

How Hot Should Hot Yoga Be?

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How Hot Is Hot Yoga Anyway?

Help I can't breathe

Oh my god, it's so hot in there. How will I ever survive? Is there enough oxygen? Ever feel as though you can't breathe in the hot room?

Has this ever happened to you? Have you said or maybe even heard a hot yoga student say: "I can't breathe", "there is not enough oxygen in there". I have heard it thousands of times. And with the exception of one time in my life in a Bikram Yoga studio with a capacity of 200 students where there were 300 of us piled high to the rafters puffing, panting and working oh so hard, I have NEVER been in or heard of another time where people were really, truly and authentically short of air! That in itself is another story and really worth telling. I may just do that another day. ☺

Beware hot yoga skeptics

There is so much misinformation out there. And you know where that comes from? Usually from the folks who don't know the first thing about the alchemy of hot yoga, the heated room and the amazing effects it has on mind, body and soul.

Usually it boils down to ignorance and fear. There are some valid concerns about the temperature and moisture levels, and the amount of fresh air. I've heard it all and it usually centers around how bad it is to exercise in the heat. If you go to <http://www.hotyogadoctor.com/index.php/site/forum/viewforum/4/> there have been some great forum discussions about people who go to studios where the room has been, in my opinion, heated to dangerous levels.

If you are reading this you are either new to hot yoga, a diehard hot yogi who loves the heat, or maybe you still haven't taken the plunge.

Is it too hot? Is it safe? Why do I feel like I can't breathe?

So what's really going on here? The whole issue is very complex and can be misconstrued by our own perceptions and ignorance. Believe it or not you can have those feelings:

- Of being stifled
- Of not being able to get enough air
- Of not being able to breathe deeply
- As if you are gasping for breath
- Of being hot and flushed
- Of being dizzy
- Of being unable to find even enough energy to get through the class or even get up off the floor

And they can all happen at many varied temperatures and not just in a heated room.

But is there really not enough air in there? Could it be something else?

Taking a positive look at the problem

Hang on to your seat because there is actually a huge upside to those uncomfortable feelings and sensations in your body.

Your lungs are your ticket to a fully enriching life experience.

The way you:

1. Hold your body
2. Hold your posture
3. Use your ability to open your chest
4. Use your diaphragm and draw life-giving breath into your body;

... changes with your mood and physiology.

But not everyone has the same capacity. The more anxious of us, or at least when we are in fear, flight or fright mode, breathe very shallow into the top of the chest. We pant, often with mouth open and would be lucky to use more than 10% of our lung capacity.

Just as anxiety can trigger you to breathe in a shallow way, the reverse is true too. That's right, shallow breathing can trigger an anxious state. If you only have a tiny lung capacity, only sipping small volumes of air, you could be challenged with a smaller ability to cope with stress.

Yoga teaches you to be happy 😊

Breathing is key. Gosh that sounds so lame. But so true. When you learn how to breathe you open up the pathway to a journey of limitless possibilities.

On a physiological level, your yoga teaches you the physiology of happiness:

1. Standing tall
2. Shoulders down and back
3. Chest open and breathing deeply.
4. Your lungs are challenged to expand and when you can breathe more deeply and more fully, your body and life experience is more expansive.

It is as simple as that.

The converse is true. If you have a small lung volume:

- Breathing deeply can be a really scary experience as you bypass the physical blocks to lung expansion
- Your lungs may literally be sacs of unused tissue taking up a large amount of space in your chest cavity, yet be largely unused.
- In effect you are feeding your lungs just to stop them from stagnating (to keep them alive).
- They are almost deadweight in your body not doing anything but taxing your system, using energy but not giving anything in return.

Here's a great analogy that will tease your mind. Imagine a circus tent. It gets unpacked and is laid on its footprint soon to be erected. Without its center pole it lies on the ground like a sad sack of plastic (albeit large). At this point it is hard to imagine that it could possibly fit thousands of people inside it. But here's the thing: erect the center pole, prop up

the center and magically a huge volume is instantly created. The same thing happens with your lungs and diaphragm. If you have years of minimal lung use with only small volumes filling them then your 'center pole' is only very small and the air just cannot get to all the little nooks and crannies.

- Breathing is a SKILL that can be improved upon.
- The deeper the breath, the bigger the 'pole'.
- The more you can open your lungs the more breath you can draw in.

Your diaphragm needs exercise too

1. Your diaphragm is an extremely important muscle that spans the space under the ribs.
2. It moves downward on your inhales by contracting its fibres.
3. It works as you inhale to increase the negative pressure in your lungs to help draw the air deep down to fill them.
4. Your breath is as deep as the effectiveness of your diaphragm can work. If you cannot even inflate your lungs past that anxiety producing shallow breath, then guess what? Your diaphragm is getting very little exercise and maybe none.

I know you are probably skeptical, right?

Think about it. Imagine you go to your first classes in a hot yoga studio. The moisture is about 60-70% (considered perfect for optimum lung function). Your body is primed able to breathe more easily. But your lungs are so out of practice of breathing. They start to open up a bit.

The diaphragm is getting stimulated and starting to WORK. It starts to move downward into the abdominal space as it contracts. You can possibly feel the discomfort of this expansion. And on top of that, the lungs start to expand and inflate with some air. All of a sudden the body becomes awash with oxygen, prana, life force, chi, energy that it has been denied of for maybe the longest time.

Who knows why your resources have been so low? How did this happen to you in the first place? Did a lifetime of emotional and physical distress or experiences fashion your body into the way it is now?

Perhaps yes! So here you are newly exposed to this crazy hot yoga, betting your bottom dollar that you can't breathe, that you can't get enough oxygen into your lungs, or even blaming the heat for your physical crisis. When actually your body has been CRYING out for air, for oxygen and for the first time in the longest while you are ACTUALLY delivering the goods.

Physical discomfort or fear of change?

In part it is your physical body not being used to taking in that much air that makes you pay attention to these odd sensations in your body.

The other part is the sheer fear or discomfort of releasing your emotional demons (or whatever they are) through your breath and by the perhaps resistant physical expansion of your torso. You are finally using those tired disused muscles, and awakening millions of alveoli in your lungs, those wondrous little powerhouses that direct the good stuff into the blood and swap the toxins and impurities out back into the air that you breathe out.

Embrace the intensity

Once you realize this, you can embrace your practice and everything it reflects you with grace and open arms and with a receptive spirit. This is why this yoga is SO damn great.

You tease, coax and seduce your lungs open to receive the bounty of the universe in the form of life-giving oxygen. The heat and moisture in the room enhances this ability exponentially so that doing yoga in the hot room makes your benefits happen fast. So fast sometimes the mind cannot *cope* with the newness, the opening and the potential for change. Either the mind gets in the way and creates difficulties by sabotaging your efforts to evolve AND/OR the body has been *shut down* for so long that it is challenged by the physical stimulus of creating space.

Confront yourself in the mirror

Hot yoga is an intense experience that encourages deep breathing and helps you grow your lung capacity. This intense work in the heat fosters a strong connection with yourself looking at your reflection in the mirror. Looking in your own eyes can trigger many varied reactions which open you up to personal growth through self-confrontation.

Who knows what that might mean? One thing's for sure the inability to look at yourself in the mirror is often accompanied by difficulty in breathing. The heat seems to accelerate the process and to me that has only an upside: You have the power in your hands. You have the ability to choose to process your *stuff* in a much more timely manner: it is your MISSION, should you wish to accept it 😊.

If you can't stand what that does for you, how those intense emotions or feelings start to bubble up from deep within and surface through sensations in the body including difficulties in breathing then you have choices to make at that moment in time.

You can EITHER be:

Fixated by the difficulties and *blame* it on the heat,

OR, you can tackle it head on in your own timeframe by continuing to go to class; face yourself head on and whatever your body and mind want to serve up to show you at that particular moment.

Once you know that you are actually feeding your body with more oxygen and enlivening your soul then you may just have the impetus to stand there and breathe through it, no matter how uncomfortable it is. In time you will do this while looking at your own eyes in the mirror, cementing a strong self-connection rather than doing what most of us do in the beginning which is averting the eyes, looking elsewhere, bending over, identifying with the *pain* rather than working through it more effectively by simply and effectively observing it.

Be an inspiration to you and others

Not able to breathe? Hardly! You are breathing better than you may have done in years. Love that feeling. Let it be expressed. Learn to breathe again. Now you know you can't blame it on the heat or the air you will know what to say to the next person who complains that they can't breathe.

In the meantime, please feel free add your comments (use the link I'll give you below) and share with all of us what you think is your greatest tip to deepening your practice, or something that you have heard.

Remember it doesn't have to be groundbreaking ... just useful, practical and something you want to share!

Tell us all what you think, believe or feel:

<http://www.hotyogadoctor.com/index.php/site/comments/hot-yoga-help-its-so-hot-i-cant-breathe/>

Namaste

Gabrielle

More resources can be found at:

<http://www.hotyogadoctor.com/>

Visit the very active forum at:

<http://www.hotyogadoctor.com/index.php/site/forum/>

Visit our Bikram Yoga-specific site at:

<http://www.quickfityoga.com/>

Introducing: The Hot Yoga MasterClass™

Whether you are just starting your hot yoga or Bikram method yoga practice, or you are a hard-core regular, this **brand new resource** will accelerate your results and have you enjoying a new depth of benefits like never before!

I purchased the entire package and have not stopped reading and rereading yet! I choose one pose to critique in my 90 minute Bikram session and make the adjustments suggested in the text. My backbend has never been this deep! How do I know, the instructor commented that it looked good!

FayeJ, FL, USA

Wow... Gabrielle, you and your team, have developed a fabulous resource - I love the whole set. Even though I am new to Bikram yoga, I practice at two studios because I value the different perspectives offered by each teacher. Your gorgeous book is filled with amazing pictures and explanations, and it offers a whole new insight. I had been resisting some poses in class. Because I now understand the intent of these poses, they have become favorites! You have fuelled my addiction to Bikram yoga... and of all the addictions to have, I believe it is a pretty good one!


Shona, Brisbane, Australia



www.HotYogaMasterClass.com

Totaling 304 pages, with 744 full-color photographs, you'll find everything you need to know about all your favorite (and not so-favorite!) hot yoga poses:

- The Essential Elements;
- "What Makes This Pose So Difficult To Get Right?"
- Step-By-Step Instructions For Getting In-And-Out Of Every Pose;
- Common Mistakes – And How To Fix Them (With Photos – This Information Is NOT Available Anywhere Else!);
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