

In the Mood

If you've lost the desire to practice, these ideas

will help rekindle your passion for yoga.



"THERE SHOULD BE A Yoga Inspiration Hotline for those who have gotten away from their practice," jokes Todd Norian, who teaches yoga nationwide and is the former director of teacher training at Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Lenox, Massachusetts. For those stuck in the yoga doldrums, his phone-support idea sounds pretty appealing.

And everyone has a yoga slump now and then—times when your practice is in a rut, when you feel your discipline slipping away, when you realize that you've been to class only twice in the past month.

Getting yourself through the yoga blues is a challenge, but the first step is to recognize that "This too shall pass." Norian says, "When I'm in a lull, I acknowledge there are different seasons to my prac-

tice. Lapsed enthusiasm doesn't mean your yoga days are over, he points out. "A dry spell can be connected with stress at work, emotional issues, or relationship difficulties—wherever your energy is tied up. My best advice: Don't get caught in negative self-talk."

In fact, Norian considers a flagging practice an invitation to go deeper into yoga. "If my attention or commitment is wandering, I know I need a challenge, so I start holding postures longer and deepen my breath," he explains. "These two key things help me break through to new levels of excitement and adventure."

Embrace Change

"YOGA INSPIRES CHANGE. It's a tool to help you drop negative habits and adopt helpful ones, to embrace whatever the present and future hold," says Max Strom, a yoga teacher in Santa Monica and Brentwood, California. "I believe you must assess what you're hiding from and be willing to change. For instance, when I'm resistant to my practice, it's often from fear that I'll have to face an emotional issue. We store and process emotions primarily through our bodies, so yoga brings them up," he says. "In difficult times, I return to a few days of gentle, restorative practice so I feel nurtured. I find this leads me lovingly back into a full practice pretty quickly."

Norian echoes Strom's emphasis on being gentle with yourself. "There's an attitude I call 'begin again,'" says Norian. "Every time your mind wanders when you meditate, you simply begin again. Don't worry if you fall away from your practice—just come back to it."

Diagnose Your Yoga Flu

"WHEN SOMEONE TELLS ME they're committed to yoga and yet they're not able to act on it, I wonder why," says Bea Enright, an Integrative Yoga Therapy teacher in Boulder, Colorado.

If you're in this situation, you're probably asking yourself the same question. Perhaps you're bored or resistant to practice because your routine is stale, you've hit a physical plateau, or you've achieved your original objectives. Maybe your life has changed but you haven't adjusted your yoga practice to fit your new

circumstances. Regardless of your scenario, assess the situation. Why are you losing interest *now*? What are your priorities, and how does yoga fit into these goals? Finding some answers will lead you along the path to renewal. After all, as Enright says, "If you commit to a practice that enlivens your life, brings feelings of accomplishment and well-being, and helps relieve stress and pain, how can you *not* stay focused?"

Once you've identified the reasons behind your yogic discontent, it's time to devote yourself to change. Here is an array of ideas for when you're feeling blasé about your practice but want to renew your commitment:

1. Begin with easy, comfortable poses. "When you first coax yourself into regular practice, choose only asanas you're wholeheartedly willing to do," recommends Joyce Anue, who teaches in Los Gatos, California. "Start small and simple

until you're energized enough to go forward with more difficult poses."

2. Set attainable goals. Make a small commitment—15 minutes of daily practice or attending class three times per week—and stick to it. Write down your intention to devote yourself more fully to

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yoga, and tell your friends. "By voicing your commitment, you have a better chance of making good on your promise," Anue says.

3. Listen to your body. If you pay attention, your body will tell you what it needs and will help you come to a place of balance and harmony.

4. Find a teacher—or add a new one. A good, encouraging teacher can help moti-

vate you. While seeking a teacher, try new forms of yoga. A switch in styles might give you a needed lift.

5. Shake up the sequence. Play with the types of postures and the order in which you do them. "Flip around your practice every so often for variety," suggests Norian. "Sometimes I do a vigorous set of postures, but other times I do gentle yoga."

6. Friendship is stronger than will-power. To keep your yoga sessions from sliding, make yoga dates on a regular basis.

7. Experiment with new props. Borrow or buy new yoga videos to experience a different teacher's style. Physioballs, chair swings, or other yoga gadgets can also add novelty, learning, and inspiration. "New toys are fun and stimulating," says Enright. "But spending money on devices you never use could actually cool your enthusiasm," she warns.

8. Practice deliberately and with awareness. Ironically, focusing more on breath

than on outward form will deepen the physical alignment of your poses.

9. Use space to anchor your home practice. Set aside a quiet, clean, permanent place just for yoga. If you practice in the same spot, that space will absorb the energy of your practice, making it easier for you to remain centered and motivated.

10. Challenge yourself. If you're frustrated because you've reached a physical plateau, ask your teacher to help you move to the next level. Shake yourself out of the comfort zone when you feel stale. "If I resist certain postures, one day I'll make a sequence entirely from those I avoid," says Strom. "It's a real kick in the pants because you face what you've been avoiding, including your emotional reaction to these particular asanas."

11. Create a private altar. Place candles, meaningful objects and photos of spiritual teachers in a shrine, then practice or meditate in front of it. An altar reminds you of your intention and heightens awareness.

12. Use music to motivate you. "I play inspirational chanting music—loudly—or African drumming or progressive jazz to get me out of a slump," admits Norian. A stimulating beat can enhance your energy, whereas meditative music can induce calm.

13. Make your practice more spiritual. If you're bored, maybe you're focusing too much on the physical. Develop a pranayama practice or focus on the devotional aspects of yoga—a mantra or chanting—to attain a meditative state.

14. Practice gratitude. Inspire the day's practice by thinking about what you're grateful for, Norian urges. Or consciously dedicate your practice to someone who needs support. "When you create peace of mind and harmony in your body, the vibrations resonate throughout the universe to all living beings," he says.

15. Attend a yoga conference. Immerse yourself in yoga and expose yourself to different classes, teachers, and styles. "A conference or retreat gives me new inspi-

ration and opens up new horizons," says Enright. "I return to my yoga practice with new enthusiasm and commitment."

16. Recall your original passion. If you have been abandoned by the yogic muse, ask yourself what you love most about practice. Reconnecting with what you love may pull you out of your slump.

17. Integrate yoga into your life. Yoga is about awareness. By bringing consciousness to your ways of moving and acting, you're practicing constantly. Remember, yoga isn't separate from your tennis game, your gardening hobby, or your job performance.

For those times when you seek inspiration and new direction for your yoga practice, Norian shares a piece of advice. "My teacher once said: 'When you practice, wisdom grows. When you don't practice, wisdom wanes.' I try to live by those words." ■

Researching this article inspired writer Laurel Kallenbach to start a daily home practice.