

Yoga. stretched

Had it with Hatha? Bored of Bikram? Maybe it's time to roll up your yoga mat in search of a new way to downward dog. There's no lack of available options.

Here are a few to contemplate. | *by* DIANA BALLON

FOR MOST OF US, THE WORD YOGA IS UNLIKELY to conjure up the image of an ascetic meditating under a banyan tree.

In fact, what began in ancient India as a way to find existential enlightenment has morphed. Considerably. Today we tend to associate yoga with an aerobic workout, a stretch class, an opportunity to sport spandex, a potential for weight loss — or any combination of the above.

“There is a mushrooming of styles or approaches to the physical practice, some of which try to preserve some depth or essence, but many others that are not concerned at all with preserving it,” says Montreal-based yoga teacher, trainer and philoso-

phy instructor Robin Golt.

When yoga began, “It didn’t include the kind of physical exercise we now refer to as yoga,” she says. “The original yoga was a response to existential questions about the universe, our place in the universe and the nature of who we really are as individuals.”

Although these existential questions are still relevant today, fewer people are asking them, says Golt. Instead, yoga is being marketed to appeal to a larger audience and taking on different shapes to respond to more people’s needs.

Over the last few weeks, I tried many of these new variations on the traditional yoga.

Here’s what I discovered.



Aerial yoga

wardrobe by INGRIE WILLIAMS
off-figure photography by LUIS ALBUQUERQUE
wardrobe styling by DEE CONNOLLY

TRY IT IF YOU LIKE

Something whimsical and playful. Maybe you like the idea of hanging upside down, or doing postures that you would find too challenging on the mat.

GAP JACKET, \$128
HAIR SLINKY BY LA VITA GLAM
HAIR TIES, \$4 - \$8 EACH
LOLÉ BRA TOP, \$50
WINNERS TANK TOP, \$17
BKR WATER BOTTLE, \$45
GAPFIT LEGGINGS, \$75
LORNA JANE BAG, \$70



THE GIST

Aerial yoga, sometimes also referred to as AntiGravity Yoga or fly yoga, is a form of yoga that involves practicing various postures using a cloth hammock or "silk" suspended from the ceiling.



THE BEGINNINGS

Although its exact origins are unknown, Christopher Harrison, a former gymnast and Broadway choreographer, founded a form of aerial yoga trademarked as AntiGravity Yoga.

THE BENEFITS

With the support of a hammock, you can work on alignment (with less worries about balance), you can feel your spine lengthen and decompress without putting pressure on your joints, and you can release tension on your muscles and bones, says Marlene Sammy, co-owner of Fly Studio and Branch Yoga & Wellness in Toronto.

There's a mental challenge as well. It's cool to confront the emotion that can arise when you are upside down, and you are forced to let go without knowing where you are in space.

THE GEAR

Essentials updated in a pretty palette work their magic when you're ready to hang out. Balance soft prints with sporty textures, like a perforated tank top. And pairing a multi-strap bag with an equally chic ultra-light jacket instantly turns a post-class coffee run into a walk of fame.

ISTOCK

Spynga

TRY IT IF YOU LIKE

To mix things up with a good sweat session followed by something more relaxing. It's truly the yin and yang of exercise.

AURUM LEGGINGS, \$145

JOE FRESH TOP, \$34

OLD NAVY BASEBALL CAP \$20

NIKE RUNNING SHOES, \$145

MANDUKA EQUA HAND

TOWEL, \$20, AT MEC

CHAMPION SPORTS BRA, \$42, AT MEC



THE GIST

Spynga is the marriage of spinning and yoga. The same teacher leads you through a spin class followed by a yoga class. All the postures and flows you do on the mat involve lengthening and strengthening what you have worked on the bike.

When you spin, you get out of your head and into the motion of your body and breath, says Casey Soer, instructor and owner of Spynga studio in Toronto and a franchise in Ohio. The lights are dimmed and atmospheric music moves you through the phases of the workout — from setting an intention for the practice, to sprinting, climbing hills and then cooling down. On the yoga side, the

focus is on balancing, stretching your body and calming your mind.

THE BEGINNINGS

While living in New York in the '90s, Soer says she loved to spin, and her friend Sari Nisker loved to practice yoga; each would drag the other to their respective classes. Then one day at a café in Hell's Kitchen, they thought, wouldn't it be cool to put the two practices together? Thus the concept for Spynga was born. The two trade-marked the word and copyrighted their teaching concept. The goal? To "convert the spinner into yoga and vice versa," says Soer.

THE BENEFITS

The Signature Class — 30 minutes of spin, 30 minutes of yoga — will leave you feeling good, balanced, and ready to take on the next challenge that presents itself in your day.

THE GEAR

An intense journey demands items as focused as you are. Start strong with moisture-wicking everything, and consider high-waist bottoms that maintain a covered rear view from bike to mat. A super absorbent hand towel, cheeky cap and cool footwear will all pull together to make it look like you've killed it. Which, naturally, you have.

SUP yoga

TRY IT IF YOU LIKE

To be out in nature or around water while working out. A lot of people who are attracted to this practice like to water-ski, surf or swim.

LOLÉ TOP, \$65

LORNA JANE SPORTS BRA, \$75

GOODY HEADBANDS, \$8 FOR SET OF 5

LOLÉ LEGGINGS, \$100

FENDI SUNGLASSES, \$740, AT

HOLT RENFREW

MEC BACKPACK, \$38



THE GIST

SUP yoga, as it sounds, is essentially about doing yoga on a paddleboard, ideally in calm water. The lake is your studio. The board is your yoga mat.

"SUP yoga really requires focused attention," says instructor Amanda Stokes of Toronto Island SUP Inc. Although yoga always requires focus, with SUP yoga there is even more focus on balance and being aware of what is around you – of what, or who, might be coming toward you on their board, or of how close you are to natural elements like an overhanging tree, says Stokes.

With these distractions, you are still looking for "a still point amid the chaos," explains Stokes. And doing the warrior pose, the crow, even a headstand on

your board, makes for a special kind of challenge.

THE BEGINNINGS

There are different theories about where SUP yoga comes from — some say California, others say Florida and Hawaii. SUP yoga is really a natural progression from SUP, says Gudrun Hardes of WSUP Toronto. Some people like to race with the board; others just like to chill. When WSUP Toronto opened six years ago, the practice was just coming to Canada, says Hardes. Now it's all over the world.

THE BENEFITS

SUP yoga combines many good elements — being outside, doing yoga and joining together with like-minded participants.

Although some postures are harder on water, some are actually easier and can feel really good, says Hardes. If you like headstands, for example, the potential to fall into water is likely less intimidating than the idea of hitting your head on hard ground.

THE GEAR

Dip into pieces designed to perform on every level. A long-sleeve top and ankle-length leggings with built-in UPF go the distance to shield from sun exposure, while designs that herald pattern and colour-blocking help cut a striking silhouette. A compact backpack with multiple compartments makes it easy to contain dry goods, like chic shades.

ISTOCK, LUIS ALBUQUERQUE

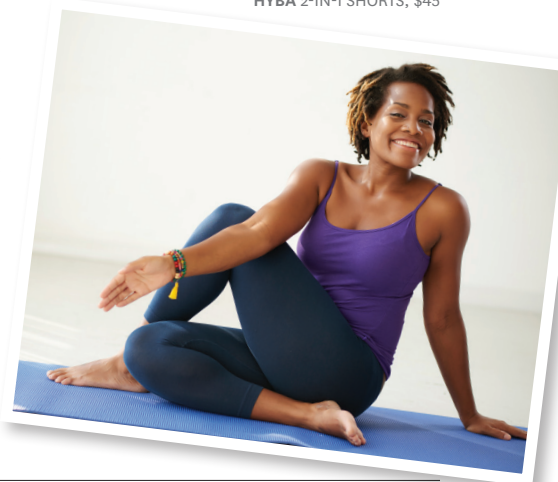
Yogalates



TRY IT IF YOU LIKE

Yoga and Pilates, but don't have time to do both in a week. It's great if you want to improve your core, or if you have specific strengthening needs due to an injury.

HYBA JACKET, \$65
NEW BALANCE CROP TOP, \$75
JOE FRESH T-SHIRT, \$16
SAUCONY SNEAKERS, \$100
HYBA 2-IN-1 SHORTS, \$45



THE GIST

As its name implies, yogalates is a blend of yoga and Pilates. It's difficult to define specifically how these two practices are fused because yogalates teachers tend to create their own blend, depending on what they want to target, says Susan Emery, owner and primary teacher at the Yoga Lounge in Toronto. For Emery, her brand involves combining yoga breath with movements targeting problem areas in the body, specifically the hips and pelvis which tend to be weak. Like many other yogalates teachers, Emery incorporates props into her class — in her case, weights, ropes and bars.

THE BEGINNINGS

Pilates was founded in the 1920s by

German-born Joseph Pilates in an effort to help bedridden patients who needed core strengthening. Louise Solomon of Australia trademarked the yogalates method in 1997, incorporating a deep understanding of functional anatomy and core stability.

THE BENEFITS

It can be adapted to the needs of people taking it, regardless of their body type. Yogalates helps tone core muscles. It gives you exercise, helps you to strengthen and stretch, possibly lose weight and generally feel better.

THE GEAR

Dressing in feel-good necessities will put a spring in your step before you even get to class. Try bold colours grounded with

neutral shades, and don't shy away from prints. Look for smart details (like shorts with flash-reducing layers) or accents that elevate (yup, that's a sexy 'n' strappy sports bra). As the final note, upgrade to a pair of sneakers in a happy-go-lucky hue.

WHERE TO BUY

AURUM: AURUMACTIVEWEAR.COM
BKR: MURALE, WELL.CA
GAP/GAPFIT: GAPCANADA.CA
GOODY: WALMART.CA
LA VITA GLAM: HAIRSLINKY.COM
HOLT RENFREW: HOLTRENFREW.COM
HYBA: HYBA.COM
JOE FRESH: JOEFRESH.COM
LOLÉ: LOLEWOMEN.COM
LORNA JANE: LUXEACTIVEWEAR.CA
MEC: MEC.CA
NEW BALANCE: NEWBALANCE.CA
NIKE: NIKE.COM
OLD NAVY: OLDNAVY.CA
SAUCONY: SAUCONY.CA
WINNERS: WINNERS.CA