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FITNESS WEEK 2014

Everything You've Ever Wanted to Ask a Yoga Instructor

Thursday, January 9, 2014, by [Tiffany Yannetta](#)

Welcome to Racked's **Fitness Week**: five days of workout coverage, so that you can start your New Year's resolutions off right.



Few things in yoga are as mysterious as **hot yoga**—a practice in which the thermostat is cranked up to a sweltering **100 degrees** or higher. The benefits: a full body detox (thanks to lots of sweating) and enhanced fluidity that allows you to glide in and out of postures. When you add the word "power" to the class description, things get even more intense.



FITNESS INSTRUCTORS

FITNESS WEEK

FITNESS WEEK 2014

HOT POWER

HOT YOGA

LOREN BASSETT

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Loren Bassett is a **Pure Yoga** instructor who teaches Hot Power classes, and she also recently worked with the company to create the newly launched **PXT** conditioning class. After the jump, she shares more reasons for why turning up the heat makes for a great workout, as well as how to get over your fear of handstands, what you should eat before class, and why excuses like "I'm not flexible" are a bunch of BS.

How important is a good sense of balance going into yoga, and what if your balance is terrible?

First and most importantly, there are no prerequisites or expectations for practicing yoga, and I think people are intimidated by yoga because they think you have to already be at a certain place in order to start practicing, which is not true. The whole purpose of yoga is to become more centered physically and mentally. One of my favorite mantras is: "a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step."

In regards to balance, being centered is the corner stone of yoga. Mentally, the most important thing is to anchor yourself into the present moment by focusing on your breath, which is meditation. From a physical standpoint, any connection with the earth and the postures is where the posture begins. For example, in Tree Pose, your connection with the earth is your foot. Essentially, it's like you're the root of a tree. If you're in handstand, it would be your hands. So that's really the most important thing: where the posture begins, root down.

Do you have any advice for when you're just starting a practice and you're not very flexible?

This is so interesting, because I cannot tell you how many times I've talked to people who say, "I don't do yoga because I'm not flexible" and the whole *purpose* is practicing yoga. I wasn't flexible when I started—I was an athlete that never stretched and I couldn't even interlace my hands behind my back for a full year. Just like anything else, the more time and energy you spend connecting to your body through movement and breath, the more you get to know your body and you discover your fullest potential. As a result, you're going to get stronger and more flexible the more you practice.

What are some of the best intentions you can think of to set before your practice?

The first one would be to stay present. Staying present and calm is the most important thing because in reality, our only reality is the present moment—we don't know what's going to happen in the future, and the past is gone. And the second thing is to clear the space, in what I call clean house. Basically, stilling the fluctuations of the mind, staying present, staying calm and flushing out any negativity, whether that's destructive thoughts or what we call limited beliefs. Replace it with what's called a positive mantra.

What's the best thing to eat before yoga?

I would say maybe a light smoothie, yogurt, oatmeal with almonds, fruit. Something really light, but the most important thing is to eat—give yourself even two hours to digest the food. If you're starving right before, I would say eat something really, really light like a piece of fruit. It's important that you eat, because you're going to need the strength and your body needs the fuel and the energy. But try to eat an hour and a half to two hours before your practice.

What do you consider to be some of the most difficult positions? One of our editors was really curious about how to get over the fear of headstands and handstands.

It completely depends on the person. For example, I'm very strong and can balance on my hands all day. I've been practicing for 14 years, but if you put me in a Half Pigeon or a hip opener and I want to cry. I do cardio and weights, so I'm going to be a little bit tighter in the hips. A lot of people are intrigued with arm balances, and they want to learn how to do them because they're fun and beautiful and powerful.

In terms of getting over your fear, another mantra of mine is: "being brave is doing something you're afraid of and doing it anyway." Obviously your safety is important, so I would say the first thing is to build up the physical strength—you want to build the strength in your arms so you're confident and you trust that your arms can support your body weight. It's baby steps. I think the most

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important thing [to know] is that you may not conquer that fear completely. You just have to establish a different relationship to the fear. Don't let the fear paralyze you.

Question: How frequently should someone to practice to see results, both physically in their bodies and mentally.

Minimum, minimum, minimum three times a week. Practicing yoga doesn't mean you have to go to a class every day. Twenty minutes of stretching a day is practicing yoga. The more frequently you do it, the more you get to know your body and the more your body will become stronger and more flexible, just like anything else. But I think a minimum of three times a week. Ideally five to six days a week.

What poses would you recommend for someone who's pretty much sitting at a desk all day?

My initial recommendation would be to do some postures that stretch the quads and the hip flexors. One of my favorites is Lizard Pose, and it's where you're in a lunge with your hands to, let's say, the inside of the right foot, and the right foot is pillared. You come down to the forearms if you can and you stretch the left hip flexors and the left quad and you lengthen the right hamstring.

Pigeon variations would probably be my second recommendation. These open the hips, chest, and the shoulders. Standing forward bends or sitting forward bends to stretch the back of the legs; Downward Dog helps to lengthen and strengthen the muscles in the body; and Locust pose, because when you're sitting at a desk you tend to round through the shoulders—you tend to hunch forward because you work on a computer.

What do you say to people who don't consider yoga to be a real workout?

I love it when they say that. My first reaction is come to my class and see how you feel after. I teach hot power classes, and I'm very strict. I do not let people leave the room unless if they've asked me beforehand, and if anybody leaves the room we all do five push-ups. Had a guy recently who competes in Ironman races, and he said, "This, in a different way, is much harder than what I just did."

If you want a more rigorous workout, you want to come to a hot power class where you're moving, your heart rate is up, your upside-down, and there's no stopping and starting. In my class, you go from one post to the next. Your heart rate is going to be up, so it's more cardio vascular.

What [hot yoga] does for me more than anything is the detoxification. It flushes the toxins from the body, and for me it adds intensity to the practice that you're not going to get with a style of yoga that is not hot. I think it strengthens you from a mental aspect, because you're faced with having to deal with the heat on top of being upside-down in postures. You're going to go deeper into the postures, because your muscles warm a lot quicker and it creates more elasticity in the muscles, and obviously it increases the heart rate, which helps break down the glucose and fatty acids and you burn more calories.

How hot is hot?

That depends on the weather outside, because it does affect the heat inside, and also on how many people are in the class. If I have a room full of 45 people that are mat to mat, and the temperature is set at 100 degrees, it's really going to be 105 to 107.

Can you think of any workouts that are a good complement to yoga?

Absolutely, I'm a huge advocate of cross training. I think that for optimal fitness, you have to do a little of everything. We recently started a program here called PXT, which is pure cross training, because I believe that first of all your body will plateau if you're doing the same thing every day or five days a week. You have to change it up, because you're going to be using different muscles and you want to work cardio, endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance. You can't get all of that in one workout.

For example, in yoga, there's no way to "pull". In order for you to target the back muscles, you have to go to the row machine at the gym. You need the action of pulling something to actually strengthen the muscles of the round

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blades, and the muscles on the shoulder blades. We don't have that in yoga. We work a lot on the interior body and not the posterior. It's important to get into the weight room and do that.

Do you have a favorite brand of yoga pants?

Lululemon is close to my heart. Most of my clothes are Lululemon, because I love the brand and I was an ambassador for them. I love **Tanya-b**; she has a brand of her own. It's very flattering and it feels great. There are a lot of really fun brands out there, like **PRISMSPORT** and **Onzie**, if you want to go a little lighter and kind of wacky. I have a few of those too, to mix it up a bit.

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