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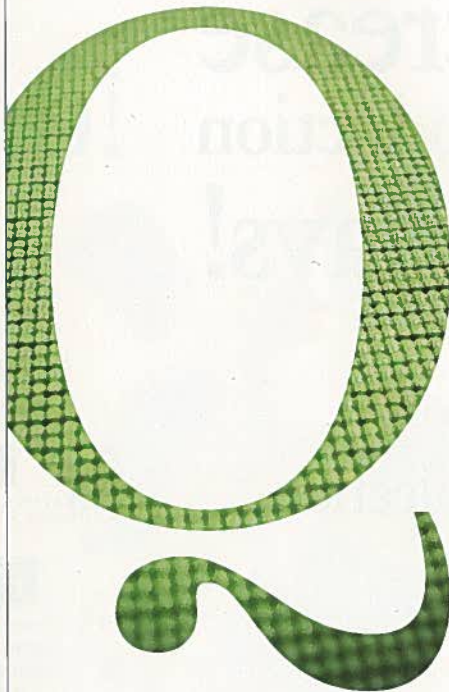
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ASK THE EXPERTS



Answers to your questions about mat hygiene, ankle pain and itchy winter skin.

My ankles hurt in Lotus Pose—is there a risk I could injure them?

If you can successfully get into Lotus Pose, you're not likely to injure your ankles. But most people are built to naturally drop into the pose because it requires very open hip flexors. Check if your body is ready for Lotus by sitting cross-legged. If your knees don't touch the ground, your hips aren't ready. If your hips are open and you still have ankle pain in Lotus, curling your toes back toward your knee, pressing the outer edge of your foot into your thigh to lift the outer ankle bone a little.

Remember, pain is always a message, so if you're hurting, get out of the pose. If you have sprained your ankle badly in the past, especially if you've done so more than once, there may be an underlying issue, such as a partially torn ligament. In that case, it's worth getting checked out by a medical professional.

Ariele Foster

Doctor of physical therapy and teacher of yoga and anatomy, Washington, DC

Can I pick up an infection if I use the yoga mat my studio provides?

It's not likely, but that doesn't mean those studio mats are clean. Without regular sanitizing, a mat accumulates bacteria that live on everyone's skin, such as staphylococci and streptococci. While harmless in most cases, if these bacteria come into contact with an open wound, they can lead to infection and more-serious illness. Cold and flu germs can also spread from nose to mat, so there's a small chance of infection for the next person who uses the mat (these bugs can survive on a surface for hours). The same holds for foot fungi, which can survive for days. The bottom line: The risks are low. We live in a world of microorganisms, and they are an unavoidable part of life. If you're concerned, avoid touching your nose, eyes, and mouth during class, and wash your hands with soap and hot water afterward.

Amesh Adalja, MD

Infectious-disease physician, University of Pittsburgh Center for Health Security

I'm prone to itchy skin in winter. Is there a natural remedy that could help?

Vitamin D

New research in *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* found that kids with eczema, a type of chronic skin inflammation that worsens in winter, saw significant improvement in their symptoms when they took 1,000 IU of vitamin D daily for a month.

Have questions for the experts?

Send them to letters@yogajournal.com