

Some Thoughts on Developing a Home Yoga Practice

We're all going to miss our regular yoga lessons and I really hope it won't be long before we're back practising together. In the meantime, there are lots of teachers offering lessons online and, who knows, if I get over my camera shyness and sort out the technicalities I might even share some videos with you myself. However, I'm also convinced that everyone can be their own excellent yoga guide too. After all, developing a home practice is important if we're to really benefit from yoga and we can all view this strange period of seclusion as an opportunity to do just that. Here are some ideas that I thought might be helpful:

1. Set aside some dedicated time and space:

Find a spot where you have enough space to move and stretch out safely and, if possible, where you won't be disturbed.

Maybe set a timer for 20 minutes or however long you want to practice. Make sure you factor in time for relaxation too.

Commit to not stopping your session early and be open to keeping going if you find yourself in a nice flow. Ready to begin?

2. How are you?

Lying down or sitting comfortably, spend a few moments assessing how you are feeling.

Do you have any aches, pains or tension?

Can you target those areas with gentle, helpful movement or do you need to avoid working them too much?

How busy is your head?

Set an intention for your practice - that you're going to spend this time focused on your body and its physical sensations and move your attention away from busy mind-activity.

3. Breathe

Establish a steady, even breath - where each exhalation lasts as long as the inhalation that went before it.

Let your breath be a little deeper than it would ordinarily be but still unforced and comfortable.

Tune your attention to the sound and sensation of the breath in your throat as it moves in and out. If you notice your breath has become a little laboured or uneven consider it a signal to back off a little. If you realise you've stopped observing the breath altogether it's a nudge to be more mindful.

4. Start gently (and build up)

Don't worry about recreating all the postures you did in your last class. Think instead of simply moving your body in a mindful way - allowing one posture to lead you into another.

There is no right or wrong but there are some **golden rules**:

- If something hurts - **stop!**
- Be kind to your joints
- Don't strain or force your way into a posture - move slowly and with care.
- The most common yoga injuries are to the lower back and knees - look after them!
- Don't rush into your deepest version of any pose, rather ease your way in gently.
- Move out of every pose slowly and with control.

5. Think of grouping poses logically and progressing in intensity. Select postures from the following groups:

- Standing poses,
- Balances
- Reclining poses
- Seated forward bends
- Back bends

Remember, what you do to the right side of the body you should always balance out on the left.

6. Think of counter poses (but not extreme ones!)

It makes sense to follow a series of forward bending poses with some back bends but you never move from your deepest forward fold into your deepest back bend - this would be jarring for the body and you risk injury. Instead think about 'resetting' and transitioning smoothly from one sequence of poses to another. For example, after building gradually up to your deepest forward bend, repeat some gentle forward bends then maybe a light twist before beginning with your gentler backbends - always building up then easing down.

7. Savasana

Never skip Savasana! At the end of your practice lie down. Rest and observe the natural, unforced rhythm of your breathing.

Well done. Let's do this again tomorrow.

Best wishes, Chris x

P.S. There may be moments when you're not sure what to do next. That's to be expected, especially if this is the first time you've practised yoga by yourself in this way. Don't worry about repeating postures! Before you begin, perhaps think of 5 or 6 poses that we do most regularly in class and let your muscles remind you of how we get from one to another. Enjoy the chance to be your own yoga teacher, with no voice to listen to but your own, no plan to follow and no video to watch... Allow yourself to have fun, to experiment and to explore different movements. And finally, if in doubt proceed to step 7 and lie down!



Namaste