

Tips and tools for rockin' your 30 day challenge

In the West yoga has become synonymous with asanas (or postures). Asana is merely a drop in the veritable ocean of yogic philosophy and teachings. The 30 day challenge may be a good opportunity to work some of the other aspects of yoga into your life. Below you'll find a *brief* introduction to the 8 limbs of yoga, followed by a few general things to be aware of during the challenge.

The 8 limbs of yoga

Yoga has 8 branches, or aspects, they are:

Yama (Restraints)

Niyama (Observances)

Asana (we got that one covered with the sweaty stuff!)

Pranayama (breath control)

Pratyahara (sense withdrawal)

Dharana (concentration)

Samadhi (super-consciousness)

Remember that doing the challenge on its own is a GREAT feat, and that all of these optional additions are just that – optional.

Yamas

Ahimsa – non-violence – refraining from causing harm or suggested harm to another living being including oneself. Practicing ahimsa can include eating less meat, or eating a vegetarian diet, stopping yourself from negative/self-critical thoughts (I'm not good enough, smart enough, skinny enough etc.), not speaking ill of others or gossiping.

Satya – truth – avoiding deceiving others or oneself. When you start telling the truth all the time, you start to realize how much energy untruths, even small ones, actually take. Speaking the truth, in a non-violent or compassionate way, can also be good for the person with whom you are communicating.

Asteya – not taking that which does not belong to you. This could include taking credit for something that you did not do.

Brahmacharya – sexual mindfulness. Always a tricky one. This could include only taking part in sexual activities that are meaningful, or short of meaningful, those to which you can be present. One could try to become aware of sexual activities that are filling an emotional void, the way chocolate does sometimes, and see if those activities are serving you.

Aparigraha -non-hoarding– limiting the accumulation of *stuff* or *things* that are unnecessary.

Niyamas

Saucha –purity. In yoga since the body and mind are not separate entities, cleansing the body, even on a purely physical level, is thought to create a more clear and focused mind.

Here are some cleanliness tips:

Flossing – every day, make your dental hygienist proud

Brushing teeth – twice at least

Cleaning the tongue – drag a clean wet spoon across the tongue, rinse with hot water and repeat until only saliva is coming off the tongue. Very rewarding to do when you wake up in the morning, and before bed

Jal neti – This is a yogic cleansing technique that involves pouring water through the nasal cavity to rinse clear the nasal cavity for smooth breathing.

Epsom Salt Baths – This is GREAT for the 30 day challenge because your muscles are releasing lactic acid as you exercise. Soak in a bath with 2-3 cups of Epsom salts (any drugstore has them). Try not to get anything *done* in your bath, just soak, it works better!

Trataka – Get in a comfortable seated position and stare at a flame while breathing slowly. Allow your eyes to water. This is a yogic cleansing exercise for the eyes.

Dry Brush - after your bath or shower firmly brush skin, can be done with a towel, to rid body of dead skin.

Santosa – contentment. Contentment is a practice, and something that can be perfected to increase a sense of overall peace and wellbeing. Rather than being carried off by pleasure and pain (either seeking or avoiding) the yogi works at consistent contentedness.

Tapas – austerity. Tapas can also be translated as fire/to burn. Practicing class with the intention of burning excess desires, unskillful thoughts (judgmental, cruel etc.) are a great start. Observing silence, fasting, or any form of giving up desires are also tapas.

Svadhya - study of yogic texts. I know you are already doing yoga every day, what do we *want* out of you. If you have the time, some great books include: Anatomy of the Spirit, Mindfulness Yoga, Living your Yoga, Yoga and the Quest for True self. Self-study, or self-inquiry is considered svadhayaya.

Asana

Actually means 'seat' as the first asanas were created to aid in long meditation sessions. Here are some asana tips for the month:

Listen to your body

-When a posture feels like it needs to be shifted, shift around. If you feel like you need to hold back from going deeper, hold back. If you become aware that you are always holding back because you don't trust yourself to go further, go further. If you increase not only your body awareness, but your ability to listen to that awareness, your 30 days will have been a great success.

-Ask your teacher about adjustments for specific needs (spinal curves, injuries etc.)

-Pace yourself

-Take Savasana before and after class for at least 5 minutes. Doing savasana while focusing on your breath is the most important asana you can do. Before class you are preparing your central nervous system. When the nervous system is calm the body is more prepared for an effective class. And after class your savasana will prolong the effects of the class and let you carry them out into your day.

Pranayama

We begin and end each Moksha class with Pranayama – breath control. Ask any one of our teachers if you're interested in learning more pranayama techniques.

Pratyahara – withdrawal of the senses

This is the limb of yoga that bridges the external limbs (above) with the internal limbs (below). You can try pratyahara by lying in savasana and turning off your reaction to any noise, or movement around you.

Dharana – Concentration

It is amazing to think that concentration and asana are equal limbs in yoga. Asana seems so much more involved, as though there is so much more to accomplish. That is, until you give dharana a try! Dharana can be practiced in savasana, focusing the mind on the breath without allowing any thoughts to come into the mind. You can also practice Dharana in your day to day life – when you are cooking, cook; when you are listening to someone, listen instead of thinking of your response; drive with awareness, speak with awareness. Attempting to concentrate in day-to-day activities can help us realize how seldom our activities

are done with concentration. When the transition is made you will find that tasks will be accomplished better and with greater ease. And yes, you may even be able to multi-task while practicing Dharana.

Dhyana – Meditation

Concentration that is kept flowing consistently. Likened to the difference between water pouring (in drops) and oil pouring (in a smooth flow).

Samadhi

This is the final stage of the 8 limbs. You may have witnessed a moment of Samadhi – giving birth to a child, or watching a love one give birth, catching a glimpse of a spectacular sunset that makes you realize that there is more to life than what we know. Eventually a deep knowledge and understanding that everything is intertwined becomes a continuous state. Samadhi is a continuation from Dhyana.

Here are some additional tips for the challenge...

Diet

Things you may want to consider lessening or cutting out entirely for the 30 days. This is all depending on where you are at. This is totally NOT NECESSARY; it is simply a way to increase the detoxification of your system that will already be taking place with the yoga.

Cigarettes/Marijuana	If you are a smoker, maybe just not smoking until after 6pm could be a start, or after 12pm. Good to give the lungs a little vacation.
Caffeine	It is a drug, and chances are if you drink it, you're addicted to it
Sugar	Raises blood sugar in big spurts causes mood swings
Wheat	Difficult to digest, can often make you feel sluggish
Dairy	Can contribute to acne, and excess mucus
Fried Foods	Same as wheat, and re-used oil is also not healthy
Red Meat	See wheat

Some things you may want to add:

Brown or Red Rice	If you've never had Red Rice try it just once it's so good AND so healthy
Nori	Seaweed that has a high electrolyte content
Mineral Supplements	Replace the minerals you may loose sweating
Lemon (in your water)	Also adds electrolytes
Ginger	Boil in hot water in the morning, add maple syrup; great for digestion
Cucumbers	Rich in minerals and great cooling food
Mint	Mint is cooling, and can be added to water
Water	more to follow

Water

We should all drink, naturally, 1 litre of water for every 50 pounds of body weight. With your challenge you should add one litre. Here are water drinking tips...

- Drink 500mL when you get up in the morning
- For EXTRA benefits squeeze the juice of one lemon into a glass of warm water and drink it in the morning before you eat anything ... you'll notice improved digestion when you do eat and it also stimulates your liver which in turn starts to process and eliminate toxins (plus lemons are a great source of some of the minerals found in electrolyte supplements)

- Drink a glass of water before you go to bed (eventually your bladder will adjust and you won't have to go to the washroom in the middle of the night)
- If your urine is dark yellow you need more water
- Add ginger or lemon to your water
- Add electrolytes, or EmergenC especially before class

Electrolytes

Electrolytes are important for the functioning of your muscles, organs, brain, and most vital functions in the body. Electrolytes are just a fancy word for four minerals that are an important part of your body's hydration process. Think of electrolytes as the tools your body uses to extract hydration from the liquids you ingest. When you exercise, some electrolytes are lost through sweat and often our daily diets don't provide the full range of vitamins and minerals required to offset this loss and may result in dehydration. Please feel free to contact the studio's teachers or manager with any questions you may have about electrolytes – you may believe that you're feeling fatigued or tired but this may be due to a lack of hydration so it's best to address that throughout the Challenge by ensuring that you are providing your body with the right tools.

It is important to replace these minerals so that your energy levels stay steady.

Most electrolytes are water soluble, which means that if your body does not need them the body will get rid of them. Electric yellow urine usually points to excess minerals leaving the body. *Caution:* excess in electrolytes may result in diarrhea.

Moisturize

If you find your skin is getting dry, naturally this will be happening because of the weather, try to find a moisturizer that is higher in oil content, and contains vitamin E. Best time to apply is directly after a shower. If your skin is greasy during class it most likely not been absorbed, either because of when you applied, or because of the ingredients of the cream itself. Moisturizing is usually not necessary every day unless you are prone to dry skin.

Rest

You may have heard that many yogis need only 4-5 hours of sleep a night. Perhaps one day when we all get to the point where we can meditate throughout class, we'll get there. Until then it is really important to rest at least 7-8 hours a night. If you can't get 7-8 be sure to have a few recovery nights where you can sleep 8-9 hours.

HAVE FUN

This is the most important part. Introduce yourself to fellow challengers, see how they're doing. Go to the movies, hang out with friends, take time to chill out and try not to take yourself, or the challenge too seriously.