

Stress Solver: Partner Yoga, An Interview with Elysabeth Williamson

Doing yoga with a partner can build connection, insight and understanding.

“We want to feel open-hearted and connected with people,” says Elysabeth Williamson, a Boulder, Colorado-based yoga teacher and author of [The Pleasures and Principles of Partner Yoga](#) (Wisdom Arts, 2004). “With partner yoga we get to experience that in a powerful way.”

Partner yoga is yoga for two or more, and the two or more may be life partners, friends or a temporary grouping formed during class. The practitioners support and balance one another as they go through a sequence of postures, some of which may be quite challenging. “It’s surprising how easily you can do apparently difficult poses when you partner,” says Williamson.

Origin: While yoga has been taught in the United States since the 1920s, the idea of partnering is the brainchild of veteran Los Angeles yoga teacher Ganga White, whose 1978 book [Double Yoga](#) (Penguin) introduced the practice. Since then, it’s spread quietly. “I think it’s poised to really break out in the next few years,” says Williamson.

Benefits: The real challenges and benefits of partner yoga are more psychological than physical, Williamson explains. Movements involving touch, trust and mutual support naturally create opportunities for self-understanding. “We see that how we are with each other in partner yoga is how we are with each other in our lives,” she says.



“Whether we are partnering with lovers or strangers, the lessons tend to be the same. Women may deal with their need to ‘help’ their partner while losing touch with their own centers. Men may move beyond their fears about ‘doing it right’ and learn to open up.”

Simple Steps: While every partner yoga class and session is different, a typical session begins with warm-ups: The entire group might sit in a circle, for example, connecting palm-to-palm. “I invite them to feel the giving and receiving of energy, which is important in the practice,” says Williamson. Then partners may do a short meditation while sitting back-to-back, a very basic partnering pose.

“We might follow this with some simple stretches, one partner supporting the other,” she says, “and then move into some of the poses that look hard but are really very doable if you move into them mindfully: one person doing a forward bend or a back bend over the other’s body; one person resting her hip bones on her partner’s upraised feet and literally hanging there, body relaxed.” Williamson’s sessions conclude with participants lying on their backs, maintaining a connection with their partner through either the crowns of their heads or the soles of their feet.