Yoga on the cheap? [1]

Dear Alice,

A friend of mine bought me a month's worth of yoga classes over the summer. I loved it! I've never found an exercise/fitness regimen that I actually WANTED to stick with. It helped with a lot of my long-standing physical issues (balance, back pain, stress, fatigue) and was a perfect balance of stretching and strengthening for my fitness goals. The only problem is that now that my month is over... I can't really afford to do it anymore. I've looked all around for inexpensive and conveniently located studios, but I can't find anything that's in my price range or fits in my schedule. What resources are there for broke aspiring yogis? Are there any guidelines for practicing yoga at home? Are there any exercise routines that are similar to yoga (i.e., low impact, stretching+strengthening) that are less expensive or easier to do without an instructor?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Congratulations on finding a physical activity program that you want to stick with and truly enjoy! To answer your question, your yoga practice doesn't have to suffer now that your month's worth of classes has run out. Taking classes can be expensive and time consuming, but there are numerous ways to stay active at low or no cost.

If your preference is to attend a class, you may try looking into local community centers, public parks, and university clubs and student organizations to see if they offer free yoga classes. Some private studios offer free classes during off-peak hours with teachers-in-training, or may have promotions for new members. Other studios are donation-based and operate under the principle that yoga should be accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status. If there's a particular studio you like, you might check to see if they have discounts for bulk purchases (i.e. buying 10 to 20 classes at once). Finally, don't hesitate to ask if you may help around your favorite studio (such as front desk work, cleaning, or publicity) in exchange for free yoga classes.

Okay with posing and stretching solo? Practicing yoga at home has a number of benefits, not just financial. Some individuals may feel self-conscious in group classes; doing yoga at home can mitigate that, provide you extra time to focus on the poses you prefer or want to work on, allow you to focus your attention inward, and help you establish awareness of the relationship between the mind, body, and breath. Before you swan dive into at-home yoga,
you may want to make note of a few guidelines for safe practice:

- Block out time for your at-home practice in your schedule just as you would an in-person class. For example, you might try 30-minute sessions three to four days a week.
- Set a timer at the beginning of your practice?some yogis prefer long sessions, but research shows that consistency, not the duration of the practice, helps build routine.
- Consider purchasing a yoga mat, block, and strap for home use. This equipment does involve an initial investment, but can pay off the more you practice at home.
- If you?re not sure where to start, consider seeking assistance online (e.g., with a yoga podcast or video). As you grow more accustomed to at-home practice, you might naturally become your own teacher.

Other types of physical activity, such as Pilates, dance, barre, and tai chi, function similarly to yoga in that they focus on stretching, strengthening, and mindfulness. Like yoga, you may find that they require some initial guidance, but that you can typically move to an at-home practice in time. You may find that working a combination of these practices into your regimen may also be the best way to address your various needs.

Namaste.

Alice!

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