



Preventing Yoga Injuries

The four keys to keeping you on the mat

by Dr. Robin Armstrong



WE ALL CAME TO YOGA FOR VERY POSITIVE REASONS, to calm the mind, improve the physical body, or to heal an injury. Yoga is very good at helping us achieve all of these things. In fact science is now recognizing the use of yoga to treat conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, high blood pressure and low back pain. But despite our best intentions, sometimes injuries just happen. This article will teach you how to prevent injuries in your yoga practice.

Injuries happen for 3 major reasons: we go past our body's physiological limits, we succumb to a repetitive strain injury, or our body's asymmetries get the best of us.

We can prevent injury with four key points:

1. Honour our old injuries. Tell your teacher about your injury and respect the limitations your injuries present. Talk to your chiropractor or health professional about what motions to avoid. An injury is an excellent time to practice the yogic tenet of *ahimsa* or non-violence towards our own bodies by not pushing ourselves too far.

2. Warm up and cool down. Start with slow flowing movements to build heat in the body before progressing to more challenging postures. If necessary come to class 5 minutes early to get in your own warm up. Allow time for a proper *savasana*, the final relaxation pose, to slow down the heart rate and decrease the body temperature.

3. Cross train our yoga. Try a different style of yoga every now and then. Not only is it mentally stimulating, but it also challenges our body to move in different patterns. This helps to prevent injuries caused by repeating the same motions over and over.

4. Take our yoga off the mat. We all have habitual activities that undermine our body's natural balance from left to right or front to back. Try carrying your bag on the opposite side, or talking on the phone with your opposite ear. Our bodies need symmetry to function properly so pay extra attention to areas in your body where this is out of balance.

What if an injury does happen?

Stop your practice, take a breath, and tell your teacher. Use *aparigraha*, non-attachment to finishing the pose or the class. Put ice on the injury as soon as possible to decrease inflammation and consult a health professional who understands yoga injuries to get a diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

We all hope to have a smooth and successful yoga practice. Injuries can happen, but if we use mindfulness and follow these four key injury prevention strategies, we can greatly decrease the chance of injury.



Dr. Robin Armstrong is a chiropractor who has practiced Ashtanga yoga for 9 years. She is a Yoga Alliance trained teacher. Combining traditional chiropractic with advanced soft tissue therapies, she effectively treats sports and spinal conditions to help people get well and stay well. She practices at Qi Integrated Health in Kitsilano.

Dr. Robin Armstrong

Chiropractor
Yoga Instructor
Active Release Technique®

Qi Integrated Health
2618 W. Broadway
Vancouver BC
T: 604.676.0355
www.stayactive.ca