

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Yoga for Children

Convener: Hemant Bhargav

Members: Nishitha Jasti, Shalu E Abraham,
Shubham Sharma



11 FAQs on YOGA FOR CHILDREN

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2. What is the minimum age for the child to start yoga? How does yoga differ for different age groups?
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Yoga for Children

Q1

What is yoga?

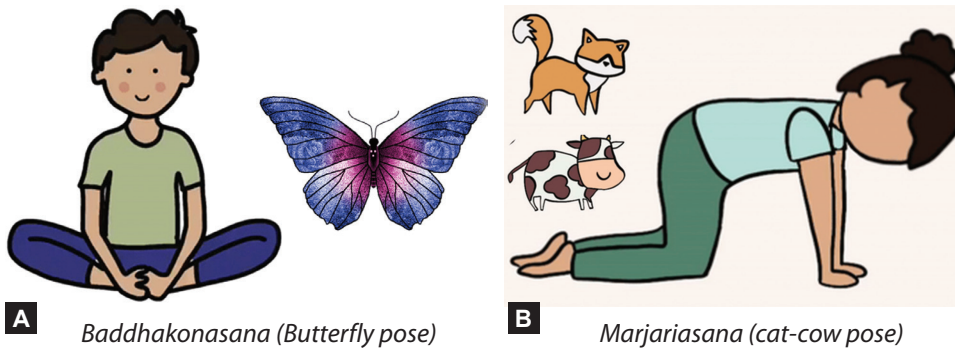
The word "Yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root "Yuj" which means "to connect or join". It involves a set of practices that aim at bringing physical, psycho-social, and spiritual well-being. It includes the practice of social and individual codes of conduct ("Yama" and "Niyama"), physical postures (*Asana*), breath regulation techniques (Pranayama), and meditation practices ("*Pratyahara*", "*Dharana*", "*Dhyana*", and "*Samadhi*").

Q2

What is the minimum age for the child to start yoga? How does yoga differ for different age groups?

There is no general consensus for when a child can start the practice of yoga. However, yoga experts agree that children of age 5 years and above could start the practice of yoga.

The younger age group between 5 and 10 years are usually taught the yoga practices in the form of play/games/songs to engage them effectively in the practice (**Figs. 1A and B**). The practices taught should be dynamic with more repetitions. The yoga module shall focus on physical development, increasing attention span, sitting tolerance, and bonding among peers. On the other hand, adolescents are capable of understanding the different practices of yoga including meditation. The yoga module could include advanced yoga postures and dynamic practices which can effectively help in their physical development, maintaining hormonal balance, and emotional wellbeing.



Figs. 1A and B: Yoga poses simulating animals/objects are chosen for age group of 5–10 years. They are taught with animations to improve their adherence to yoga, as shown above.

You can also make use of the age-specific yoga modules being taught by NIMHANS, Bengaluru. The YouTube links for these age-specific yoga modules are given below:

- (a) Yoga for children aged 5–10 years: <https://youtu.be/SFZTCIfAm1A?t=1>
- (b) Yoga for children aged 10–15 years: <https://youtu.be/pp9RgCyiMe8?t=1>

Q3

What are the precautions to be taken before attending a yoga class?

- Yoga practice by children should always be under the supervision of a trained yoga expert. Further, presence of parent is recommended for the children of age 5–10 years.
- Yoga should be practiced on empty stomach. A minimum of 2 hours gap after breakfast and 3 hours gap after a full meal is recommended before the practice of yoga.
- Keep sharp objects and heavy furniture away from the site of yoga practice (**Fig. 2**).
- Use proper yoga mat to prevent falls (**Fig. 2**).
- Yoga teacher must instruct the children to not exert beyond their capacity.



Fig. 2: Model arrangement of yoga class for children.

Q4

How will my child benefit from yoga?

Practice of yoga may benefit your child in the following ways:

- It increases their muscular strength and flexibility.
- It strengthens their lung and cardiac functions.
- Improves sensory-motor performance and enhances processing ability of their nervous system.
- Improves their memory, attention span, concentration, and planning and execution skills.
- It improves their mood and alleviates stress and anxiety.
- Increases emotional stability, reduces fear and feelings of helplessness, as well as aggression and negative feelings, and improve overall well-being.

To get your kid started on yoga, please get in touch with the Department of Integrative Medicine, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) by sending an email to yogaforstress.nimhans@gmail.com.

Q5

Are the yoga practices taught safe?

The current evidence suggests no untoward effects of yoga taught to the children. The yoga practices in the module being taught by the Department of Integrative Medicine, NIMHANS, have been adapted from research studies which have not reported any adverse effects.

Q6

My child is already active in sports, how else will practice of yoga benefit my child?

- Yoga improves the activity of parasympathetic nervous system which is responsible for better relaxation.
- Yoga postures improves body awareness and it also involves controlled breathing techniques that aim at promoting mental well-being (**Fig. 3**).
- Yoga has lesser risk of injuries than sports.
- In addition, yoga may improve their cardiorespiratory strength which in turn improves their performance in athletics and other sports.



Fig. 3: Children practicing yogic controlled breathing and chanting techniques.

Q7

In my experience yoga seems to be a slow-paced practice with a lot of mindfulness aspects. On the other hand, my child is active. I do not think he will sit still and he may not find yoga to be interesting. How can this be handled?

In the beginning, it may seem difficult to get your kid to practice yoga. However, there are several ways by which the sessions could be made interesting. Different approaches could be used such as animations/songs/dance/games/role play to teach yoga postures to the children and to keep them engaged throughout the session (You can refer to our *YouTube video links* mentioned in the answer to Frequently Asked Question No 2) (**Figs. 4A and B**). The yoga practices taught should be very dynamic and should follow a certain rhythm. Positive reinforcement and rewards could also be used to encourage the children to improve their performance.



Figs. 4A and B: Activity-based yoga postures are taught to the children to retain their interest for the entire yoga session.

Q8

Are there any specific contraindications for children when practicing yoga?

- We recommend that children with epilepsy should not practice fast breathing techniques (*Kapalabhati/Bhastrika Pranayama*)
- Yoga should not be performed when the child is sick, such as with a cold, flu, headache, or vomiting.
- Children with any problems with the back should avoid certain yoga practices such as “bow” pose, acute forward bends (*Padahasthasana* and *Pashimottanasana*) and advanced back bends (*Chakrasana*).
- Children with heart diseases should avoid inverted poses such as *sarvangasana* or *sirsasana*.

Q9

Can children with special needs practice yoga?

Definitely, Yes. The current research evidence shows that yoga improves their clinical symptoms, behavioral complaints, sleep quality, and social bonding. However, they will need close assistance and longer periods of training to learn and benefit from the practice of yoga. In most cases, they may require tailor-made yoga modules specifically addressing their needs.

Q10

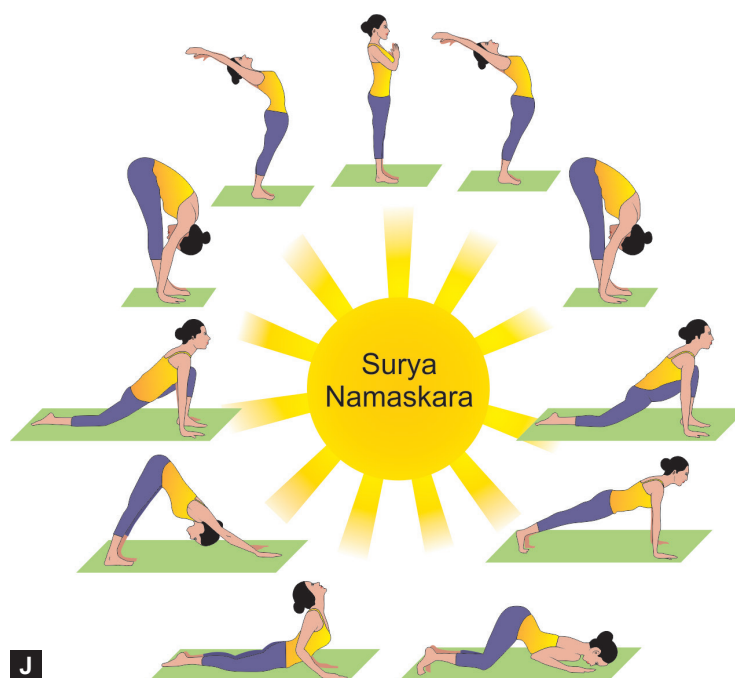
Is yoga a religious practice? Will it interfere with my family's religious beliefs?

No, it is not a religious practice. Yoga is an ancient practice which is now being studied with scientific rigor. None of the yogic practices focus on religion in particular (adopting namaskara mudra and chanting "OM" is optional and can be replaced by sitting with palms facing upwards and simple humming chants, respectively). Hence, it will not interfere with your child's or your family's religious beliefs.

Q11

What kind of yoga practices are useful for children?

Depending on the age, different yoga practices ranging from yogic games (*krida yoga*), physical postures (*asanas*), and breathing techniques (*pranayama*) to meditations can be taught. Usual recommendation is that children from 5 to 10 years of age should focus more on asanas, mantra chanting, and yogic games with small component of pranayama. As the age advances, asanas can be maintained for longer time (15–30 seconds) and more of fast- and slow-breathing techniques and meditations can be added. *Surya Namaskara* or "Sun salutations" (6–12 rounds) is one practice which should be taught to all children from 5 years and above (<https://youtu.be/ZwthwNzuLA8>) along with *Nadishuddhi pranayama* (3 minutes) and chanting of mantras or humming sound (*Bhramari*) for 3 minutes (**Figs. 5A to J**).



Figs. 5A to J: Few yoga practices beneficial for children.