

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

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!

Before Class...*

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

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 more water than normal to your daily routine. (Also, you may want to stop drinking around an hour or two before class.)

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 to three 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.

4. Don't wear long pants. You will be sorry. 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 twenty minutes 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.

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 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). Whats with the towels? If you’re not a heavy sweater, you’ll just take one towel 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 sweat like an animal (nothing wrong with this, by the way) you will probably want to use two towels, laid out in a slightly overlapping way, covering your entire mat.

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! Listen to the teacher and be open to what he says, even when your brain tries to tell you something else.

11. Take lots of breaks. There’s no shame in lying 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 lie 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 lie down 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 !

After Class...

15. Don't get up too fast! Take your time leaving the room, hanging up your rental 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!!” Take it easy.

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

17. 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.

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

19. Go back again tomorrow. WHAT?!? But that's CRAZY, isn't it?!?!? Actually, no it's not. They say “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!** Hot 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!