

The Benefits of Yoga
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In the life time of the average American the body begins to take on a life of its own. Even to the dismay of the soul that inhabits the body. The body reacting to the modern world of stresses, day to day activities and the pressures of this life crave answers to make it feel better. Usually this leads the body to find answers in a variety of different forms. This ranges from food, alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs; legal or illegal. This is the body's way of attempting to relieve the stress, noise and ailments of our society. Our bodies then begin to crave more and more relief and they become addicted to these answers. In reality usually what happens is the opposite of what is desired. The body becomes increasingly sore, lethargic and full of disease. The mind become stagnant, the muscles weaken and the joints rust. Again even to the dismay of the soul, who wants to have a life full of activity, strength, wellness, joy and peace. But the body is out of control or better stated in control of the soul with a life of addictive cravings all of its own.

The benefits of Yoga on our health are really almost unbelievable. They can change a person's life and transform the mind and body. The teachings of yoga are based on an intricate and precise understanding of the healthy functioning of the human body and mind. The techniques of Yoga are designed to maximize your potential for good health. In this report we are going to start with the benefits first to the body, and then follow up with the benefits to the mind. I am going to divide this first section for the body, under four main topics; muscles, joints, organs, and specific ailments.

The popular opinion is that Yoga does not increase or work the muscles in the way that aerobic exercise does or that strength training does, below I have quoted a study that proves differently.

A study was conducted at the University of California at Davis. Ten college 'coach potatoes' adopted a yoga routine for eight weeks. Each week, they attended from two to four classes during which they spent 10 minutes on breath control, 15 minutes of warm up exercises, 50 minutes doing yoga asanas, and then 10 minutes of relaxation/meditation. At the end of the eight-week period, the researchers measured the students' fitness and discovered that their muscular strength had increased by up to 31%, their muscular endurance improved by 57%, their flexibility increased by 188%, and their cardio respiratory fitness improved by 7%. These results are pretty amazing when you consider that the study was only conducted for eight weeks. **Muscle Fitness – Can**

Yoga Make You Stronger? By Della Menechella

Yoga asanas systematically work each opposing set of muscles in turn. The asanas give muscles and ligaments a slow non violent stretch. Stretching the muscles helps it to contract more strongly while the slow movement and deep breathing increase the oxygen supply to the muscles, and prevents the accumulation of lactic acid in the fibers. Build up of lactic acid which usually happens in typical exercise programs that push for the burn causes the muscles to be unable to contract for a temporary amount of time. Many times this is associated with the pain that you feel after a strenuous exercise program.

Many poses in Yoga are done slowly or you stay in that pose for a long period of time. This challenges the muscles more to hold the pose or moving thru the pose slowly than allowing momentum to move you through the exercise. By maintaining poses for minutes at a time it teaches your muscles to contract for longer periods which can drastically improve your muscular endurance. Muscles used during yoga will be more elongated because while you are strengthening the muscle you are also lengthening them. Also you do not focus on one muscle as weight lifting does; you are using all of the smaller muscle groups as well.

Another exciting benefit of Yoga is what happens to your joints, and tendons. In the aging process, for various reasons; our joints and tendons become inflamed and painful. Range of motion becomes considerably lessened sometimes to the point of minimal movement. One of the benefits of Yoga is that it moves our bodies' fluids around in our body. As the blood circulates through the arteries and veins our lymph also flows through our bodies by doing this it is cleansed of metabolic by products (toxins) and our blood is replenished with oxygen and nutrients. Yoga also helps circulates the synovial fluids that are inside our joints. Another benefit to the joints and tendons is that as you practice asanas your range of motion increases without straining the joints.

The next topics we are going to look at are the benefits Yoga has on our organs. In my research I have read that Yoga is perhaps the only activity that massages all of the internal organs and glands of our body. A very practical explanation of the process is that whenever we twist the body the blood is squeezed out of the internal organs and when we release the twist fresh blood flows into the organs. In this process we are flushing our internal systems, giving it vital nutrients and fresh oxygenated blood as well as flushing out toxins and waste materials. This massage and stimulation of the organs also helps in keeping away disease.

The last topic we are going to cover in this section is specific ailments and Yoga. Yoga can significantly improve or even cure several ailments. Research on this matter is really just beginning to accumulate, so evidence is not overwhelming or conclusive at this point but during my research on this matter I have read countless stories and testimonies from doctors, students and teachers on this matter. In fact after my research I found so much information that I could have written this whole report primarily on this subject. I am going to list a few ailments that seem to plague our population the most. Yoga helps with high blood pressure, diabetes, headaches, arthritis, spinal alignment, chronic pain, weight loss, asthma, anxiety, depression, and menstrual related problems. Yoga offers individual asanas that target specific conditions, or a whole series of poses that work together to target special needs. This combined with the atmosphere of the class, relaxation techniques and breath control Yoga begins to bring relief or healing to the ailments. Again the ailments listed above are just a sampling of the ailments Yoga can help.

The second section we are going to look at is Yoga and the mind and meditation. We have seen in this report, that Yoga can help us increase our physical health. Now let's look at the benefits of practicing Yoga and how it's been found to be beneficial to our mental health.

Above we talked about the benefits of Yoga poses and how as we perform them it flushes our system with oxygen, fresh blood and other valuable nutrients. As our bodies are being flushed it releases the stored up waste and toxins, this is also true for our brain. This in turn gives you a feeling of well being, it begins to release the stored up anxiety, worries and tension. It improves our concentration, and alleviates mood swings.

One of the key aspects of Yoga is learning to breathe correctly and the relationship between breath (oxygen) and mind and meditation. The difference between Yoga and other sports or fitness activities is in the breathing aspect. Yoga has an insistence upon rhythm and smooth control; the retention; and the unique regard for the reciprocal relationship between respiration and the mental state. When we do full body poses like the Sun Pose it uses our whole body and it encourages you to breathe deeply and rhythmically. By breathing deeply we begin to still our busy overactive mind and bring awareness to our self. By deep breathing we are bringing into our body Prana; the life force it needs. Yogis view that Prana is the force behind renewal of the body cells. Once we begin to learn the techniques of breathing deeply we can do it any were at any time. This can reduce the symptoms of panic attacks and out of control emotions. This helps us to cope with the difficult stressful situations that we are dealing with at that moment, because now we have a new sense of calmness. Then we can make logical non emotional decisions. These are great tools that should be taught to people of all ages.

Now this leads us to the value of meditation. Meditation is one of the most rewarding benefits of Yoga. It connects us to our inner self, which in turn connects us to God. Meditation is more than just relaxation; it is the development of mindfulness. Some of the benefits of meditation are increased learning, ability, and memory, feelings of vitality, creativity and overall happiness. You will see a decrease in the areas of anxiety, depression, irritability and moodiness.

People will find that this time of meditation is an escape from the attachment of the external world. At first they will have a difficult time stilling their busy minds but with practice and time they will learn to become still inside their mind. It is also an opportunity to recognize the occurring negative or destructive thoughts. By recognizing these thoughts they can begin to change the thought patterns and recognize them as negative and destructive patterns. The most negative mind patterns are related to fear and anger. Undesired thoughts create inner turmoil. This will affect us mentally, emotionally and eventually physically. Meditation allows these thoughts to be turned off quickly before they can get a foot hold. In short you will find that meditation is very rewarding it connects us with our own inner powers of vitality, clarity and love. The disciplines of Yoga over time brings us to calmness, develops patience with in us towards ourselves and others as well as greater understanding and compassion. What is great about Yoga and meditation is that it starts with a focus on you and then over time as you begin to repair and heal yourself physically mentally and spiritually it turns outward towards the world around us. As we begin to operate with a new sense of peace and joy and love we in turn give it away to others. Not only do we give it away to others we want to show them the way to the inner peace and joy that we have found.

