

If you've never heard of yoga, let us be the first to welcome you out of your apocalypse bunker. Happy 2012! But if you've simply never tried it, start slowly. "Be kind to your body," says David Vendetti, co-owner of South Boston Yoga Studio. "If your body says it doesn't feel right, it's definitely not for you." Not right now, that is. But a little practice and your body will be firm and flexible in no time.



Stress Less

RELEASE YOUR INNER TENSION WITHOUT EVER BREAKING A SWEAT.

Chances are your daily commute carries you right to the brink of overstressed. But what if you could undo your worries—work headaches, road rage, and all—in the same amount of time?

Herbert Benson, director of the Institute for Mind Body

Medicine at Mass General, claims that's all it takes. For the past 40 years, he's been singing the praises of the Relaxation Response, a fast-acting chill-out technique he developed that now boasts thousands of devotees.

Here's how it works: While breathing slowly and sitting comfortably with closed eyes, start repeating a simple word (Benson suggests "one"), phrase, or movement for up to 20 minutes. If you get distracted, just return to your word.

Sound easy? It is. And Benson insists that it works. According to his research, the Relaxation Response causes a stressed-out body to change. In the short term, metabolism and heart rate decrease. Over the long haul, immunity increases and cells appear to age more slowly. If it's a miracle drug, your brain is the pharmacy. And the best part? It's always open. —ANNE VICKMAN

CASUAL *to* HARD-CORE YOGA

CHAIR YOGA

WHAT Some (okay, all) advanced yoga poses can look intimidating to newbies—especially to seniors or those with injuries that impair movement. Enter chair yoga, which teaches basic poses and breathing while controlling intensity and the impact on joints.

WHERE Blissful Monkey, 663 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, blissfulmonkey.com.

WHEN Anytime; classes generally have about five participants.

SLOW FLOW

WHAT To maximize yoga's benefits, you need perfect form. That's why beginners and advanced students alike hit slow-flow classes, which break down yoga postures into individual movements and focus on alignment.

WHERE Exhale Back Bay, 28 Arlington St., Boston, exhalespa.com.

WHEN Mornings for company (20 to 25 attend); afternoons for elbow room.

BEGINNERS BIKRAM

WHAT Now that you've mastered yoga's basic moves, you can employ them in a hot (100 to 105 degree) room to detoxify (via sweat), stretch your muscles more easily, and burn more calories. It's true: Some like it hot.

WHERE Bikram Yoga, 30 JFK St., 2nd fl., Cambridge, bikramyoga-boston.com.

WHEN Anytime; the average class size is 30 (even fewer in the afternoon), but 80 is the max.

HIP-HOP YOGA

WHAT Yes, some studios are more likely to pipe in unobtrusive classical music, or, worse, Muzak during classes. For those who want more danceable energy than soporific relaxation, there's this fast-paced class, which improbably blends Vinyasa yoga with Kanye.

WHERE Sweat & Soul Yoga, 1032A Commonwealth Ave., Boston, sweatand-soulyoga.com.

WHEN Classes, capped at 30, are busiest during evenings.

OM FREE

NOT SURE IF YOUR BODY BENDS LIKE THAT? SHORT ON CASH? LUCKY FOR YOU, THE YOGA MINDSET ENCOURAGES SHARING THE PRACTICE WITH THE UNINITIATED. THAT MEANS YOU CAN EXPLOIT...ER, ACCEPT THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS WITHOUT BREAKING YOUR BUDGET.



Limber up with pre-Freedom Trail tourists and bargain-savvy locals at the Liberty Hotel's courtyard yoga classes on Saturdays at 10 a.m. The free sessions, led by Equinox instructors, run outside all summer long and move indoors during cooler months. Bring your own mat. 215 Charles St., Boston, libertyhotel.com.



The once-in-a-while community class at All One Yoga aims to break down the monetary barriers to beginning your yogic journey. That's \$5 well spent. Call for availability, 1065 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, alloneyogaboston.com.



Whether you call it community service or slick marketing, yoga and running-gear purveyor Lululemon hosts free monthly community classes at different locations. lululemon.com/boston/prudentialcenter.



If peace of mind is more your speed than a dripping-sweat workout, the Shambhala Meditation Center offers weekly classes for only a \$5 suggested donation. 646 Brookline Ave., Brookline, shambhalaboston.org. —SHEVAUN BETZLER