



YogaDayUSA



2010 Yoga Insight Survey

Executive Summary

In December 2009, a survey was conducted on behalf of Yoga Alliance to identify those factors that may be inhibiting people from beginning a yoga practice. This analysis was intended to shed light on current perceptions of yoga in the United States and determine how well people understand the myriad health and wellness benefits the practice yields. Through such research, Yoga Alliance hopes to encourage more people to try the practice and reap its rewards.

Participants in the survey – a census-based, online poll among Americans – included both those who currently practice yoga and those who do not. The survey assesses the country’s current awareness of yoga and indicates that:

1. Many Americans have misperceptions about yoga which, if addressed, might lead more to try it. Education is needed and people who currently practice may be the best messengers to help establish a more accurate understanding. The three most common misperceptions are that:
 - Yoga is religious
 - Only those whom are flexible can practice yoga
 - Yoga is not *really* exercise.
2. Among both people who practice and those who don’t, it is universally agreed that yoga is relaxing, contributes to good health and can be “spiritual” and “enlightening.” But these two groups hold dramatically different views as to: yoga’s level of difficulty; whether or not it is “new age;” and who can benefit most. These divergent attitudes may explain why many Americans are hesitant to try yoga.
3. Those who *do* practice, praise yoga’s health management benefits. In addition to using it to reduce stress, many of these individuals turn to yoga to address conditions ranging from pain relief to weight management and cardiovascular health, among many others.
4. Whether or not they practice yoga, people believe that oversight – including that of instructors – should be governed by standards set by a third party. An understanding of Yoga Alliance’s mission - and the requirements it has established for registered teachers and schools – might encourage more people to try and take part in the practice.

Yoga Insight Survey DETAILED FINDINGS

- 1. Many Americans have misperceptions that, if addressed, might encourage increased participation. This holds true even more for men than it does for women. Education is needed to clear up misperceptions and those who practice yoga may be the best messengers to help do this.**

Misperceptions among Those Who Don't Practice Yoga

Misperceptions about yoga among those who do not practice it – primarily that it has religious connotations, requires flexibility/being in shape, and is not “real exercise” – may be inhibiting people to try it.

- A majority of Americans who do not currently practice yoga (57%) – 63% of men and 51% of women – think that “yoga requires mantras or chanting that are about worship.” In fact, more than 1 in 3 (37%) – 40% of men and 34% of women – believe that “yoga is a religious mediation.”
 - ✓ This helps explain why more than 3 in 5 Americans who do not practice yoga (61%) agree that “non-religious people, such as agnostics or atheists, would be turned off by yoga.”
- More than 2 in 5 Americans who do not practice yoga (44%) incorrectly believe the statement “you have to be flexible to do yoga.” Men (50%) are more likely than women (38%) to believe this misperception.
 - ✓ A perception that one must be flexible or at least in shape proves to be a significant factor in beginning a practice. For instance, nearly 3 in 5 Americans who do not practice (59%) agree that “doing yoga requires a person to be in at least decent shape.”
 - ✓ Additionally, when asked on an open-end basis about the reasons they have opted not to try yoga, 22% of Americans say it is because they are not flexible. Men (29%) are twice as likely as women (14%) to cite lack of flexibility as a barrier.
- Three in ten (29%) are lead to believe that “yoga isn't a workout.” Men (40%) are more than twice as likely as women (18%) to hold this view.
 - ✓ Underlying sentiments about whether or not people view yoga as exercise support this. Nearly half of respondents – 53% of men and 36% of women – agree that “yoga has a lot of benefits, but it's not *real* exercise like running, swimming or weight lifting.”
 - ✓ Additionally, more people are likely to say that running (27%) and swimming (26%) offer the most effective exercise for optimal health, compared to yoga at only 21%.

Education is Needed for Those Who Don't Practice Yoga

When asked about the major reasons they have lead to them deciding to not try yoga, 30% of Americans say “I don't know enough about it or where to turn for information.”

- Interestingly, women (28%) are nearly as likely as men (32%) to say this.
- Additionally, 1 in 5 Americans (21%) say they are “not sure how to pick a yoga teacher or facility.” Men (19%) are nearly as likely as women (23%) to say this.

Americans Who Practice Yoga May Be the Best Messengers

If those who currently practice yoga (41%) spread the word about its benefits to those who don't, more people would likely try it. It would also help create an accurate picture of the practice: “Yoga serves anyone; it meets you where you are no matter what your capacity or state of health.”

- Nearly 3 in 5 Americans who practice (59%) do not see any reason for non-religious people, such as agnostics or atheists, to be “turned off” by yoga.
 - ✓ In fact, only 12% of Americans who do yoga believe that it is a religious mediation.
- Nearly 3 in 4 Americans who do yoga (73%) believe that yoga is just as effective an exercise as running, swimming or weight lifting.
 - ✓ In fact, Americans who do yoga are twice as likely to say the yoga offers the *most* effective exercise for optimal health, far more than running (22%), swimming (21%), aerobics (12%) or hiking (4%).
- Most yoga practitioners understand that you do not have to be flexible to participate. Only 1 in 5 Americans who do yoga (21%) believe the statement “you have to be flexible to do it.”

2. It is universally agreed that yoga is relaxing, contributes to good health and can be “spiritual” and “enlightening.” But those who practice differ from those who do not as to yoga’s level of difficulty; whether it’s “new age,” and; whether it is more for women than men. Such attitudes may help explain why many Americans don’t embrace yoga.

There is a Shared Brand Image of Yoga

Regardless of whether they practice yoga or not, Americans view it as a relaxing activity that contributes to overall good health.

- More than 3 in 5 (61%) Americans who practice yoga say that it is relaxing. 45% of those who don’t practice yoga agree. In fact, “relaxing” was the number one descriptor choice among all survey respondents.
- Half of Americans who practice yoga say that it contributes to health and wellness. 44% of those who don’t practice yoga agree.
- Both practitioners and non practitioners say the word “enlightening” comes to mind when they think of yoga.

There are Important Differences

Those who do NOT practice yoga differ significantly in their perceptions of the exercise from those who do. These differences may help explain why many Americans are reluctant to try it. When asked what words or images come to mind when they hear the word “yoga”:

- Americans who do NOT practice are almost twice as likely as those that do to say it is difficult, strenuous or challenging (39% vs. 22%).
- Americans who do NOT practice yoga are three times more likely as those that do to say it is “new age” or “hippy” (27% vs. 9%).
- American who do NOT practice yoga are nearly four times more likely as those that do to say is it “for women” (22% vs. 6%).

3. Both Americans who practice and those that don't agree that yoga's oversight – including that of instructors – should be governed by standards set by a third party. If those who don't practice knew yoga already had such standards, more would likely take part.

Standards are Important

Most Americans believe that “the practice of yoga should be governed or guided by standards set by an independent third party or organization. All yoga instructors must meet these standards.” Both Americans that practice and those who don't share this sentiment.

- Half of Americans who do not currently practice yoga agree with this statement. Perhaps if they knew it was a “serious endeavor” with rigorous governance more *would* participate.
- Likewise, 62% of Americans who DO currently practice yoga agree with this statement.

Certification Makes Participation More Likely

Interestingly, only 29% of Americans who do NOT practice yoga know that, in many parts of the country, instructors require certification to teach.

- This helps explain why 29% of Americans who do NOT practice yoga say they would be more likely to try if they knew there were qualified instructors who met certain standards as define by a professional association.
- 21% of those surveyed indicated that they were unsure how to identify a teacher or facility. Perhaps if they were aware of a governing body that provided information on qualified instructors, they would be more likely to try yoga.

For more information on the Yoga Insight survey, please visit www.yogaalliance.org.