

Almost every single beginner to Bikram Yoga will make one or more of the following mistakes. I've done it, my instructor when she was starting out has done it, and everyone else I know who's into Bikram has done it. The important thing is not to worry that you've been "guilty" of any of those, but to do your best to solve these issues as quickly as possible; it will make your journey through the world of Bikram Yoga that much more enjoyable.

Mistake #1: Proper Focus During The Warm-Up/Cool-Down Poses

Both the Standing Deep Breathing Pose (Pranayama) as well as the Blowing-in Firm Pose (Kapalbhati-in-Vajrasana) are critical to the whole routine, and yet most beginners will somewhat neglect them starting their third or fourth Bikram Yoga Session.

It's of the utmost importance that you understand the following:

- **Without a proper warm-up**, you have a MUCH harder time performing all of the subsequent poses. You'll be more likely to suffer a mild injury and less focused on the routine, hence significantly reducing your enjoyment of the activity.
- **Without a proper cool-down**, the routine is more likely to become a chore, as your last memory will be that of the difficulties while doing the Head-to-Knee and Spine Twisting poses. Doing a proper cool-down (Blowing in Firm) will not only help you unwind, it will also help your muscles and central nervous system relax, allowing you to return to your normal activities quicker.

Treat the first and last pose just as seriously as you would any other pose, and you'll be blessed with a more fulfilling experience.

Mistake #2: Practicing Too Often

The more advanced Bikram Yoga practitioners will often do their routine 6 or 7 times a week, sometimes even multiple times a day. The majority of beginners I know (including myself) start out by employing a similar approach, with the assumption that it will allow them to settle into the poses quicker. While Bikram Yoga is very easy on the body and the chances of sustaining an injury are extremely low, over-reaching in the beginning will result in the following:

1. Increased risk of straining a muscle or joint.
2. Reduced willingness to participate in the activity due to a level of mental strain that you are not used to.
3. Loss of focus, resulting in poor performance and mistakes during the session.

It's always a good idea to take it easy with everything new we do in life, but with Bikram Yoga that is particularly important. The whole purpose of the activity is to help you mentally relax and bring your body into perfect sync with your soul; and the

worst way to achieve this is to condition yourself to perceive Bikram Yoga sessions as a chore. Even if you feel that familiar motivational kick that makes you feel you could practice for 2 hours a day, 7 days a week, I strongly recommend you resist the urge to do that.

Start with one, maybe two sessions a week, and only add more sessions after 4 weeks – regardless of how confident you feel about increasing the volume. Remember: the goal isn't for Bikram Yoga to be an activity that you perform for 1 or 2 months and then abandon it completely; we want this to be something you incorporate into your life, making it something you enjoy doing and benefit from for many years to come.

Mistake #3: Thinking You Need To Perform Each Pose Perfectly

When looking at all this pictures of Yogis performing each pose perfectly, and watching all the Bikram Yoga videos showcasing practitioners with 10+ years of experience, it's easy to believe that the only way to perform the poses properly is to do them exactly as illustrated in the pictures/videos. *This is a critical mistake!*

Please understand that what you see on various illustrations only depicts what a perfectly-performed pose should look like. Reaching the level of flexibility and mental focus required to perform the poses in such a fashion takes a minimum of 3 years of dedicated training. But that's not the most important part!

The important part is that no matter how flexible you are, you are benefiting from every single pose you do. Think about it like this: if you were able to perform each pose perfectly from the get-go, then you wouldn't be improving your body or focus at all, since you would already be at your peak as far as Bikram Yoga is concerned. It is the fact that you need to challenge yourself and constantly improve from month to month that will make you a better person, so do your best to embrace your inability to perfectly perform each pose and learn to see it as a **positive** thing, as it means you have so much more room for improvement and self-fulfillment.

Beginners will often attempt to push their body far beyond what it is capable of, which usually means:

1. They risk injury.
2. They slowly stop enjoying the activity due to the mental and physical strain they are putting themselves under, leading them to unconsciously begin to make up excuses not to practice anymore.
3. Due to the extra strain, they stop breathing properly and make many mistakes during the pose, preventing them from ever improving and reaching perfection in the future.

The above holds true regardless of whether you practice alone at home, or whether you attend a Bikram Yoga class with an instructor; I know quite a few beginners who,

when in a class, felt the need to keep up with others in their group (who were often more experienced than them), leading them to over-reach and force their body into things it is not capable of doing. Sometimes the instructor is to blame too – they often push their students too hard, without paying attention to what the individual student is capable of at a given point in time. If this happens to you, explain to your instructor(s) that you want to ease yourself into the poses and that you'd appreciate it if they wouldn't ask too much of you – there's absolutely no shame in that! And remember – you are paying the instructors to help you, they are not doing you a favor by following your wishes.

Start small, and work your way up over many months or years. Just make sure that every time you perform a pose it is somewhat (but not too much) challenging. This will force your body to adapt and improve. It's a very similar concept to lifting weights at the gym – you don't immediately start with what the professional bodybuilders lift, do you?

Mistake #4: Asking Too Much Of Your Instructor

This one is very common. I see instructors approached by their students for a variety of reasons, including:

1. "I've had back pains for the last 5 years, what should I do?"
2. "I feel pain in this spot while doing this pose, why is that?"

Remember that your instructor is *not a licensed medical practitioner*. They are only there to help you perform the poses as best as they can. If you feel pain while performing a specific pose, tell your instructor and they should be able to offer you an alternate pose or a variation upon the original pose, but do not expect them to tell you why the original pose causes pain – for answers like these you should absolutely consult a doctor!

The reason I mention this is because many instructors feel like they need to give medical advice to their students (they feel that it is expected of them, so they try their best), not knowing that they are doing the students a major disservice. Therefore you should not even put your instructor in a position wherein they would need to "make something up" just to put your mind at ease. Whenever pain or unusual discomfort are involved, consult a doctor. They have X-Ray machines and access to various equipment, expertise and consulting, that your instructor has no clue about, despite their sincere effort to be of help.

Mistake #5: Taking Your Sessions Too Seriously

The desire to attain the perfect pose can be overwhelming to many beginners; so much so that they forget entirely to have fun during their routine. Yes, there is some strain and considerable focus required during each session – but that is *not* the

equivalent of being constantly stressed out over whether you are doing well or not. If you find yourself constantly clenching your teeth and knitting your brows, you are probably taking things way too seriously. Not only that, but the stress you are feeling in your facial muscles is always translated to the rest of your body, making it more difficult to perform a pose. If you find yourself doing that, slightly relax the pose so that it is not as much of a burden, focus on your breathing, and do a few things to relax your facial muscles, such as:

- Slowly closing and opening your eyes
- Opening and closing your mouth
- Puckering your lips and moving them around in a circular pattern

Basically do anything you can to remind yourself of how a relaxed face should look/feel like. Try to relax your body and let it ease itself into the pose, rather than attempting to force yourself into it. Once you can do that, you'll be able to enjoy your sessions more intensely, and you'll also notice better progress over time. It's a win-win whichever way you put it!

BONUS TIP: if you practice Bikram Yoga in hot room – whether it's in a professional class or in your own home – always take a shower both after and *before* your session. While the reasons for the former are obvious, taking a shower before a hot Yoga session is something many people forget to do, even seasoned professionals. There are a few very good reasons why you want to do that:

- It helps you get rid of any lotions or other oils that you might have on your skin. There's nothing more frustrating than achieving a perfect pose, and then "slip" out of it due to a slippery skin texture.
- If you take a hot shower, it helps you ease into the temperature that you will be training in, making it less of a shock.
- If you use cologne or perfume, please remember that the smell of it can become really intense in a heated Yoga room, particularly when you sweat (and you will sweat!). This smell can be very disturbing to anyone else training in your vicinity and can easily break their concentration.
- It's a great experience to start a Yoga session while feeling fully refreshed and 100% clean; it can even make you more confident in your abilities to perform a certain pose, as it gives you a certain degree of extra mental calm.