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3rd Edition

Yoga

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- Practice Yoga with a partner or against the wall
- Become more flexible and relieve stress



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Larry Payne, PhD

Internationally renowned Yoga therapy pioneer, teacher, and author

Georg Feuerstein, PhD

Internationally renowned Yoga researcher



Yoga
FOR
DUMMIES[®]
A Wiley Brand

3rd Edition

**by Larry Payne, PhD,
and Georg Feuerstein, PhD**

Foreword by Felicia Tomasko, RN
Editor in Chief,
LA YOGA Ayurveda and Health Magazine

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DUMMIES[®]
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Yoga For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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Yoga For Dummies, 3rd Edition

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Foreword

When I first met Larry Payne, it was 1995. At the time, I was a 24-year-old Yoga student living in Boulder, Colorado, studying to be a Yoga teacher. I was also anticipating attending my first Yoga conference: Unity in Yoga, held in the stunning mountain town of Aspen.

I don't expect Larry remembered meeting me, but I remember him. I remember his confident delivery, his enthusiasm, his experience, and his three-ring binder filled with information on the business of Yoga. I remember him offering suggestions to a rapt group of students on how to grow their presence as a teacher and find new places to offer classes: churches, community centers, schools. The experience increased my love affair with Yoga; I became enamored with the possibilities of incorporating it more into my own life and sharing it with others. Larry was one of the teachers leading the movement to make Yoga more accessible and as widely practiced as it is today.

That year was before the first edition of *Yoga For Dummies* was published, before the first Yoga Journal conference took place, and before the founding of *LA YOGA Ayurveda and Health Magazine*, where I am now the editor-in-chief. It was also before interested students were able to do a Google search for Yoga centers or online videos, and before my small New England hometown sported any variety of Yoga classes.

Back when I was a high school student beginning my Yoga practice, scouring libraries and bookstores for resources, I would have loved nothing more than to have found a copy of *Yoga For Dummies*. Even 25 years into my personal practice and with 15 years of teaching, I

frequently rifle through my own copy of this book. I might be searching for inspiration; suggestions on practice, teaching, or sequencing; a clear explanation of a point of practice; or other gems of grounded, practical information. With gratitude, I always find it in these pages.

Over the past two decades, since Larry and I met on that spring day on the snowy mountaintop in Aspen, not only has he written *Yoga For Dummies* (with late scholar Georg Feuerstein, PhD), but he also has founded and built the notable Yoga Therapy RX program at Loyola Marymount University, where I am honored to be among the faculty. Larry has been responsible for training thousands of students as they seek to become respected members of the growing professional community of Yoga therapists. As part of that same active Yoga community, I am honored to call Larry both a colleague and a friend.

The book you're currently holding reflects years of study and practice by the authors, all put together in an easy-to-understand format. It's a friendly guide that demystifies traditions and brand names, helping you make sense of how to prepare for your first practice or your five thousandth. Within these pages, you discover how to design your own practice (suggestions I love), as well as how to incorporate concentration, steadiness, mindfulness, and more in every part of your life. Pick up this book for your parents, your children, your favorite teacher, or yourself. Keep it nearby for when you need a reminder of something essential (even in your desk drawer or bookshelf at work). Fold over pages, write notes to yourself, travel with it.

When I began my own Yoga practice, I had no idea where it would take me, but on a daily basis, I feel grateful for what it has added to everything I do. Yoga has allowed

me to find balance amid all the chapters of my life, including nursing school and the state boards, the everyday challenges of work and life in L.A., a cross-country move, time spent living overseas, health challenges, family dynamics, relationships, and more. In all the chapters of any life, Yoga offers tools for practice, helping us build resilience so that we may thrive. For this aim, *Yoga For Dummies* is a trusted companion, a steady support, a lifetime tool for practicing Yoga at any age and for any body. Use it well, and return to these pages often.

Felicia Marie Tomasko, RN, E-RYT-500

Editor in Chief, *LA YOGA Ayurveda and Health Magazine*

and *Find Bliss Magazine*

President, Bliss Network

Member, Board of Directors, National Ayurvedic Medical Association

and The Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Health Care

Introduction

More than 20 million Americans practice Yoga of some kind, and many more millions of Yoga practitioners live in other parts of the world. Yoga isn't a fad. It has a history of approximately 5 millennia and has been around in the West for much more than a hundred years. Though ancient, it's especially relevant to today's hectic and stressful way of life.

By its very nature, Yoga leads you toward greater balance and relaxation. It's the ultimate mind-body practice. A Yoga practice brings a balanced mixture of alertness and relaxation with each pose. The physical movements coordinated with the breath bring bodily and mental relaxation, and the serene mind brings further relaxation to stressed and tight muscles. What results is a welcome dose of enhanced well-being. These benefits draw millions to the practice of this ancient tradition. And indeed, Yoga has never been more important. In our hectic 24/7 way of life, loaded with opportunities for constant stimulation and accumulation of stress, Yoga brings balance to all who take the time to welcome it into their lives.

Yoga has brought health and peace of mind to millions of people, and it can do the same for you. We invite you to explore Yoga in depth with *Yoga For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, as your guide. The yogic postures are an excellent starting point, but they're merely the outermost shell of a multilayered tradition. At its core, Yoga is a timeless answer for anyone seeking deeper meaning in life and that elusive treasure called abiding peacefulness.

About This Book

Perhaps *Yoga For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is the first book on Yoga you've ever held in your hands. In this case, we can definitely say that you're starting at the right place. More likely, however, you've leafed through quite a few other books, including some that are neither sound nor helpful. How, then, is this book different? We have a two-part answer for you.

First, the information you find in *Yoga For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is based on our extensive study and practice of Yoga. Between us, we have more than 75 years of experience with Yoga. One author (Larry) directs a university-based Yoga therapy training program for Yoga teachers at Loyola Marymount University; has a thriving practice as a Yoga therapist and Yoga teacher in Los Angeles, where he adapts Yoga to his clients' specific needs and health challenges (especially back problems); and has produced a popular series of Yoga DVDs. The other author (Georg) is internationally recognized as a leading expert on the Yoga tradition, has authored many seminal works on it, and has created a teacher training manual on Yoga philosophy that Yoga teachers in seven countries refer to. In this book, we merge our respective areas of expertise to create a reliable and user-friendly introductory book that can also serve you as a reference work on an ongoing basis.

Second, we're both dedicated to motivating you to practice Yoga, a system that we've seen work both minor and major miracles. We've committed our lives to making Yoga available to anyone who cares about the health and wholeness of the body and mind. In short, we can say, with all modesty, that you're in the best of hands.

This book guides you slowly, step by step, into the treasure house of Yoga. And what a treasure house it is! You find out how to strengthen your mind and enlist it to unlock your body's extraordinary potential. A sound body requires a sound mind, and we show you how to improve or regain the health and wholeness of both.

We know you're busy, so we've organized this book in the easy-access way the Dummies series is known for. You may choose to read the book from cover to cover, or you may read any section or chapter as it calls to you. Feel free to skip over the Technical Stuff, which we indicate with an icon, and the sidebars (although we think you'll find these interesting). But please, when you see a Warning icon, take note — we want your practice to be a safe one.

Whether you're interested in becoming more flexible, more fit, less stressed, or more peaceful and joyful, this book contains all the good counsel and practical exercises you need to get started.

Above all, we've endeavored to make this book relevant to busy people like you. And if, after reading this guide, you become more serious about studying and practicing Yoga, consider taking a Yoga class with a qualified instructor. This book is a great guide, but nothing compares to hands-on instruction and guidance.

Foolish Assumptions

We know you're no dummy! But if you're a newbie to Yoga, we know you appreciate starting with the basics. No prior exposure to the many aspects of Yoga is necessary for you to benefit from this book. In fact, this book is the perfect first step in your exploration, and we invite you to continue to explore further when you have

this under your belt. The Additional Yoga Resources section online at www.dummies.com/extras/yoga can help you with that, but you get more on that later in this introduction.

We also know that some of our readers may already have some experience with Yoga and want to understand the fundamentals more deeply. For you, we provide detail and a fair amount of depth across the Yoga spectrum, but always in a clear and direct manner. We assume that you're looking for sound information with a no-nonsense presentation. Let other books speak to you in an esoteric manner. For us, let's just talk Yoga!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, you'll notice little pictures in the margins. These icons point you to information that you may not want to forget or, in some cases, you may decide to skip over.



Our tips point you toward helpful information that can make your yogic journey a little smoother.



When we point to information for you to remember, we think it's worthwhile for you to pause and make a mental note of the information; it can help you down the road in your understanding and practice.



Please take note of all warnings. Yoga is safe, but Yoga injuries can and do happen, and we don't want that to be your experience.



Consider this material “nice to know” information. We think it's interesting and can add to your experience. But feel free to skip it if you want to breeze through.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the book content, you can find valuable free material online. We provide you with a Cheat Sheet that addresses questions that may be first and foremost in your mind: We separate Yoga facts from myths, help you find the right Yoga teacher for you, and offer tips for a successful Yoga practice. You can access this material at www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/yoga.

We've also included additional articles at www.dummies.com/extras/yoga. There you can read about avoiding common Yoga injuries, taking Yoga on the road with you, finding lucidity in sleep as well as wakefulness, and eating like a yogi. Plus, we've included a bonus chapter on Yoga therapy for the upper back and neck, two common areas of stress and strain, and we've detailed a Yoga therapy routine for the lower back. You can also make use of our list of additional resources when you've mastered the basics and want to learn more about Yoga.

But wait, there's more! We have 10 short videos that introduce you to great ideas for improving your Yoga practice, regardless of your age or physical abilities.

Check out these tried-and-true poses and routines at www.dummies.com/go/yoga.

Where to Go from Here

We've designed *Yoga For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, to be both an introduction and a beginner's reference work. You can read the chapters one after the other and practice along with us, or you can dip into the book here and there, reading up on the subjects that currently interest you, such as relaxation techniques or helpful props for your practice.

If you're a newcomer to Yoga, we recommend that you spend some time with the table of contents and leaf through the book to get a general sense of how we've structured and approached the material. You probably want to begin your reading with the first two chapters, which give you a picture of the Yoga landscape.

If you aren't new to Yoga and you want a refresher course, you can also use this book as a reliable guide in answering your questions. Perusing the table of contents is a good starting point for you as well. You may find yourself gravitating to later chapters that zero in on specific categories of postures, or postures and routines for specific age groups or needs, or ways to custom-design a personal practice. And of course, the index is always useful to locate specific information on any topic of interest.

Okay, then, are you ready to Yoga?

Part I Getting Started with Yoga



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part ...

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with the vast roadmap of Yoga
- ✓ Understand the basics, to make your practice of Yoga both enjoyable and safe
- ✓ Find a Yoga class and instructor that meet your individual needs
- ✓ Start putting the fundamentals to use: guidelines for safe practice, conscious breathing, relaxation techniques, and coordination of breath and movement

Chapter 1

Yoga 101: Building a Foundation

In This Chapter

- ▶ Debunking Yoga myths
 - ▶ Deciphering the word *Yoga*
 - ▶ Exploring the primary branches, styles, and approaches to Yoga
 - ▶ Understanding the yogic principles of being
 - ▶ Taking control of your mind, body, health, and life with Yoga
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Although *Yoga* is now a household word, many people don't know exactly what it is. Far more than just physical exercise, Yoga can transform you, even if it's not your intention when you first step onto the mat. In this chapter, we clear up the confusion and explain what Yoga really is and how it relates to your health and happiness. We also help you see the richness of Yoga, with its many different branches and approaches. Yoga really does offer something for everyone.

Whatever your age, weight, flexibility, or beliefs may be, you can practice and benefit from some version of Yoga. Yoga may have originated in India, but it's for all of humanity.

Understanding the True Character of Yoga

Whenever you hear that Yoga is *just* this or *just* that, your nonsense alert should kick into action. Yoga is too comprehensive to reduce to any one aspect — it's like a skyscraper with many floors and numerous rooms at each level. Yoga isn't *just* gymnastics, fitness training, a way to control your weight, stress reduction, meditation, or a spiritual path — it's *all* these tools and a great deal more.

The Yoga we enjoy today comes from a 5,000-year-old Indian tradition. Some of the exercises look like gymnastics and so, not surprisingly, have made their way into Western gymnastics. These exercises, or postures, help you become (and stay) fit and trim, control your weight, and reduce your stress level. Yoga also offers a whole range of meditation practices, including breathing techniques that exercise your lungs and calm your nervous system, or that charge your brain and the rest of your body with delicious energy.

You can also use Yoga as an efficient system of healthcare that has proven its usefulness in both restoring and maintaining health. Yoga continues to gain acceptance within the medical establishment; more physicians are recommending Yoga to their patients not only for stress reduction, but also as a safe and sane method of exercise and physical therapy (notably, for the back, neck, knees, and hips).

Still, Yoga is far more than a system of preventative or restorative healthcare. Yoga looks at health from a broad, holistic perspective that integrative medicine is only now rediscovering. This perspective appreciates the

enormous influence of the mind — your psychological attitudes — on physical health.

Finding unity

The word *Yoga* comes from the ancient Sanskrit language spoken by the traditional religious elite of India, the *Brahmins*. *Yoga* means “union” or “integration” and also “discipline.” The system of Yoga, then, is a *unitive* or *integrating discipline*. Yoga seeks unity at various levels. First, it seeks to unite body and mind, which people all too often separate. Some people are chronically “out of the body.” They can’t feel their feet or the ground beneath them, as if they hover like ghosts just above their bodies. They’re unable to cope with the ordinary pressures of daily life, so they collapse under stress. They don’t understand their own emotions. Afraid of life, they’re easily hurt emotionally.

Yoga also seeks to unite the rational mind and the emotions. People frequently bottle up their emotions and don’t express their real feelings. Instead, they choose to rationalize away these feelings. Chronic avoidance can become a serious health hazard; if people aren’t aware that they’re suppressing feelings such as anger, the anger consumes them from the inside out.



Here’s how Yoga can help you with your personal growth:

- ✓ It can put you in touch with your real feelings and balance your emotional life.
- ✓ It can help you understand and accept yourself so that you feel comfortable with who you are. You don’t have to “fake it” or reduce your life to constant role playing.

- ✓ It helps you become more able to empathize and communicate with others.

Yoga is a powerful means of psychological integration. It makes you aware that you're part of a larger whole, not merely an island unto yourself. People can't thrive in isolation. Even the most independent individual is greatly indebted to others. When your mind and body are happily reunited, this union with others comes about naturally. The moral principles of Yoga are all-embracing, encouraging you to seek kinship with everyone and everything. We say more about this topic in Chapter [22](#).

Finding yourself: Are you a yogi (or a yogini)?

Someone who's practicing the discipline of balancing mind and body through Yoga is traditionally called a *yogi* (if male) or a *yogini* (if female). In this book, we use both terms at random. Alternatively, we also use the English term *Yoga practitioner*. Becoming a *yogi* or *yogini* means you do more than practice Yoga postures. Yoginis embrace Yoga as a self-transforming spiritual discipline. A yogi who has really mastered Yoga is called an *adept*. If such an adept also teaches (and not all of them do), this person is traditionally called a *guru*. The Sanskrit word *guru* literally means "weighty one." According to traditional esoteric sources, the syllable *gu* signifies spiritual darkness, and *ru* signifies the act of removing. Thus, a guru is a teacher who leads the student from darkness to light.

Very few Westerners have achieved complete mastery of Yoga, mainly because Yoga is still a relatively young movement in the West. So please be careful about anyone who claims to be enlightened or to have been given the title of guru! However, at the level at which

Yoga is generally taught outside its Indian homeland, many competent Yoga teachers or instructors can lend a helping hand to beginners. In this book, we hope to do just that for you.

Considering Your Options: The Eight Main Branches of Yoga

When you take a bird's-eye view of the Yoga tradition, you see a dozen major strands of development, each with its own subdivisions. Picture Yoga as a giant tree with eight branches; each branch has its own unique character, but each is also part of the same tree. With so many different paths, you're sure to find one that's right for your personality, lifestyle, and goals. In this book, we focus on Hatha Yoga, the most popular branch of Yoga, but we avoid the common mistake of reducing it to mere physical fitness training. Thus, we also talk about meditation and the spiritual aspects of Yoga.

Here are the seven principal branches of Yoga, with an eighth branch we added at the end:

- ✓ **Bhakti (*bhuk-tee*) Yoga, the Yoga of devotion:** Bhakti Yoga practitioners believe that a supreme being (the Divine) transcends their lives, and they feel moved to connect or even completely merge with that supreme being through acts of devotion. Bhakti Yoga includes such practices as making flower offerings, singing hymns of praise, and thinking about the Divine.
- ✓ **Hatha (*haht-ha*) Yoga, the Yoga of physical discipline:** All branches of Yoga seek to achieve the