

Welcome!



Interested in attending our yoga classes for veterans? Wonderful!

Here is some information to help you get started

You can start whenever you'd like:

Please call us before your first class. We've found this to generally be a good idea. We'll know to expect you, we can schedule an orientation, and we'll be sure you have correct information about class times and location.

We offer an orientation session:

You are joining an on-going class. We will meet with you before you begin to share some of the important practices with you, such as the breathing (pranayama) and the energy gateways (root lock and belly lock) as well as the reasoning and science behind the practices we use. Usually we meet before class, even 20 minutes can be a big help.

You are welcome to begin classes with us whenever you are ready, without an orientation; either way, please call Nancy at the YES to Vets number (317) 371-7967 before your first class.

We start and finish class on time:

- Please make every effort to set up and be ready to start at the designated time. Being on time generally means arriving to class 5- 10 minutes before start time.
- Call or text if you are coming but are running late. (317) 371-7967
- If you do arrive late, still come in and join class! Don't miss your practice –

Our yoga classes are a “**cell phone-free**” zone! Our goal is to not see or hear a phone through the entire class.

Please don't push yourself or “over-effort”! We get best results with a “tortoise wins the race” attitude. **Consistent appropriate effort** moves us forward, pushing often sets us back... It is your responsibility to practice in the manner that is right for you at any moment. We are your instructors, coaches and support team, you decide what is right for you.



Here's what you can expect:

- A pleasant space with the needed props: mats, blankets for support and cushioning, straps, eye pillows, etc.
 - Having one's own yoga mat and eye pillow is hygienically sound. Bring yours if you have them – and you are welcome to use ours.
- A well-trained, experienced and dedicated teaching team.
 - There is a primary teacher and 1-3 assistants in each class. We have years of yoga experience and have sought advanced training in the therapeutic uses of yoga, as well as the effects of trauma and understanding the unique needs of the military population, as best we can.
- A group of your brothers and sisters – other veterans welcoming you, happy to see the benefits of yoga reaching others.
 - We have between 3 – 17 students in class.
 - Your fellow students will be men and women veterans and possibly their loved ones, spouses and family members.
- Your loved ones, spouse and family members are welcome to attend classes, also at no charge.

All practices are adaptable to individual needs. We do not all do the poses the same way – we do them however is right for us, at each moment.

Generally, here's our practice:

- breathing/pranayama
 - seated practices
 - standing postures
 - floor poses, on the front/prone
 - floor poses, on the back/supine
 - relaxation, while lying on the back, or any other comfortable position
- We begin seated in chairs.
 - We use the chair for support, as needed, when doing the standing/balancing poses.
 - We are careful about proper back bending so our work is all beneficial and doesn't aggravates conditions.
 - We use props as needed to make our practice safe and comfortable.

Since we are practicing advanced yoga techniques, additional terms are needed.

Here are **5 Yoga (Sanskrit) terms that we use:**

1. prana - life force
2. pranayama – the breathing practices used to purposefully increase, direct and accumulate prana within our system
3. ujjayi breath – the “victorious uplifting” breath with sound
4. drishti – eye position, holding the eyes steady affects the mind positively
5. namaste’ – a greeting acknowledging our “sameness”; the “Inner Spark of Light” in all

Ancient Yoga Practices meet Neuroscience and Biomechanics:

- Yoga alignment principles match modern biomechanics
- Neuroplasticity - brain changes influenced by our environment and experiences
- Neurogenesis - just as with muscles, our brain “responds to demand’. Yoga is ideal for placing demand on the brain - the effort to concentrate, balance, find new movements and hold new positions all encourage neurogenesis.
- Crossing the center line of the body improves hemispheric communication, coordination and the “brain/body” connection, as well as memory recall
- Breathing practices (pranayama) affect the nervous system and our hormonal secretions
- No more than 80% full inhale (to stay in parasympathetic mode), exhale as empty as possible, squeezing stale air out

Yoga practice principles:

- breath and movement are synchronized
- every posture has a drishti, we hold the eyes steady and in place throughout the practice
- focus on the breath, strengthening ability to concentration
- use ujjayi for feedback about how we’re practicing
 - pushing too hard and in danger of injury
 - holding the breath
 - not engaged enough
- use the breath to go into and exit out of all postures - same full attention to the transitions as the postures
- we use strong contraction of muscles paired with full relaxation as a means of muscle training. Full relaxation allows full contraction. Tense muscles are not strong muscles.
- explore limitations, modify as needed, practice how is right for you at each moment
- avoid pain, do movement slower and smaller until there is no pain
- practice several brief sessions during the week on your own
- balance aids: drishti and root lock
- avoid competing, with others or yourself, or a former you



About Yoga:

- **Yoga is holistic** - the healing is "non-specific". Yoga re-establishes balance in the entire system – body/mind/spirit.
- Yoga means “**Union**” and this is the highest goal - union of the individual self with the Infinite Source.
- Each person is understood to be **multi-dimensional**; physical body, energetic layer, mind, emotions, higher intellect, and a layer of deep contentment.
- **Breathing** is slower, with a slightly deeper inhale and a much more complete exhale, and smooth throughout the practice. How we breathe affects us profoundly. Breathing patterns allow us to impact our physiology through the autonomic nervous system.
- We **stay present in each moment** as best we can, and **move with full awareness**, increasing concentration and responding to our own body’s signals.
- We take responsibility to work in the manner that is **right for us** at any given moment, avoiding over-exertion and injury. We always have full choice.
- **Pain is honored** as a messenger. We do not push through pain, instead we learn what it has to tell us.
- **If there is pain** with a movement we try it again, smaller, slower and more precisely.
- Over time the yoga helps us improve habitual **movement patterns**. The biomechanics of yoga re-establish musculoskeletal alignment and comfort.
- We move **toward ideal alignment**, making adjustments gradually.
- An effective yoga practice is **regular, moderate, pleasurable and focused**.
- We practice “**drishti**” - holding our eyes steady.
- Yoga is **non-competitive**, we do not compete with ourselves or with each other.



Suggestions for using yoga effectively:

Practice however is right for you at every moment. Whether on your own or in our class together, tune into your body and practice as is best for you at each moment. Don't push, the process can't be rushed. Practicing too hard can increase stress, or even cause injury. Respect your body as it is, befriend your body, let yoga meet you where you are. Yoga develops self-awareness and encourages self-care.

Use the breath. The breath is intimately connected to the nervous system. Slow smooth breathing signals the nervous system that all is well and helps tip the autonomic nervous system balance toward the “rest, renew, heal” mode. Slow complete exhales – making the exhales

slower and longer than the inhales and using torso muscles to squeeze breath empty – are especially helpful. These ancient yoga techniques are now supported by modern science:

- ❖ the inhale stimulates the sympathetic branch, the “fight, flight or freeze” mode
 - ❖ the exhale stimulates the parasympathetic branch, the “rest, renew and heal” mode
- The quality of the breath provides feedback for the optimal intensity of practice.

“Resting the mind on the breath” is a revered and basic concentration technique for present-moment awareness that we can use as needed anytime, anywhere.

Observe and direct your thoughts. This is a huge step in yoga development - to be able first to step back and become aware of one’s thoughts, and secondly, to direct the thoughts. Negative frightening thoughts make the body secrete stress hormones, while happy positive thoughts and emotions encourage the secretion of endogenous opioids, the “happy hormones”. Try not to entertain negative thoughts, remove them like weeds from a garden and let your more productive positive thoughts flourish.

Notice how good yoga feels! You’ve already made that first huge step of getting started; acknowledge your accomplishment! Then each time you practice hold it in your mind and heart that you are fulfilling your duty to yourself and others to do what you know helps you feel and do better. Being more in control and receiving the myriad benefits of yoga feels great, including a lasting drop in stress, and positive changes in the brain. Let yourself feel good about your yoga efforts!

Our hope and expectation is that your regular yoga practice will be richly rewarded with improved health and wellbeing in every area of your life, continuing far beyond our sessions together.



**Our YES to Vets team really hopes you will give yoga and our classes a try!
Call and speak with Nancy, and we have peer advocates
who you can speak with as well.**

Thank you and see you soon!