



STRIKE A BALANCE

Work with the right teacher and you'll get the most from your yoga practice, says Trish Lesslie

Strength, stamina, suppleness and serenity. Practise yoga regularly and those are just some of the benefits you can expect this ancient philosophy to bring to your mind and body. But with so many different schools of this physical, spiritual and mental discipline on offer, finding the practice that's right for you can be trickier than mastering a Downward Dog. From Hatha, the most traditional and basic style, to Iyengar, 'slow yoga', which Nigella Lawson says helps her keep a svelte physique, the array of techniques can be mind-boggling.

What works for your yoga-bunny friend might not work for you, so start by thinking about what you want from your practice – whether it's a meditative mindset, toned muscles or a combination of both.

'Some classes such as Ashtanga vinyasa (as practised by Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow) are notoriously vigorous, while others like Kripalu are much milder,' explains Chris James (chrisjamesmindbody.com), an in-demand, London-based yoga teacher. He recommends you attend at least four or five classes to see which style suits you best.

But while classes are a great way to try out different types of yoga, the only way to get undivided attention from

your instructor is to book in for private lessons. 'I'm a one-on-one specialist, and this is how traditionally yoga is taught, following the master/pupil model,' says James, who studied with masters in India in the 1990s. 'Yoga classes are more of a western adaptation of this model.'

Still, as well as allowing you to try out different styles, classes are a good way to search out an instructor who's right for you. As James points out: 'It's often down to the personality of the teacher, which is such so subjective.'

So if you think the fabulous instructor leading the Kundalini class might just be 'the one', ask if he or she would consider taking you on as a private student. If not, then they should at least be able to recommend an instructor with a similar style who can.

'Once you've settled on a teacher, it's best to study with that person as much as possible, especially if you're working with a particular problem,' James advises. 'This gives the teacher time to get to know you so that he or she can tailor postures and instructions to suit your specific needs.'

It can take perseverance and patience to find the right instructor, but then those are just two of the qualities a good yoga practice will help you hone, along with a perfectly toned yoga body, of course. Let the search begin.

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