



Via [Alison O'Connor](#)

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[20 Tips for your First Bikram Yoga Class.](#)

Things you can do before, during, and after class to ensure a positive first experience in the hot room.



(Photo: By HealthZone (The Star) [FAL], via Wikimedia Commons)

Among my circle of friends, family, and acquaintances, I've developed a bit of a reputation as a Bikram yoga fanatic and all-around yoga nerd. And I'll admit, it's true. I go to class every day. [I blog about it.](#) I talk about it. I live it, breathe it, eat it, sleep it, love it!

Ok, that might be a little overly dramatic, but you get the point.

Perhaps because of this, I get asked a lot of questions from curious individuals who have heard of Bikram before, and are thinking about trying it out, but are just a little nervous. I mean let's face

it, the prospect of going into a room heated to 105 degrees for 90 minutes and doing 26 postures and two breathing exercises is a little daunting, right? Understandable!

The most frequent question I get is either: “I’m thinking about signing up for a Bikram class! Should I be scared?” or “I just signed up for a Bikram class! Am I going to die???”

The short answer to both is NO, absolutely not!

The long answer is also NO, absolutely not, but there are a few things you should think about before your first class, and a few things you can do before, after, and during class to ensure a positive first experience in the hot room!

So without further ado, for all of you who have asked and all of you who haven’t, here is my list of 20 tips, tricks, and hints for your first Bikram yoga class! Enjoy!

Before Class...*

1. Hydrate. But not too much. Drink plenty of water throughout the day leading up to your first class. Now don’t go crazy and guzzle liter after liter or anything, but do add a little more water than normal to your daily routine. You don’t want to arrive at class and realize that *Ooops*, all you’ve had to drink all day is a gallon of iced coffee and a diet coke.



(photo: The Baltimore Sun)

Bad news bears. Also, you will want to stop drinking at least two hours before class. You know, just to make sure you don't have to, errr... *relieve yourself* at any time during your practice.

2. Eat. But not too much. A hot yoga class can be very demanding on the body. Thus, you'll want to make sure you've eaten enough during the day to fuel you through your class, and that what you've eaten has been fairly light and healthy. The day of your first hot yoga class is probably not the best time to hit up the all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet, or chow down on the Denny's grand slam breakfast with extra bacon. Keep it light, keep it simple, and like with the hydrating thing, stop eating at least two hours before class. You don't want anything churning around in your belly while you're trying to "compress your abdominal wall, contract your abdominal muscles"!

3. Bring at least a liter of water with you to class. It's hot in the room. You will sweat. You will get thirsty. Simple enough.

4. Don't wear long pants. You will be very, very sorry. Tiny butt-hugging shorts, sports bra, and a tank top for the ladies, shorts or swim trunks for the gents. That's all you need. Really.

5. Get there early. At least half an hour early. Gives you time to fill out the necessary paperwork, get changed, and get a good spot in the room. Also, many teachers give specific instructions at the beginning of class for first-timers, so you want to make sure you're in the room to hear it and not still in the locker room fiddling with your tiny butt-hugging shorts.

6. Tell the teacher you're new. It's surprising how many people don't want to do this. But really, the teacher is there to help you! Yoga teachers love to teach people about yoga. That's why they're teachers! And trust me, they want you to have the best experience possible on your first class, and they'll do whatever they can to make that happen. So don't be shy, march right up to the teacher, and pluckily say, "Hi, I'm (insert your name), and I'm new!" You'll be best friends within minutes.

7. Ask where the "cool spot" is. Now that you're BFF with the teacher, ask her (or him) where the best spot is for you to set up your mat. Most studios have a "cool spot"—often (but not always) near a door or a window—and this is usually where they recommend new people set up for their first class. Because, obviously, it's a *cool spot*.

8. Set up your mat and towel(s). When you sign in to class, you will most likely be handed a yoga mat and two towels. Ommigod, what do you do with these things?!? Well, the mat goes on the floor. That's an easy one. But the towels? That's more of a matter of preference. If you're not a heavy sweater, you'll just take one of the two towels and place it right on top of your mat, right in the middle, so that it absorbs your sweat and keeps your mat from becoming the yogic equivalent of a Slip 'n' Slide.



HOWEVER. If you're like me, and you sweat like an animal (nothing wrong with this, by the way) you will probably want to use both towels, laid out in a slightly overlapping way, covering your entire mat. [For the record, this is how I set up my towels](#), and it works great!

9. Have NO expectations. That goes for expectations of yourself, the teacher, the class, the studio, etc. Expect NOTHING, and be open to EVERYTHING.

During Class...

10. Keep an open mind. If you've practiced other yoga before, just know that this will be different. Try not to be all HEY, THIS ISN'T HOW WE DO IT IN VINYASA/ASHTANGA/KUNDALINI/WHATEVER! Of course it's not the same! This is Bikram! Listen to the teacher and be open to what she says, even when your brain tries to tell you something else.

11. Take lots of breaks. There's no shame in sitting down! It's your first class, go easy on yourself!

12. But not too many breaks. Then again, if you feel good, keep going! Don't sit down just because you feel like you want to take a nap. Listen to your body really honestly, see what it tells you, and react accordingly.

13. Stay in the room. In every class, the teacher is guaranteed to remind you that staying in the room is the most important thing. Even if you have to sit the whole time, by staying in the room, maintaining your focus, and mentally staying with the class you are still practicing yoga. The heat is one of the greatest benefits of this practice, as it allows your body to open up and your muscles

to release in ways they wouldn't be able to otherwise, but it can also be the toughest thing to adjust to. By staying in the room, you give your body the time and space to make that adjustment.

14. Breathe. When things get tough, breathing will keep you alive! It can be hard to remember in the moment, but if at any point you feel yourself struggling in a pose, back off a little and recover your breath. I mean, let's face it: if you're not breathing, you're unlikely to be doing anything else. KnowwhatI mean?

After Class...

15. Don't get up too fast! Take your time leaving the room, hanging up your mat, putting your towels in the bin, showering, etc. Your body may feel a smidge unusual. You've just worked every major muscle group—probably pretty darn hard—and detoxified yourself in a very big way! So respect that and don't push it. Give yourself plenty of time to chill after class. If possible, don't have ANYTHING you “have to do!!” the rest of the day. Take it easy.

16. Thank the teacher for this fresh hell she just put you through. It's only polite.

17. If your studio has peppermint soap in the showers, don't get it in your eyes and DON'T GET IT IN YOUR HOO-HAH! This is just practical advice. It burns. Trust me.

18. Re-hydrate. Have something with electrolytes. Coconut water is great, any kind of electrolyte water is too, even sports drinks will work. Also drink plenty of actual water. That's that clear stuff that comes out of the tap.

19. Eat. Have a nice light healthy meal. Fruits, veggies, lean protein. You know, the “good” stuff.

20. Go back again tomorrow. WHAT?!? But that's CRAZY, isn't it?!??? Actually, no it's not. They say in Bikram “come back as soon as you can, as often as you can!”, and that's especially true in your first week. Your body has to get used to this new, very different thing you're doing, and the more frequently you go, the better opportunity it has to do just that.

So there you go, yoga people (and soon-to-be yoga people!), a few tips for your first journey into the hot room. Above all, remember to **ENJOY YOURSELF!** Bikram yoga can certainly be challenging at times, but don't be intimidated! Like all forms of yoga, it's not something to be learned and mastered in a day, or a month, or a year, or ten years! This practice is rich and deep and amazing and takes a lifetime, but that's what makes it interesting and relevant! See this as a new adventure, a new experience, and a new way to explore the power of the mind-body connection that only yoga can facilitate!

Good luck, have fun, and NAMASTE!

**As with any exercise program, if you have any pre-existing medical conditions or specific injuries, you should probably check with your doctor and get their A-Okay before beginning your Bikram yoga practice. Just saying...*



Alison O'Connor is a writer, comedian, performer, and yogi living in New York City. Her writing has been featured in The New York Times, as well as many other less-prestigious sounding publications, online journals, and blogs. Alison found yoga in 2006, while working and training as dancer. It was love at first downward dog, as she was instantly fascinated with the mind-body connection, and how such a simple practice could change her life so much, so fast. She obtained her Vinyasa teaching certification in 2008 and immediately began teaching at several studios in the NYC area. While currently on hiatus from both Vinyasa and teaching, Alison has recently found a new love in Bikram yoga. She practices nearly every day and writes at length about her experiences in the hot room on her Bikram-centric website [“It’s A Party, Not A Picnic”](#). / When not sweating her face off in yoga class or writing snarky non-fiction, Alison can be found performing longform improvisation, musical improv, and even a little freestyle rap (yes, really!) at comedy venues and basement theaters around the city. She also flirts with doing stand-up comedy, but they haven’t officially started dating yet. As if ALL THAT wasn't enough, Alison also haphazardly updates her observational humor blog, [“AOC in NYC”](#), and is hard at work on her first book, which has recently been acquired for publication by OCA publishing. For more on Alison, and to follow her up-to-the-minute adventures, you can follow her on Twitter: @AOCinNYC.