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TAYLOR™

Ask a Yoga Therapist

How Do I Choose a Yoga Therapy Class?

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The "Ask a Yoga Therapist" series is for general information purposes and does not constitute as medical advice or prescription. Readers should seek local, qualified consultation and direction from their healthcare professional prior to acting on portion of these columns. Individual consultation is available with Dr. Taylor at www.drmatthewtaylor.com .

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Ask the Yoga Therapist

This column is part of an ongoing column where you can submit your or your students' questions about yoga challenges and related health and safety concerns. Submit your questions to askatherapist@yogatherapy.com

Q: What should I look for when I am trying to find a good Yoga therapy class? Are there differences and what distinguishes a good from mediocre (or worse) class?

A: You ask a very important question because anyone can log on to most studio websites and find classes advertising some relief of a health malady: back pain, bone health, chronic pain, etc. You have to be a savvy consumer because there are no accepted standards of what constitutes a safe class environment or regulation of the teacher's actual competence to teach the topic being marketed. Let's look at some factors that will help you decide and also assist teachers in better designing their offerings to the public.

We will begin with safety, or ahimsa. If you have a health challenge, have you been cleared by your health professional(s) to participate in Yoga and do you know what, if any limitations you have? Once you have the green light to participate, and then search out teachers or studios that offer what you are looking for in the local area. Get familiar with the teacher/therapist's bio and read the studio's frequently asked questions page. If you feel comfortable so far, now call the studio and ask these questions:

1. Will I fill out a health questionnaire before I start? You should as you wouldn't want them guessing what limitations you have to practice.
2. Will I meet with the instructor beforehand to discuss my situation? A one minute "Hi, how are you?" as class is filing in is not acceptable. The teacher should have read your questionnaire beforehand and have time to sit with you in private.
3. How many students in the class? More than a dozen per teacher/assistant makes good observation doubtful.
4. How does the teacher deal with my limitations or discomforts during class? There's a wide variance and you should know ahead of time to match your personality.
5. If I sign-up for a package of classes and find I don't like it or feel uncomfortable, can I get my money back?

If you are satisfied with the answers you receive and the way the information is imparted to you, then set up your time to meet the teacher and fill out your paperwork. Once there, here are some questions for the teacher:

1. What additional training have you received to qualify you to teach this topic? Because they've had the same condition is not sufficient.
2. Ask # 4 above.
3. How many years have you been teaching this topic? There's no magic number, but certainly longevity suggests ongoing consumer satisfaction.

4. What do you want to know about me? Presumably they will have additional questions, but also note tone, eye contact and other “healing” qualities. If they hurried, distracted, or tense, are you sure you are going to learn from them?
5. How do you handle monopolizers (those that ask too many questions or dominate discussions) in class? If you are one, you should know and if not and those people drive you crazy, best to know how the teacher deals with the inevitable in a group setting.
6. What is the structure of the class and do you practice while teaching? Ideally the class offers much more than some postures and a cool down. See the reference link at the end of this article for more. When the teacher isn’t demonstrating, then they should be circulating the class room to advise and assist, not doing their own practice.
7. Do you make adjustments and when? Adjustments are when a teacher corrects a student’s movement. Dependent on teaching style they can range from gentle verbal suggestions to abrupt, hands-on pushing you into a position. You want to know!

We can all celebrate that the group yoga therapy process is a profound and effective process, but go in practicing ahimsa for ourselves by doing your homework beforehand. We in the Yoga community know you the consumer want to take charge of your own health. The interactive, participatory group yoga therapy class format delivers that power when done well within the guidelines of this article.

Log on to www.matthewjtaylor.com/groupyogatherapy.pdf to download a free copy of a www.iayt.org journal article I wrote that further explores this important topic.

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