

The Health Benefits of Yoga

By: Victoria Howard, RYT

Impressions of Yoga are often mistaken as a weird Eastern philosophy of people meditating and putting legs behind their heads, sure there are yogis who can, but for the rest of us, yoga is a fairly simple practice that can be incorporated into our everyday lives by anyone of any age. Yoga has been around for over 5000 years, is practiced by over 11 million Americans, and is endorsed by many in the medical community for its therapeutic properties. The word Yoga actually means “union” or to “yolk”, the combination of incorporating movement, breath and meditation.

An average yoga class is usually an hour to an hour and a half of calm, soothing stretches while trying to quiet our very busy minds. A class consists of a series of postures that safely stretch the muscles, while using focused breathing. Yoga is a very simple practice that will yield enormous results with numerous benefits. A much needed break from our busy lifestyles, an hour of pure solace in a blissful environment.

The most obvious benefit of yoga is that it improves our flexibility, and this can help in many other active sports such as golf, running, etc. By gaining increased flexibility and strength it also improves our posture. It enables an increased range of motion in the joints as well as increased lubrication in the joints. The stretching also releases lactic acid which can build up causing stiffness, tension, pain and fatigue. Yoga stretches the muscles but it also stretches the soft tissues, ligaments, tendons and fascia. For these reasons yoga helps with chronic back pain, stress and arthritis, a complaint by young and old alike. This is why so many people, male and female, old and young are getting involved in the yoga practice.

Pranayama is the practice of deep breathing which is a vital part of the yoga practice and has many medical benefits. Often in our daily lives we don't tend to just stop and take deep breaths. Just deep breathing alone can help improve our lung capacity. Breathing is also crucial to heart health, by focusing on our inhales and exhales we slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure. All of which reduce the tendency for heart disease, high cholesterol as well as lowered stress and anxiety levels.

Yoga has also been known to improve insomnia, boost immune system function and help with proper body alignment.

There are many types of yoga, some gentle (yin), some more vigorous (vinyasa), some are in heated facilities (hot yoga) and I recommend trying as many types as you like until you find the style of yoga that fits you best. Some of the more vigorous styles have also been known to help

with weight loss. Yoga's health benefits are endless and they continue to do medical studies sharing more and more positive data about all the wonderful benefits yoga has to offer.

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