

YOGA...WHY?

Everyone seems to be talking about yoga. Celebrities, even professional athletes, tout yoga is the fountain of youth. Almost every week, there is an article about yoga in prominent periodicals -- even business magazines! Fortune 500 companies are offering lunchtime yoga classes. There are more than 32,000 yoga websites.

What is it about yoga? On the surface, yoga is a challenging, fun discipline that keeps the body fit. It regulates internal organs and balances the circulatory, respiratory, and hormonal systems. Yoga alleviates stress, aids in healing physical injuries and illnesses, and helps reclaim a sense of well-being. Unlike the "endorphin high" experienced in Western exercise, such as circuit training, spinning classes, and various forms of aerobics, a sense of mastery of one's own personal world is conceptualized as one practices yoga. One can become physically and mentally stronger, and as the body becomes more flexible, one can become more flexible in attitude.

The goal of yoga is to harmonize your body, mind and spirit through a combination of poses, meditation, and breathing exercises. It's an effective tool for calming your mind and allowing you to achieve complete physical and mental relaxation.

What does "Yoga" mean? The word "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit word "yuj" which means, "to unify." Yoga involves seeking to "unite" your body, mind and spirit, allowing you to connect with your inner self, leading to a sense of contentment and tranquility.

Yoga originated in northern India more than 5000 years ago. Archaeologists have found statuettes of men in yoga poses from around that time. Developed by ancient sages, yoga was not written down for thousands of years; instead it was passed down from teacher to student. Approximately 2000 years ago, a philosopher named Patanjali began organizing and writing down the principles of yoga into a collection known as Yoga Sutras. Many people consider Patanjali be the father of yoga.

Anyone can practice yoga, regardless of age or fitness level. If you have a physical limitation, you can modify yoga to meet your needs. People with limited mobility can perform yoga while sitting in a chair. Almost everyone can find yoga useful since it provides a wide variety of benefits. People who work in offices can perform stress-relieving practices to give their overworked minds a break. Athletes and dancers can perform strengthening practices to restore energy and improve stamina. Children can practice yoga to improve their attention span and concentration. Seniors can feel stronger and improve the flexibility.

There are seven main types of yoga. Although each type of yoga helps unite your body, mind and spirit, each has a slightly different focus. I practice Hatha Yoga, which is the yoga of physical discipline. It is the most common type of yoga in the Western world. The goal of Hatha Yoga is to achieve union of the mind, body and spirit through physical actions. It promotes taking care of your body to be healthy. Your body may become more relaxed, and your mind may become clearer even after just one practice.

Should one consider practicing yoga? I personally and professionally believe that one of the primary reasons for considering yoga is that it provides a balanced and wholesome approach to achieving good physical, mental and emotional health. Yoga is easier on your body than many other fitness activities, such as high-impact aerobics. Unlike many other forms of exercise, it addresses all aspects of your health and well-being.

The peace and relaxation that yoga offers improves mood, which in turn improves overall well-being. One of the most recognized benefits of practicing yoga is stress reduction. It encourages personal reflection and introspection, which helps to release any anxiety, hostility or depression one may be feeling. Yoga poses, meditation and reading exercises are all clinically proven methods of relieving stress. One can feel more mentally alert, centered in content. Practicing yoga can help relieve stress by clearing one's mind and bringing attention to the present moment. Obviously, stress reduction can have a positive effect on your health, especially when stress is a major contributor of many illnesses in today's world.

Yoga serves as an effective tool for improving mental functioning, such as memory enhancement and better concentration. It can also improve hand-eye coordination, reaction time, dexterity, and fine motor skills. Additionally, yoga can improve posture, which allows you to stand, sit, and walk with confidence.

Among the physical benefits of yoga is pain reduction. Therapeutic relief from many ailments, such as back pain, arthritis, headaches, and menstrual cramps, can be accomplished through yoga. Many yoga poses can also release tension and soreness in your muscles. The practice of yoga improves your breathing by increasing awareness of breath and increasing lung capacity. By focusing on deep breathing, one can help release tension from the body and make your body more alkaline and less acidic. Too much acidity in the body can be harmful for bones and tissues and can also cause enhanced arthritis, fatigue, headaches and depression. Many yoga poses help improve the circulation of blood flow which helps flush out toxins and impurities from the body. Regular yoga practice can also help lower blood pressure and pulse rate.

One of the most noticeable effects of yoga is that it can make the body strong and flexible, while improving the range of motion in joints. This also improves balance, tones muscles and increases stamina. Some of the best yoga poses can also help build strong bones, which helps prevent osteoporosis.

You can do yoga alone or in a group, in a small space utilizing the time that you prefer, and progressing at a speed and pace that's comfortable. Anyone at any age can do it, practically anywhere. No fancy or expensive equipment, and you can do it forever with continued benefits for your health.

Yoga does not require you to twist your body like a pretzel! I am amazed at the flexibility that some of my students have attained over time. I do not have that degree of extreme flexibility, but I practice and preach yoga because I crave all the benefits. You do not have to force yourself to sit in uncomfortable positions and chant, "Om." If our minds are active, then maybe it is a good idea to have active bodies. But let's harness that activity for our highest good, just as we harness the power of a waterfall to generate electricity. Through yoga poses, you can reach that same meditative place others are reaching by sitting, and you can have much more fun! All aspects of your life can transform just by practicing Yoga. Our classes are open for anyone, of any age, at any level of experience. You set the pace. We set the opportunity for support, accountability and enjoyment. Try it out – Most love it!