

GUIDE

Yoga styles explained in plain words

What vinyasa, hatha, yin, hot, restorative and prenatal yoga actually mean, with sourced definitions.

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Yoga class names can look like a foreign language. Most describe one thing: how the poses are linked, how intense the class is, or who the class is for. These definitions come from Yoga Journal's beginner guide (updated 2026-11-12) and MedlinePlus (reviewed 2026-07-22), both fetched on 2026-11-13.

Movement styles

- **Vinyasa.** A sequence of poses moved through with one movement per breath. It is the most common "flow" class.
- **Hatha.** Focuses on individual poses rather than linking them. Often used as a general term for yoga. Good for learning alignment.
- **Ashtanga and power.** Athletic practices built on set or flowing sequences. MedlinePlus describes Ashtanga or power yoga as a more demanding workout that moves quickly between postures.
- **Iyengar.** Poses are held for long periods with careful attention to alignment, often with props.
- **Kundalini.** Emphasises breath, chanting and meditation more than continuous movement.

Rest styles

- **Yin.** Seated and lying stretches held for about 3 to 5 minutes to work connective tissue, per Yoga Journal.
- **Restorative.** A few relaxing poses, supported by blankets and bolsters, held for several minutes. The aim is rest, not effort.
- **Chair yoga.** Poses done seated or supported in a chair. MedlinePlus lists chair-adapted practice as an option for different needs.

Specialised classes

- **Hot yoga.** Any style practised in a heated room. MedlinePlus gives Bikram-style classes as 26 poses in a room heated to 95 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (35 to 37.8 degrees Celsius). Cleveland Clinic (fetched 2026-11-13) reports most hot yoga rooms run 90 to 105 degrees Fahrenheit. See our hot yoga safety guide.
- **Prenatal yoga.** Emphasises breathing, pelvic floor work, restorative poses and core strength. ACOG recommends modified yoga during pregnancy. See our prenatal guide.
- **Private yoga.** One-to-one sessions tailored to your body and injuries. MedlinePlus suggests telling your instructor about health conditions so they can modify poses.

How to choose

Match the style to your goal: build heat and stamina (vinyasa, power), learn alignment (hatha, Iyengar), recover and sleep (yin, restorative), or work one-to-one on a problem area (private). Then check the level. A style name does not tell you whether a class is beginner-friendly, so ask the studio.

Frequently asked questions

Which yoga style is best for a complete beginner?

Hatha, gentle or beginner-labelled classes are the usual starting point. Yoga Journal suggests foundational, gentle, restorative or yin classes for beginners.

Is hot yoga a separate style?

No. Any style practised in an intentionally heated room is hot yoga. Yoga Journal and MedlinePlus both describe it that way.

Sources

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medlineplus.gov — https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000876.htm
yogaalliance.org — https://yogaalliance.org/explore-training-options/