

Avoid This Costly Yoga Mistake

by Erin Honeycutt

Picture this: a student walks into a yoga studio for the first time. He sits down gingerly, wincing with pain as he removes his shoes. A teacher walks over... introduces herself... asks if he needs any help.

“Well,” he replies. “I have a lot of pain in my low back, and I have a tear in my right hamstrings. My friend told me yoga will help me. Can you tell me which class I should take?”

The next few moments are critical.

What the teacher recommends can make the difference of whether this student heals or gets hurt even more... whether he begins a lifelong practice leading to vibrant health, or walks away concluding that yoga “isn’t for him.”

As a yoga teacher, what would you say?

As a student, what information would you want to hear?

It’s tough to give students a yoga class that will help them heal, but at the same time they find fun and enjoyable. That’s why it is absolutely crucial that yoga teachers receive as much quality training as possible.

It’s Not Just Exercise

Think about it: you wouldn’t go to a physical therapist who only had 10 or 20 hours of training, would you?

... would you go to a doctor with a diploma from QuickMedicalDegrees.com?

... or how about a nutritionist who attended a weekend seminar before setting up shop?

Sure, people use yoga to work up a sweat and get a good workout. But that’s not its primary purpose or true potential.

Yoga is a healing modality – just like physical therapy or massage therapy. And those who treat it like calisthenics are missing out on a lot of the amazing benefits *real* yoga has to offer.

Teacher training is the key.

A teacher simply can’t learn to teach yoga in a way that helps the body heal, if she only has a one-weekend teaching certificate. As a student, *you must be just as selective about choosing your yoga teacher as you would be about any other health practitioner.*

More Training Is Better

There are tons of yoga certification programs out there. Some are only one weekend. Others are the equivalent of a two-year degree. It goes without saying that the more time a teacher has invested into getting her certificate, the more dedicated she is to her craft.

You're serious about wanting a healthy body. **Shouldn't your yoga teacher be just as serious about teaching?**

Teacher training is not about learning a bunch of advanced poses. It's about learning how to inspire students... how to keep them safe... when to teach certain poses, and *when not to*.

It's about putting the student first.

A surprising 2006 report revealed that nearly 4500 people that year ended up in the ER with serious injuries from yoga. And it's not just beginners. Many of these students were long-time practitioners.

The report did not mention how much training *the teachers* of these injured students had. But it is obvious that these students never learned the basics of how to keep themselves safe in poses – or the body-awareness to stop before injury occurs.

First Do No Harm

News flash: not every pose is right for every student, on every day of the year.

For example, our first-time student with the hamstring tear and low-back pain? That's ample evidence that he should **not** do any forward bends – like Uttanasana or Paschimottanasana.

A student with high blood pressure? Avoid inversions like headstand or shoulder stand, as well as any pose that puts pressure on the heart.

You see, each pose has a set of contraindications, or physical conditions that indicate a student should avoid that pose. Unless your teacher has learned this information in detail, there's a good chance she might tell you to do something that is unsafe for your body.

And the number of people turning to yoga to help heal injuries and physical conditions is growing every year. Any teacher who sincerely wants to help students must find training that is safety-focused. The more of it, the better.

How Do I Know How Much Training My Teacher Has?

Simple. Just ask.

Most teacher training programs are measured in hours. Some are 10-20 hours. A select few are 2000 hours.

The minimum amount of training you should look for is 200 hours. These programs are fairly standard and easy to find. It is approximately equal to one month of 8-hours-a-day, 6-days-a-week training. It's a decent amount of time, and it shows a good level of dedication on the part of your teacher.

However, it is stunning how, even in 200 hours, ***there's so much you don't have time to cover.***

200 hours is really just the basic-basic basics. It's *probably* enough to keep you safe in class. It's likely not enough to help your teacher work with your particular injury or issue in a focused, methodical way.

Vastly superior is a 500-hour teaching certificate. This will begin to provide your teacher with enough knowledge to work with specific issues therapeutically. Perhaps more importantly, it shows that **she has enough thirst for self-improvement to continue** beyond just the basic level of training.

A 2000-hour certificate is equivalent to a two-year vocational degree. This is really the pinnacle of yoga teacher training. If you have access to a 2000-hour-certified teacher, it's likely that no other teacher can come close.

Want a yoga teacher with as much – or more – training than a massage therapist? Look for someone with a 2000-hour degree.

[Not All Training Is Created Equal](#)

The next question to ask is whether the teacher training spends significant time on safety.

Lots of training programs focus hours upon hours on doing the poses. Some spend time breaking the poses down, learning how to lead students into each pose in a class.

But most programs barely touch on how to **make sure you don't injure yourself** when you do what the teacher says.

Doing the pose is important. So is teaching the pose in an organized and understandable way.

But safety is what facilitates the body's healing process.

Safety makes all the difference in the world.

A 500-hour trained teacher in a safety-oriented style will do tons more to help you heal from injuries than will someone with even 2000 hours of training in a yoga-as-workout style.

You see, the more complex the pose... the more vigorous the class... the more you move your body and get your heart rate up...

... the more essential safety becomes!

Safety, Safety – Where’s The Fun?

Don’t get me wrong. Asana should be fun. There’s nothing that quite matches the feeling of the first time you go up into headstand unassisted. Balancing in bakasana can bring a big smile to your face. Building strength and flexibility can feel *fantastic!*

But the real goal is to enjoy these aspects of asana day in and day out... year after year... until you’re at least 80 or 90 years old!

And for that, you have to build your practice safely.

To Know And Not To Do... Is Not To Know

One final point to look for in selecting a yoga teacher is this: **are they living a lifestyle that matches what they’re teaching?**

Would you listen to a nutrition expert who only eats fast food?

How about a priest who spends his off-hours drinking and gambling and using foul language?

Or a pet trainer whose own animals are wild and out of control?

Then why would you listen to a yoga teacher who doesn’t live the same values they teach?

Values like non-violence... truthfulness... cleanliness... a continuing desire to learn and grow and improve oneself.

Is your teacher a kind and caring person outside of class? Does she take care of her body and mind at all times and in every possible way, or only on the yoga mat?

Is her yoga a way of life, or just a performance to be viewed by others?

If your teacher doesn’t live the lifestyle, then she doesn’t really know what she’s teaching. And what she doesn’t know, you won’t learn from her. It’s that simple.

A true teacher lives the information. It’s a part of her. When she teaches a pose or a meditation technique, she teaches from experience. So you get the benefit of knowing the information is true and effective; that it has passed the test of real-world experience. Your teacher isn’t just making stuff up as she goes along.

One Program That Has It All

I can honestly say that the College of <ABC> Yoga is the one training program I’ve found that encompasses everything I’ve mentioned here. (In fact, “<abc>” is the Sanskrit word for “<xyz>”.)

It’s fun... safety-oriented... in-depth.

It’s flexible too, with 200-, 500- and 2000-hour levels. So you can start where you are right now, and work through the program at the pace that best serves you.

And best of all, this program was personally founded by two world-renowned yoga masters, <her> and <him>, who are both still deeply involved with every aspect of the training. These two masters both live what they teach, and they teach you how to build a lifestyle that supports you on your own yogic path.

When you speak with them, you can feel the difference.

If you're a yoga student, you'll find the College personally rewarding, whether you want to teach or just deepen your practice. If you already teach, consider deepening your education by joining the College.

Go to <http://www.abcyogateachertraining.com> to learn more.

Make The Best Choice

What's the costly mistake to avoid?

It's choosing a teacher who doesn't know how to keep you safe in class... who only thinks of yoga as a cardio workout... who looks good and sounds good, but doesn't live the lifestyle to match.

It's listening to the wrong teacher, and getting hurt as a result.

Find yourself a good teacher, using the criteria I've outlined. Or better yet, join the College of <ABC> Yoga, and *become* the teacher you want to find in the world.

Your students will always be thankful you did.

Erin Honeycutt is a Certified <ABC> Yoga Instructor with over 2000 hours of teacher training. He is a published author, an entrepreneur, and a marketing consultant. He also serves on the faculty of the College of <ABC> Yoga, and is a long-time student of <her> and <him>.