



# 7 ideas to stoke your Passion for practice

 WHEN YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH YOGA, you may find yourself falling hard. After all, a new practice feels juicy, delicious, and full of promise. It's all good... so long as you take care to stoke the flames of your passion and keep burnout from creeping in. "A yoga practice is just like a marriage or any other long-term relationship," says Mebbie Jackson, a long-time yogi with a daily vinyasa practice in Knoxville, Tennessee. "When life gets busy and you don't pay attention to yoga like you should, you can get stuck in a rut. You need always to be working to bring new energy and new tricks into it."

Jackson actively looks for ways to keep herself motivated. One night, she found one in an Anusara Yoga workshop led by Martin Kirk at the local Glowing Body studio. "Find the things you really love about your practice, and explore them more deeply," Kirk told her. "Let that love inspire your practice so it can inspire your life."

That's excellent advice for beating burnout and keeping motivation high, which you'll need to do to reap all of yoga's benefits. Here a few other ideas to help you stick with it—try them out, or let them inspire your own, better ideas.

*by Hillari Dowdle  
illustrations by Annick Poirier*



massage schools. “Any good fundamental anatomy course will teach you the basics: This muscle attaches to that bone and moves that joint in this direction or that direction,” she says. “This is the key to understanding how the body moves, and it can give you tremendous insight into how your yoga practice works.”

When you have a fundamental grasp of anatomy, you’ll understand what your teacher really means when she talks about internally rotating your arm. With practice, you may even be able to visualize the cascade of cause-and-effect events that each muscular action sets in motion. “When you know the body and understand how and why it moves the way it does, you’re able to come at poses from the inside out, rather than from the outside in,” Hatley says.

## switch your **Style**

If you’re getting bored, one easy way to switch it up is to explore different styles of yoga, says Shannon Paige, a Yoga Pod instructor in Denver and Boulder, Colorado. “Make a list of all the styles available to you, and go take those classes in a systematic way,” she advises. Try one new style every few weeks, and note after each what you liked and what you didn’t like.

“If you usually practice an alignment-based style, you might like learning to flow in your practice. If you do vinyasa, you might find real power standing still in an Iyengar class. And people who take a restorative class are always amazed that you can lie down and let the yoga do the work,” Paige says. “When you take a different class, you get an instant fresh perspective—you are being asked to use your body in new ways. It’s an opportunity to learn a tremendous amount of new information about yourself.”

The experience doesn’t have to be all good in order to benefit you, either. “What you don’t like is as important as what you do like,” Paige says. “You might take a hot yoga class and dislike it. Then you would know that you need something more cooling and soothing. Sparks of wisdom come from good experiences and bad ones.”

## Watch and learn

When Kimberly Greeff feels like catching a class, it’s not so simple. She’s a busy mother, working artist, and founder of Evolve Yoga in Anchorage, Alaska. So Greeff does what any tech-savvy, semi-isolated, time-pressed yogi would do: She downloads an inspiring podcast class. “I

## DVDs to inspire



**Ali MacGraw—Yoga Mind & Body**  
featuring Erich Schiffmann

**The Feminine Unfolding: An Exploration of Yoga with Angela Farmer**

**Yoga for Inflexible People I** by Judi Rice

**Iyengar Yoga with Gabriella**  
by Gabriella Giubilato

**River Flow I** by Tias Little

**Universal Theory of Yoga Level 1**  
with Andrey Lappa

**Insight Yoga with Sarah Powers**

**Inner Body Flow I** by Angela Farmer

**Duncan Wong Yogic Arts: Source Power**

**Shadow Yoga with Shandor Remete**

**Sun Salute Expanded with Mary Paffard**

**Tripsichore Yoga I** by Edward Clark

**Yoga for Beginners I** by Barbara Benagh

**Gravity and Grace with Peter Sterios**

use the podcasts to further my study,” she explains. “I love taking a good class with a master teacher.”

Greeff teaches Forrest Yoga and listens to Ana Forrest’s podcasts. But she’s also a big fan of Alanna Kaivalya, a Jivamukti master teacher in New York who offers podcast classes (visit [jivadiva.com](http://jivadiva.com)). Other high-quality yoga podcasts are available through iTunes, iHanuman ([ihanuman.com](http://ihanuman.com)), and [yogajournal.com](http://yogajournal.com).

DVDs can also be a source of inspiration, says *TJ* contributing editor Richard Rosen. (See his favorites, above.) “There are a few that I watch over and over for their beauty and approach, and for new ideas about how to practice,” he says.

## take a **Private**

Private lessons give you an opportunity to ask questions you never get to ask in a class setting—and get personal attention to help you make progress in your poses. “You can be in a room with a yoga teacher every day with 40 other students for years and never realize that you’re dropping the inner thigh in Lunge Pose,” Paige says. “In a private, the teacher will make sure you master the action, and you might realize that keeping your inner thigh lifted is the key to transforming all your standing poses.”

Private lessons can be expensive; prices range from \$50 to \$250 for one hour. Consider it an investment in your yoga future.

Before you book your appointment, make sure you’ve got the right teacher. Paige recommends asking three questions—and looking for excitement in the answers: Do you give many private lessons? Do you like to give private lessons? Do you have the time to give private lessons? “These are more important than ‘How much does it cost?’” she says.

## follow your **Leader**

It’s a fundamental tenet of yoga that the answers to all our questions—including *How do I stay motivated?*—can be found within. Paradoxically, as we learn self-guidance, we most benefit from the guidance of a wise teacher—a guru, if you will.

“A real guru can see what the student needs and offer the practices at the right time,” says Yogiraj Alan Finger, the co-creator of Ishta Yoga. “Serious students should seek out a teacher who can help them understand how it all works. Then you will never become bored with the poses. You’ll never not want to do it.”

They say that the teacher will appear when the student is ready. Still, it doesn’t hurt to give fate a hand. So go looking—in books; on videos; and in classes, workshops, and conferences. When you find a teacher whose work resonates with you, commit, if for no other reason than this: You might just transform your life. ❖

*Hillari Dowdle, a former Yoga Journal staff editor, writes in Knoxville, Tennessee.*



## Dedicate yourself

“Sometimes when you are bored or you’re feeling that your practice has hit a plateau, it’s because you’re driven to get a certain pose that’s out of reach, like Handstand,” says Adi Carter, a teacher at Greenhouse Holistic in Brooklyn. “It can be helpful to dedicate your practice to feeling grateful for what your body can do, or appreciating the simple beauty of your breath.”

Carter advises her students to start their practice by feeling gratitude for how things are, then expand their focus outward. “Every time you step on the mat, ask yourself: ‘What do I want to see more of in my life?’” Carter says. “It’s a tough question, but it’s worth asking. Once you find the answer, you can set an intention to use the energy of your yoga practice to help make it real.”

For example, you might want to see more flexibility in your body and mind. You might want to dedicate your practice to creating peace in all your relationships. “Any intention is heightened by your yoga practice, so set a good one,” Carter advises.

Jodie Vicenta Jacobson often spends a moment in Carter’s class sending love to

children around the globe. “When I stop, get quiet, and take a breath, I’m reminded that yoga is much bigger than me,” she says. “I think yoga helps send my intention out and at the same time seal it in. It’s amazing every time.”

## Buddy up

A traditional Ashtanga practice takes place in a Mysore room, where students gather together to practice, although they don’t necessarily do the same poses. But there isn’t a Mysore room in Sebastopol, California, where teacher Ann Austin lives. So she created one with her friend Lucky Jamison.

“We make a little Mysore room wherever we are—right now, it’s in my barn,” Austin says. “We get together at 6 a.m. four times a week to practice in our lineage. Then we head home, send our kids off to school, and move on with our lives feeling totally energized.”

Practicing together, the two yogis provide each other with inspiration, feedback, adjustments, spotting, and reinforcement. “We keep each other honest,” Austin says. “When you are left to your own devices, you’re more likely to just do what you want or like. We’re not

strict, but we both love the practice. We help each other remember that.

“All you need is a friend who shares your enthusiasm and a space to do your practice in that’s separate from your everyday life,” Austin adds. “To be able to create your own schedule and have your own practice—but not have to forge along the path alone—that’s invaluable.”

## get Anatomical

When you’re doing your Down Dog, you’re probably focusing on all the bits and pieces—the pressing through the palms, the inner spiral of the legs, the alignment of the elbow creases. But are you really, truly inhabiting the pose?

“So many longtime yoga practitioners get caught up in where their arms and legs are supposed to be that they forget how to feel the pose,” says Susi Hately, a kinesiologist who facilitates Anatomy and Asana workshops throughout the United States and her native Canada. “I want students to understand how their arm bone moves in its socket, or how the pelvic girdle functions. Once they understand how their body really works, all the other alignment cues fall into place.”

Hately is a big fan of introductory anatomy courses at community colleges and

