Jason Parnell-Brookes)2. Create space in your chest and shouldersLying on your abdomen, bring your hands either side of your chest, elbows off the floor. You can turn your fingers out slightly to help bring your elbows into the back ribs. Press into the tops of your feet, lift your knees off the floor, lift your pubic bone up and lower belly in. Press gently into your hands and lift your chest forward and up. Take a couple of deep breaths and come down.It's always a good idea to take a twist after a backbend to reset the spine (Image credit: Jason Parnell-Brookes)3. Take a gentle twistSitting in a cross legged position, cross your shins with your ankles under your knees. This means your feet need to be further away from the hips than you might normally sit if cross legged. If your knees are high, sit onto the edge of a cushion or a yoga block. This will help to relieve the hips and knees down towards the floor. Take as much height underneath the buttocks as you need to make this comfortable for you. Bring your left hand behind you, right hand onto your left thigh or knee and twist to the left side. Take a few breaths and then repeat, twisting to the right.4. Rest in extended child's poseCome to an all fours position, bringing your big toes together and keeping your knees apart. Sink your buttocks back towards your heels. If your buttocks don't connect with your heels, place a cushion or block underneath your thighs. Stretch your arms forward and come onto your fingertips. Move your shoulder blades down the back. Your forehead may reach the floor but if not, support it with blankets or a block to ensure your neck stays relaxed. Take a few minutes here then bring yourself up.After any yoga practice, make sure you take a few minutes in a calming posture like extended child's pose or corpse pose so your body can absorb the positive effects of your practice (Image credit: Jason Parnell-Brookes)Tech for yogaAs Kat Bayly has explained, you need very little equipment to begin a yoga practice, but there is some technology that can make it easier to get started.If you're taking part in an online yoga class, you'll need a webcam so the instructor can watch and make sure you're safe. Our preferred webcam is the Logitech StreamCam thanks to its electronic image stabilization and facial tracking (great for keeping the image steady and focused while you move), plus smart exposure and 1080p resolution.If the Logitech StreamCam is a little beyond your price range, the Microsoft LifeCam HD-3000 also comes highly recommended. Again, it features auto-focus to ensure you're clearly visible to your instructor, and it can be mounted on a tripod if it's not convenient to have it clipped to your laptop. The exposure shifts dynamically to suit changing lighting conditions, too. For more options, check out our full guide to the best webcams.Fitness trackers are mainly designed for aerobic activities like cycling, running, walking and swimming, and can't give too much help when it comes to yoga (indeed, they could be a distraction). However, if you're participating in a particularly intense session, you might be interested to see a record of your heart rate, and an estimate of how many calories were burned during the session.You don't need an expensive smartwatch for this, and a basic activity band will do the job perfectly well. The Honor Band 5 is one of the most affordable fitness trackers available today, and offers both activity and sleep tracking, with a maximum battery life of 14 days with light use.The Xiaomi Mi Band 4 is another good choice that's super affordable. It's not the best looking fitness tracker, but can track your heart rate throughout your yoga practice and can last up to a month between charges.Interested in something a little more high-tech? Yoganotch is a 'smart yoga' system that uses a set of sensors on your body to provide live feedback and advice as you move through a yoga class, helping you stay safe and improve your posture. The sensors clip onto elasticated straps or your clothing, creating a 3D visualization of your body.If you need to make any corrections, an audio instruction will advise you what to do, and let you know when you've got it right. The Yoganotch app is only available for iOS so far, but an Android version is in the works.(Image credit: Yoganotch)The Yoganotch set (including motion sensors with a charging stand, wearable straps, a phone stand and everything else necessary to get started) is available for a discounted price of \$199 (about £150, AUS\$300) when you use the voucher code launch.Check out our guides to the best treadmill deals and exercise bike deals Most studios and fitness centers offer yoga in a warm or hot room, but Bikram yoga, sometimes called the original hot yoga style, is a whole different ball game. Technically, Bikram is a version of Hatha, a traditional branch of yoga that combines postures and breathing. But it's not just a style, it's a specific experience with a cult-like following (Beyoncé included). Every class features the same 26 set poses, takes place in a 105-degree room, and is taught by a Bikram-certified instructor. But the heat and tough postures can provide different challenges than a traditional yoga practice. Here's the 411 on how to stay safe and get the most out of a Bikram session. Share on Pinterest Photo by Colin GouldWarm Bodies — The Need-to-KnowBack in the 1970s, Bikram Choudhury (a four-time Yoga Champion of India) created a series of poses for amateur yogis. Since Bikram developed his practice, hundreds of Bikram yoga centers have cropped up around the world, from Serbia to San Francisco. Regardless of location, each sweaty 90-minute class features the same series of postures, such as the half moon and the standing bow. According to the Bikram official website, the heat helps sweat out toxins, stretch muscles, and improve circulation throughout the body.The heat definitely gets the heart pumping, but the jury's still out on whether or not it counts as a cardiovascular workout. The evenly paced moves are super low-impact, making Bikram a good option for runners or anyone with sore joints. Research also shows that this form of yoga can boost strength, flexibility, and even aid weight lossBikram yoga training and physical fitness in healthy young adults. Tracy BL, Hart CE. Neuromuscular Function Laboratory, Department of Health and Exercise Science, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado. The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research. 2013 March; 27(3):822-30.On the other hand, critics claim that the heat can limber up a body a bit too much, and actually do more harm than goodwhen people are suddenly able to push themselves beyond their usual limitations. The excessive heat can also be a problem for people with cardiovascular issues, high blood pressure, or those who are more susceptible to dehydration or heat stroke. Bikram yoga is a tough experience for a first-timer — the often-crowded room, the heat, the sweat, and the tricky postures make for a serious workout. Before heading into the toasty yoga studio, check in with a doctor if you have or have had any health problems or a history of cardiovascular issues. Ready to sweat? Here are a few extra tips to get the most out of every Bikram session.It's Getting Hot in Here — Your Action PlanGet prepped. Because the heat can be so hard on the body, it's important to think ahead before heading to a Bikram yoga class. Start hydrating 24 hours before the class, and avoid eating for 1-2 hours prior to a yoga class to prevent nausea. But don't make up for lost time by chugging a whole bottle right before walking in the door — overloading on H2O can lead to an uncomfortably full stomach and overactive bladder during class!Dress to impress. Pick comfortable clothing that doesn't chafe or restrict movement when wet. Nobody wants to get bogged down by a soggy cotton T-shirt, so opt for form-fitting clothing. Many people minimize the damage by wearing as little as possible — for men, a pair of spandex shorts, and for women, shorts and a stretchy tank top or sports bra.Choose bottle service. Don't forget to bring water! Place a bottle next to your mat and take small sips as needed. Ideally, hydration occurs before class so drinking water between pose shouldn't be necessary. However, everyone has different needs, so do what you gotta do! Note that some teachers may not "give" very many rest poses, so it's important to listen to your body and take breaks (simply stand still, sit, or lie down).BYO Equipment. Most studios provide yoga mats, but many people prefer to get schweddy on their own personal mats (hey, we feel ya). Bring a towel (or three) to mop up a slippery sweat pool or use for traction when sweaty limbs start slidin'. Note that sweating regulates the body temperature, so avoid the urge to constantly towel it off. Wiping off sweat can actually make it harder for the body to adjust to the hot room and distract from the flow of the practice.Speak up. Before class, let the teacher know about any previous injuries or medical conditions you might have. An experienced yoga instructor can teach variations to reduce stress on a certain body part or make certain moves easier or harder depending on each person's needs.Go your own way. As with any yoga class, it may be tempting to compare your practice with someone else's. But paying attention to your own body (not what Mr. Gumby is doing over there) is especially important in a heated class, where heat can loosen joints and muscles and make it easier to push beyond your limits. If the heat makes you feel dizzy, take as many breaks as necessary. Most instructors encourage staying in the hot room lying down until ready to participate again. While resting, focus on breathing slowly through the nose. Ease out: After class, restore fluids and electrolytes with coconut water or a sports drink, or try plain H2O plus a banana. All certified Bikram studios have showers, so consider rinsing off that eau de yoga before heading back to the outside world.Special thanks to Peter Finlon and Greatist Expert Sarah Bernier for their contributions to this article.Have you done Bikram yoga before? How was your experience? Tell us about it in the comments below or tweet the author @SophBreene.

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