

YOGA LIFE

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Getting perspective with Yoga

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The basis of yoga as outlined by the yoga sutras is to continuously develop positive qualities, growing from our current condition, whether physical, emotional or spiritual, to seek ongoing improvement that brings us in closer unity with our purpose. The purpose of yoga is yoga. This means a constant awareness and an ever-changing, ever-improving perspective. At the most surface level the practice of yoga allows us to connect with both inner and outer awareness in order to find greater peace of mind.

As a student of life, I've had to ask myself how to simplify the concept of finding awareness while life continues to change and brings challenges. There are days on the mat, where I find myself in effortless movement of my physical body and complete presence of mind. My mind graciously ceases to race through the usual list of personal and business endeavours. I long for this presence of mind because it brings so much peace and contentment as well as acceptance into any given situation. In yoga, I am able to rationalize better, reason with intellect, interact with kindness, and accept with gratitude. But how do I carry over that short-lived moment in time that I am present on the mat and translate it into the rest of life? The one

effective answer I have found is that, if I become more aware of how I perceive my surroundings the more I am then present. It is not just the physical surroundings but also what I think of my surroundings, the inward thoughts. As I am sure many of us are, I am afflicted with intense over-thinking as well as over analysing. Yoga has been the healing tool that allows me to accept the mind clutter, and process both my thoughts and the resulting emotions in order to then simply let it all go and focus on being present.

The shift that happens when we allow ourselves to live in the present moment is remarkable. The suffering of any situation is lessened as we begin to take every single action as simply that, a single action. It no longer becomes our life story, our ongoing complaint or a representation of self that replays in our minds. With the presence of mind that yoga brings all things simply are as they are. I have been able to use these practices from my mat to make continuous improvements off the mat. Even the smallest shifts in thought provide solace for the mind and spirit. Our minds suffer because of attachment, but this can be lessened with greater awareness. It is not possible to change that which we are not aware. However, we all have the innate capability to change what we can – our perspective.

Lessons from the Mat Give Perspective

Aside from the wide array of physical health benefits, yoga is about uniting the mind and spirit. The physical benefits are a by-product from the nature of yoga. Due to this, many principles can be attributed to a practice on that mat and how it relates to life off the mat. Here are four principles that I have found useful:

1. Strive for Balance

Ever heard or said the phrase, “What we do on one side, we must do on the other,” during yoga class? It is about balancing out the natural occurrence of our asymmetrical bodies. You may lean to one side or favour a certain hand or leg; internally it is not uncommon to see the pairs of kidneys and lungs in disproportionate size. Through regular yoga practice, our muscles can begin to shape into great balance. Muscle activity is also significantly improved as our bodies naturally adjust and stretch to the postures. This increases mobility and the capability to move into more advanced poses. The more balanced our bodies the stronger we become.

This same principle holds true off the mat. Building balance into our lives strengthens us. I have even found the correlation between lacking balance on the mat during times where my life lacks balance off the mat. Obstacles and challenges naturally occur, think of those as our poses. As we push through with awareness, just like on the mat, we have increased strength and capability. As we strive for balance we move closer to uniting with our purpose, yoga.

2. Follow a Sequence

We follow various series of asanas in yoga because they allow us to flow through practice. A well-sequenced

class allows us to leave energized, relaxed with an increased flow of energy and a deeper connection to our spiritual body. Our bodies crave the natural progression of knowing what comes next, the familiarity that comes with following a routine. Both balance and comfort live within a routine where our mind and body know exactly what to expect. It also provides a feeling of order to our lives.

A healthy routine off the mat is equally important. Following a routine will keep us grounded and reinforces our energetic flow creating ease in our daily lives. This will create a greater awareness and perspective throughout our day.

3. Take Time to Breathe

A yoga instructor once said during class, “Our breath will tell us how to respond.” Each movement on the mat is accompanied with an inhalation or exhalation. Aside from shavasana, our practice calls for constant active breathing. With each breath, we move deeper into a pose or exit from a pose, transitioning to the next posture; this is how we gauge our body’s responsiveness. Our breath allows us to know whether to push further, pull back or simply be still.

In life, nothing is more beautiful than taking the time to breathe, inhaling and exhaling of life force. Listening to our breath will allow us to act and respond with awareness. The question of whether to move forward into a thought or action, or recognizing the time to pull away is answered by quieting the mind and bringing focus on breathing.

4. Remember Your Humanity

Of course, we’re all human. But I think sometimes we forget we are not super humans with hyper speed drive and the ability to do everything at once. Yoga takes patience and practice to progress on the mat. We need space to grow within our imperfections. We face resistance on the mat when our body may not be ready for a particular posture. This same resistance happens off the mat, and it is at these times to remember that we are human; a living breathing entity of spirit and matter that has strengths and weaknesses. Accepting our humanity allows us to patiently provide understanding and build healthier relationships with others and ourselves.

Yoga Benefits Various Health Ailments

Along with the mental benefits of yoga, it is helpful to understand other physical ways yoga can benefit us. Yoga is an ancient practice with varied roots of origin that has caught the attention of the mainstream audience worldwide. But still, sceptics wonder how such seemingly low-impact exercises, in comparison to more intense Western methods of exercise, are able to not just influence the mind and spirit, but also transform the body.

In medical studies, yoga has been scientifically proven to change, improve and even eradicate various medical illnesses and disorders. The symptoms of health and wellness ailments such as diabetes, high blood pressure, uterine fibroids and depression have all been minimized or had the contributing factors reduced from an ongoing practice of yoga. Let’s explore the breakdown of what these diseases are to better understand how yoga becomes so beneficial.

Yoga by definition is an all-inclusive exercise that encompasses the physical body as well as mind and spirit to promote full body wellness.

Diabetes

Diabetes (Type 1) occurs when the immune system destroys cells in the pancreas that would otherwise make insulin; the hormone used to break down sugar from the carbohydrates digested for energy or to store glucose. Without this insulin, the body cannot function normally. Other causes of diabetes include obesity, poor diet, increasing age, pancreatitis, genetic and family history to name a few.

Since diabetes is a disorder of the digestive system the most beneficial yoga

poses are those that target the activation of the abdomen. The alternating action of contracting and relaxing the abdomen begins to simulate the pancreas, thereby increasing blood and oxygen supply. Cells of the pancreas then receive fresh blood flow as well as nutrients resulting in a rejuvenation that promotes new insulin production. Practicing active breathing techniques also stimulates this healthy revitalization of the pancreas.

Recommended poses for relieving symptoms of diabetes:

- Dhanurasana (Bow pose)
- Halasana (Plough Pose)
- Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Twist Pose)
- Vrikshasana (Tree Pose)

High Blood Pressure:

High blood pressure, or hypertension, occurs when the blood flows above a certain level of pressure than what is necessary to pump through the body. Studies have proven high blood pressure occurs for a variety of reasons: high sodium diet, imbalance in the kidneys and genetics. Excessive alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity, high levels of mental stress and obesity are also to blame for rising pressure in the blood stream. People afflicted with high blood pressure should approach any physical exercise with caution to avoid raising their heart rate.

Yoga aids in managing hypertension primarily with pranayama, controlled breathing techniques. Yoga works the opposite of most physical exercise such as jogging or

lifting weights that require the blood and oxygen levels to increase consequently putting the heart under increased amounts of stress. With our physical yoga practice the muscles are in a relaxed state, which decreases the amount of blood and oxygen to flow, yet still increases flexibility, endurance and muscle strength. Add to our asanas conscious breathing and the nervous system becomes stabilized, therefore regulating the blood pressure. Breathing deeply in a controlled manner will positively affect the entire body.

Recommended poses for relieving symptoms of high blood pressure:

Practice these with active pranayama.

- Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward-Facing Dog) with Support
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend)
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
- Balasana (Child's Pose)

Uterine Fibroids:

Uterine fibroids, or myomas, are growths that develop in the uterus typically during a woman's childbearing years. Fibroids are noncancerous growths that can range from the size of a small seed to a small grapefruit. Health and science experts have not come to a conclusion on what causes fibroids, however studies have shown these growths contain a higher level of estrogen implying an imbalance in hormones. It is also suggested that women who have had family members who also suffered from fibroids are at higher risk as well as women whose diet includes red meats, alcohol, or caffeine.

Uterine fibroids affect the female reproductive tract and pelvic region. Asanas that focus on opening and otherwise softening the abdominal area are most beneficial to minimize or alleviate the symptoms. Various twist poses that stretch and open the pelvic region will provide relief.

Recommended poses to relieve the discomfort of uterine fibroids:

- Bharadvajasana (Bharadvaja's Twist)
- Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana (Revolved Head-to-Knee Pose)
- Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)
- Salamba Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Supported Bridge Pose)

Depression:

An estimated 350 million people worldwide are affected by depression. Various types of depression exist from major depression with recurring episodes, postpartum, persistent depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder. Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) where your mood is affected by sunlight also occurs during the winter

months versus the summer time when more sunlight exists. Symptoms range from emotional irregularity such as anxiety, anger management issues, or extreme irritability to physical symptoms such as insomnia, fatigue, or weight loss and weight gain.

Since depression can attack both the body and the mind, practicing yoga is ideal as it addresses both entities. Depression can drain energy both mentally and physically, so rely on postures that provide energizing benefits, increasing mindfulness, controlling the breath, and fatigue reducing poses. These will be the most advantageous, plus there is the added benefit of strengthening the body.

Recommended poses for relieving symptoms of depression:

- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
- Viparita Virabhadrasana (Reverse Warrior I)
- Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand)
- Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana (Two-Legged Inverted Staff Pose)

Changing the Perspective of Who Does Yoga

Despite what may be speculated on social media, yoga is not a special sport reserved for young, thin-framed women with acrobatic-like agility. Quite the opposite, yoga by definition is an all-inclusive exercise that encompasses the physical body as well as mind and spirit to promote full body wellness. Everyone can practice yoga, any religious background, belief, age, ability or race.

One of the oldest yoga instructors, Tao Porchon-Lynch, is nearly 99 years of age. Body positive advocate, Jessamyn Stanley, breaks all barriers of what you thought a yogi should look like, and Matthew Sanford instructs and practices yoga from his wheelchair. If ever there is a hesitation, now is the time to let it go and try a class.

Yoga is most beneficial when practiced on a daily basis, however incorporating various poses into current fitness programmes or consistently adding a few poses to a morning routine will prove beneficial. There are many styles to choose from that will fit any personality, ability, fitness goals, or mood.

Our Mission to Change Perspectives

Seeking new perspectives and respecting the perspectives of others is the foundation of the U.S.A. based Perspectives

Yoga Wear brand. Our brand is unique because we focus on the whole person with the clothing as a by-product. The yoga wear collection is custom designed artwork on print created for women to feel beautiful in their own skin. The brand is centered around promoting positive change in mindset that empowers women to find purpose and peace of mind. Our mission is to encourage people to use their own innate passion to serve others on their journey to success. Seek a new perspective, find balance in life, pursue passion and awaken real joy. Finding our perspective starts with yoga.

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