



The Skinny

Diets, nutrition, workouts and more

Abby Lentz gives tips on HeavyWeight yoga

By Laura Kelly

After The Skinny blogged about Abby Lentz's HeavyWeight Yoga DVD collection, Lentz herself responded. Here's what the Austin, Texas, instructor has to say about modifications, props and substitutions for full-bodied folks:

Lentz: Thanks for the mention of my DVD in your blog — and for bringing up the topic of beginner's videos vs. DVDs designed especially for people who are overweight/obese. While the pacing may be about the same in any beginner's DVD, more than likely they will not mention the use of modifications, props or substitutions needed for a full body to really receive the benefits of a yoga pose.

MODIFICATIONS: [Blog commenter] Jenna mentioned how difficult it is to move around her body to reach her toes. One of the modifications I use is called the "Belly Well," which separates the legs, creating a space for your body so you can deeply lengthen your spine or more fully stretch your hamstrings. It can also be combined with what I call an "Energetic Swipe," which moves the flesh out of the way to lower a forward bend or to deepen a twist.

More from Lentz on props, substitutions — and our namaste thanks, 'natch — in the extended entry



Photo courtesy of Lentz, showing one of her classes in session

PROPS: Heavier people are usually oriented to the floor differently, as our tush can lift us higher and make it harder for us to connect to the floor with our hands. Props are a great way to neutralize this and help keep our alignment. For example, with a side body stretch, if your hand doesn't easily reach straight out to the side, you may roll forward, which can introduce an unwanted torque to the lower back. Using a block, the hand can firmly support the arm and helps deepen the stretch while keeping the shoulders and hips in alignment. (In my DVD, I include a section on how to substitute household items for yoga gear, so you can get started right away with items on hand.)

SUBSTITUTIONS: Asana substitutions are also important for those of us who are full-bodied, but still want a well-rounded yoga practice. A beginner's DVD may include a pose like Half Shoulderstand, a reasonable starting pose before Full Shoulderstand. However, neither of these postures are recommended if you are overweight or obese — as it's very dangerous to bring all that extra weight onto your head, neck and throat. With a DVD made for the full-bodied, these poses not only don't appear, but substitutions and combinations are offered so the benefits can be received without any major risks. (Doing Legs-up-the-wall, or even a gentler Legs-up-the-chair, can give you the inversion of a shoulderstand. Combine this with Tree pose and you'll have the other Shoulderstand benefits of core strength, concentration and balance.)

Wrapping up: Perhaps more importantly, there's the intrinsic benefit of seeing a person of size doing yoga. It helps to realize it can be done, you can do it, and you can start with the body you have today. I hope you'll forgive me if this is way too long — but bringing people of size to the yoga mat is my passion.

Thank you, Abby, from The Skinny and, as we said, namaste!