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Whether you're new to [yoga](#) or a seasoned yogi, there's always room to evolve your practice. Top yoga teachers share their tips for getting more out of the time you spend on the mat—and discuss how doing so can help enhance your life off of it.

Come as you are Each day brings changes to our mood, energy, emotions, and physical capabilities, which is why each time we step onto our mats we must commit to simply coming as we are. “Yoga is not about practicing only when you feel wonderful and up to it, but it is about arriving even when you feel less than stellar,” says Jane Bahneman, MS, E-RYT 500, director of [Well Equipped](#). Before your next yoga class, take 60 seconds at the start of your practice to check in with yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally and just accept your current state. Then, revisit how you feel at the end of class. You can also use this check-in technique off the mat to stay calm and collected in everyday life.

Make improving your intention We all have strength and weaknesses, many of which we discover on our mats, “Whether it’s balance, strength, flexibility, mental concentration, or rhythm of breath, find the area that needs the most improvement, and set an intention at the beginning of class to make small improvements each class,” says [Elizabeth Kovar](#), MA, mind-body movement specialist in Seattle, WA.

Let your breath lead “Yoga without the breath is like surfing without the waves,” says wellness expert and yoga teacher [Stacy McCarthy](#), BS, E-RYT 500. While many people believe that yoga is all about the physical postures, the truth is, the poses take a back seat to the breath. “Think of your breath as a dance partner and let it lead,” adds Glick. Doing so will help you gain more awareness within each pose, says [Rob Glick](#), BS, international fitness educator and yoga teacher at Yoga Works and Corepower Yoga.

Allow each pose be a metaphor for life From balancing postures to heart openers, think of each pose as a metaphor for your life, says [Lawrence Biscontini](#), MA, RYT 500, award-winning international fitness instructor and mindful movement specialist. “When balancing in tree pose, for example, think about the shaky aspects of your life and how learning balance can help to make you stronger outside of the yoga studio,” he says. “You’ll learn that it’s not about yoga on the mat that matters, but rather the yoga you practice off of the mat that really improves the overall quality of your life.”

Always honor yourself Each time we step on our mats we must listen first to the true teacher in the room—ourselves. “Our wants and needs for change all the time, even within one class. For example, you may need more a restorative practice one day, but feel too self-conscious to take breaks. Or you may have tons of energy and want to crank out chaturanga pushups all class long and that’s fine too,” says Glick. “All that matters is that you’re honest with yourself and listen to your inner voice.”