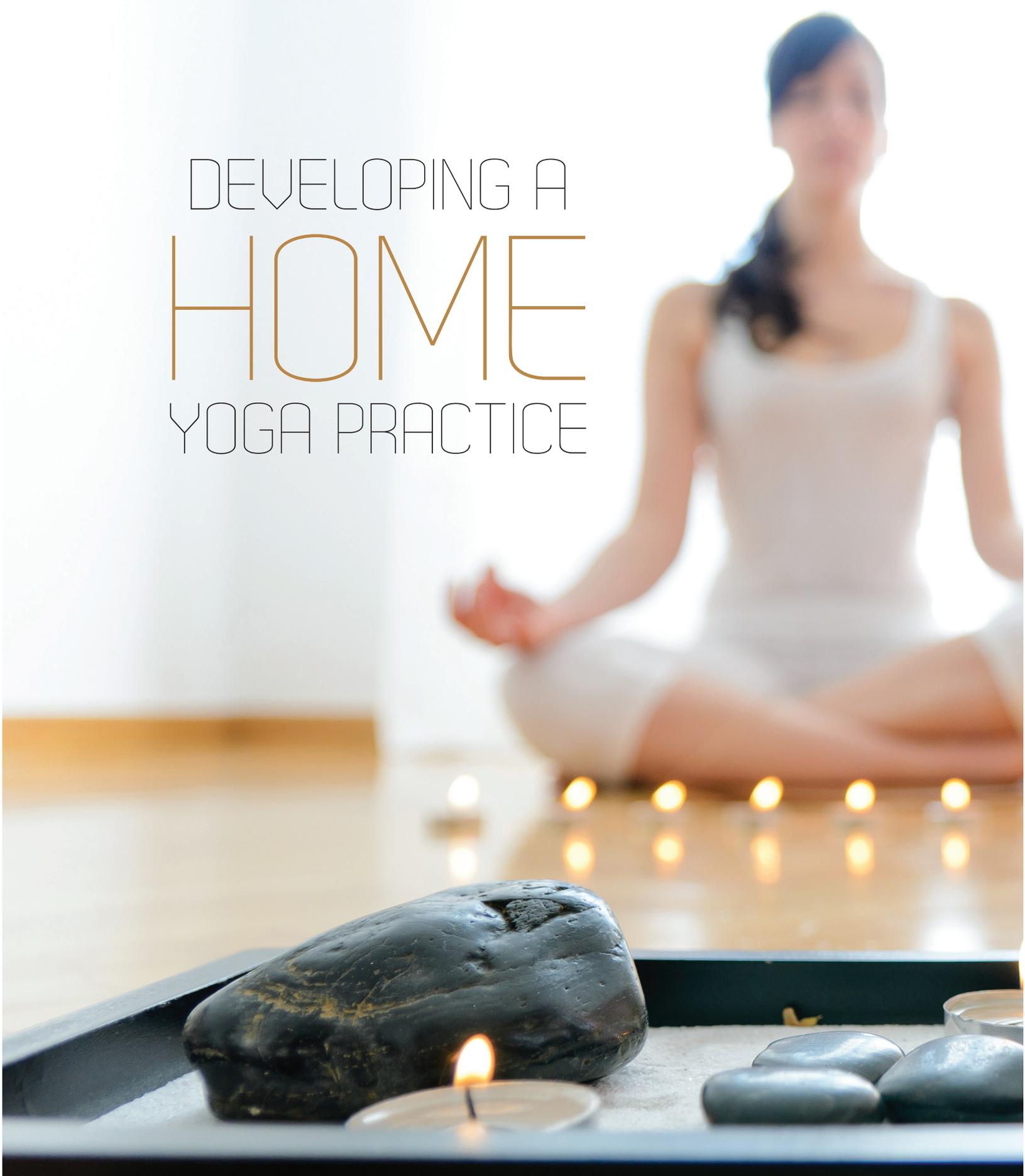




# DEVELOPING A HOME YOGA PRACTICE

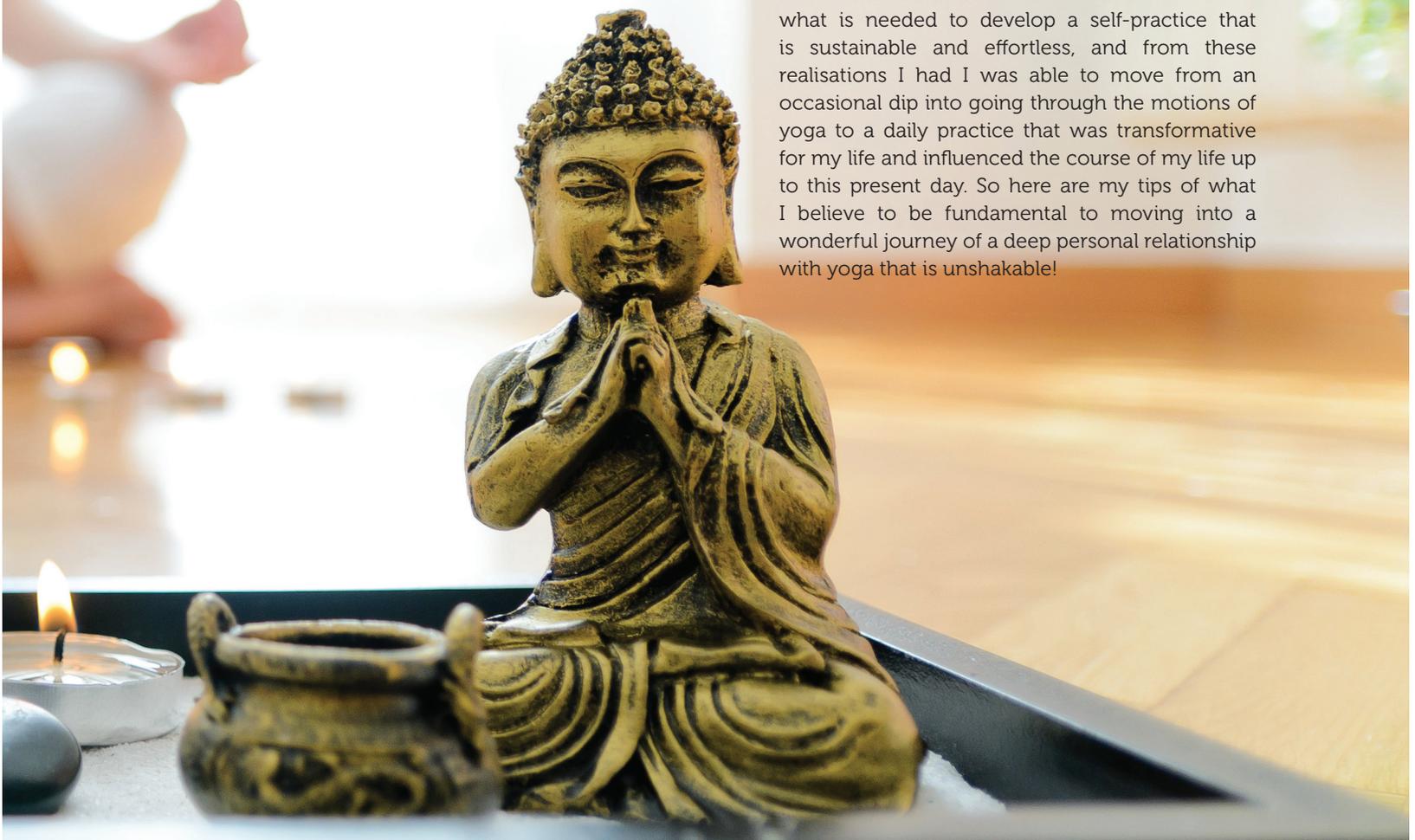


One of the most frequent questions I am asked by my yoga students is "how can I develop a self-practice at home?" or comments such as "I've tried to practise at home but I just can't seem to get going." So how can we move into an all-round dedicated yogin who can pull up a mat anywhere and just practise?

Today we have a wide variety of options available to us with literally thousands of yoga books available, online yoga classes and the ubiquitous YouTube so it's never been easier to practise at home. However the home practice that most people are looking for when they ask this question is the self-practice that doesn't have to be lead by a screen, audio or book, but comes from our own personal relationship with yoga. It is also the regular, perhaps daily, routine of practising at home which is sought.

The transition for me came when I had been practising yoga for a few months and had the realisation that yoga was going to be a permanent part of my life. It was also in the days of having very little spare cash, no internet classes (we are talking over 20 years ago!) and less access to the wide variety of books that are now available (this is pre-Amazon days remember!) so the only way I was going to get more yoga into my life was to practise at home. I had plenty of false starts - getting the mat out but then being distracted by something or someone else (I was in a shared house of 8 people and a dog at the time), or general uncertainty about where to begin the practice or how to sequence the postures. One of the constraints I found was that I gave myself an allocated time to practise which made me a) clock watch and b) feel pressured to practise for that period which then left me feeling like I had failed in my practice when I invariably practised for a shorter period of time. I also practised fairly sporadically which inhibited my ability to develop a routine.

These constraints I met form the foundation of what is needed to develop a self-practice that is sustainable and effortless, and from these realisations I had I was able to move from an occasional dip into going through the motions of yoga to a daily practice that was transformative for my life and influenced the course of my life up to this present day. So here are my tips of what I believe to be fundamental to moving into a wonderful journey of a deep personal relationship with yoga that is unshakable!



## Routine

Setting a regular routine will help you to make yoga a part of your life that you cannot skip just like brushing your teeth! Routines are something that can be tricky in this modern-day world of working jobs that are not necessarily 9-5, children, family, friends and generally busy lives. It may be that your life allows you to have a routine where you are able to get on the mat at the same time before or after work for example every day but you may have a life where each day has a different timetable (as I personally do). It may be that your routine is that you commit to a regular time for each day of the week, so Mondays may be a 7am practice but Tuesdays may be a 7pm practice and so on to fit around your life. What you should try to do though is at least initially stick to the routine for each day if that's possible.

If your weeks vary from week to week maybe plan your week ahead and even put it in your diary so there is an added commitment there. Research (in the European Journal of Social Psychology) tells us it apparently takes an average of 2 months of a consistent behaviour to develop a habit but it can be as little as 18 days or even as long as 8 months for some. I therefore recommend you try setting yourself a target to practise daily for 2 months. You may find before the 2 months is up that you know this has become a regular routine because there will be a transition where if you miss a session you will notice it and you will crave your practice! It is more beneficial in terms of yoga to practise regularly for a shorter period than to practise once a week for a longer period. It is the constant tapping into the state of integration on a daily basis that will make you want to live your life from that place. We forget very quickly, so in a daily practice there is a constant nudge in the direction of waking up to our essence nature (cit or consciousness) which is hard to turn back from once you have opened that door.

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## Time

Start small. The routine and regular practice will get you going and the amount of practising can be built up slowly. Allow your regular practice to be as little as 5-10 minutes a day initially (unless a longer practice comes naturally, but it should not be forced) so there is no pressure around the amount of practice and your yoga does not become like another household chore. It should be enjoyable! You will find if you start small that it will grow by itself. You will naturally start to want to stay a little longer on the mat. A posture may naturally want to lead to another so it's a bonus when you plan for 5 minutes and end up doing 25 minutes. It will eventually lead to you being able to do an hour or two of practice no problem if that is your intention and life allows (if life allows anytime spent on social media then it definitely allows time for yoga!)



## The asanas (yoga postures)

What to practise? If you practise a particular style of yoga that is based on a set routine of asanas (e.g. Astanga vinyasa) this won't be a problem, but if you attend classes where the routines change or you are more interested in exploring different postures you may be wondering what exactly to practise. This is where a book may be useful for inspiration and to remind you of postures you may have practised in class. You could ask your yoga teacher to suggest a mini class plan for you or you could get on the mat and just start with your favourite posture (providing it's not a posture that requires some warm up of the body) and move from there. Perhaps you practise Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutations) and that may start you off. Perhaps you may just come to sit quietly in a simple posture such as Sukhasana (Easy pose) or stand in Tadasana (Mountain pose) and see where that takes you. During my early days of morning self-practice I always found beneficial to start in a supported Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle pose) and then the postures would evolve by themselves. I recommend investing in the classic asana book *Light on Yoga* purely for inspiration. I would sometimes open a random page and practise a posture that way (hoping it wasn't a crazy, bendy pose I couldn't actually do!)

## Enjoy and be inspired!

Don't forget you are doing this practice because you love yoga! Enjoy the practice in the same way you may enjoy sinking into a warm bath - immerse yourself. Inspire yourself with yoga philosophy. It may become boring if yoga is just an exercise routine for you - how many people sustain the same exercise routine for years? Not many, they change it because it becomes dull or repetitive. The joy of yoga is in that no practice is the same, there are constantly new discoveries in our own bodies to be had and there are many inspiring sources of nourishment for your yoga out there in the form of classical texts and modern yoga writings and of course we can't rule out the Internet and YouTube! We are lucky to live in an age where we can access teachings that were once only available to a very few people who had to go to the trouble of finding a guru in the Himalayas. We should embrace this wonderful opportunity and allow it to take us on that journey of self-discovery and transformation and we can do it from the comfort of our own living room!

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