



downward

**THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF "DOGA,"
MAN'S BEST FRIEND IS FINDING INNER
PEACE IN THE STUDIO.**

THE IDEA OF taking your canine companion to the yoga studio may draw a chuckle, likely bringing to mind over-pampered chihuahuas being carried in designer purses. But after seeing the effects it has on their pooch's mental and physical health, many are now taking dog yoga very seriously.

Also known as "doga," the movement started in New York City more than 10 years ago and quickly spread across the country as herds of yogis and enthusiastic dog owners rushed into studios to try it. And doga has even made its way across the

ocean. Mahny Djahanguiri is a yoga instructor in the U.K. who teaches a doga class and has an international bestselling book on the subject, *DOGA: Yoga For You And Your Dog*. Djahanguiri attributes the movement's popularity to working people who wish to escape their busy lifestyles and find a creative outlet. "Everyone should join the class and relax with their dogs," Djahanguiri says.

Can't see your pooch performing a headstand? Not to worry: doga poses are crafted with the capabilities of the dog in mind. "My routine is based off a dog's natural movements," says Annie

Students stretch with their dogs in a doga class in Tokyo on December 21, 2018. In early 2016, 270 dogs and owners in Hong Kong set a new world record for the largest doga class.

dogs

Appleby, a prominent “dogi” from Los Angeles. “The poses are simple enough, like touching your forehead to your dog’s or letting him sit on your back while you stretch.” Like most yoga classes, doga starts with relaxing breathing techniques and light stretching. The class can then include anything from chanting to meditation, and dogs are encouraged to stretch into positions with gentle petting or treats. Veterans immediately slip into perfect synchronicity with their four-legged pal while some newcomers struggle to keep their pooch on the mat. But that doesn’t mean first-timers with dogs who’d rather be chasing tails than nirvana should become frustrated. Appleby says the classes become easier over time, citing the example of

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one man who brought his previously restless dog to every class she’s held. “His dog has definitely become more relaxed over time,” she explains. “He follows the routine very easily now.”

Whether you have a Great Dane or a Pomeranian, all dogs can participate in a doga class. “Small dogs can act as weights to deepen their owner’s stretches,” says Appleby, while “big dogs can provide support for certain poses.” Some doga classes even include a massage that can help older dogs with blood flow and digestion. But dogs of all ages can take advantage of the physical contact as the classes foster a stronger bond than more detached activities such as going for a walk. “There’s nothing like looking into your dog’s eyes and getting down on their level during a stretch,” Appleby says. “When you look into their eyes, a true bond is formed.”

But, as Djahanguiri says, “Doga isn’t just for dogs, it’s for you!” The virtue of doga, she explains, is how it makes yoga even more accessible to everyone. With the familiar presence of a pet, newcomers can relax more easily. Which is why in her classes, Djahanguiri encourages people not to take themselves too seriously. “If you don’t want to be licked in the face, you’ll have a problem!” she laughs. Doga requires your dog to guide you as well, and your pet may be more of a guru than you expect. “Have you ever seen your dog stretch their front and then back legs out in the morning?” Appleby asks. “That’s downward facing dog and upward facing dog right there. It’s kind of like dogs invented yoga!”