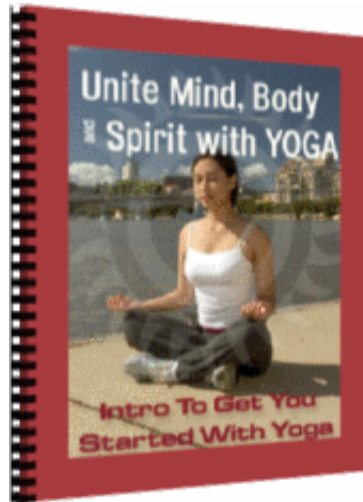


Unite Mind, Body and Spirit with Yoga

by Admin

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Unite Mind, Body and Spirit with YOGA: Introduction to Yoga

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Benefits of Yoga

Practitioners of yoga talk about a unification of the body, mind and spirit acquired through practicing the yoga exercises and techniques.

One of the fundamental beliefs that yogis share is that the mind and the body are a unified structure, which can find its harmony and it can heal itself, when being in a proper environment. Due to these principles, as well as to the results obtained, many doctors consider yoga as having therapeutic results, and recommend it for curing a series of illnesses, mainly related to the nervous system.

Yoga is not a recent life philosophy. It has been practiced for thousands of years and during all this time, people benefited from the great results obtained. Furthermore, they conducted investigations, in order to clearly establish the areas in which people can obtain health benefits, by an extended practice. The information obtained after conducting the investigations was grouped in three

categories, establishing that yoga practitioners are likely to observe improvements in what concerns physiological, psychological, biochemical aspects.

From the physiological point of view, prolonged yoga practices can cure pulse rate decreases, respiratory and blood pressure dysfunctions, it can contribute to stabilizing the nervous system equilibrium, to normalizing gastrointestinal functions and endocrine function, to increasing the joint range of motions, endurance level, energy level, immunity to diseases and cardiovascular efficiency, to improving eye-hand coordination, reaction time, dexterity skills, depth perception, sleep, etc.

The second category, comprising psychological benefits, points out that yoga can also contribute to increasing somatic and kinesthetic awareness, self-acceptance and self-actualization, social skills, well-being, as well as to improving concentration, memory, attention, mood, learning efficiency, symbol coding, etc.

As for the biochemical benefits of yoga, we can enumerate substantial decreases of glucose, sodium, cholesterol, total white blood cell and remarkable increases of vitamin C, total serum protein, hemoglobin etc.

Furthermore, various studies revealed that yoga exercises are extremely effective when it comes to increasing the level of joint flexibility, together with the level of lubrication of joints, ligaments and tendons. Another interesting aspect has to do with the fact that yoga is one of the very few techniques, which contributes to massaging all the internal organs and glands, including the ones that are hardly ever stimulated during the lifetime of a person, such as the prostate. The stimulation and massaging of the internal organs proves to be beneficial when it comes to preventing and keeping away diseases.

Moreover, these ancient and efficient techniques guarantee a complete detoxification of your body. When stretching the muscles and performing a thorough massage, due to the complexity of the yoga exercises you ensure the

optimum quantity of blood supply you need. As a consequence, toxins are eliminated from your body and certain undesired processes, such as aging, are considerably delayed.

As a final remark, all the benefits presented above come in addition to the most important aspect provided by yoga practices, meaning the harmony and the synchronization between body and mind, as well as strengthening your meditation and emotional systems.

Getting Started with Yoga

One of the amazing things about yoga is that despite the great benefits that it produces, it requires no costs. There is not specific yoga training equipment that one has to use in order to obtain the desired results and there is no such thing as the perfect environment required for practicing yoga.

All this is a direct consequence of the fact that yoga is, more than a practice, a state of mind and a life style. That is why your will, as well as your believes and attitudes towards this philosophical path are all that actually matter. Moreover, a balanced and healthy diet, based on natural food, is a key issue for preparing yourself for your first yoga session. What we eat can strongly affect both our mind and our soul, so it is crucial to mind what we eat.

Even though you do not need a specially designed place for performing your yoga class, make sure, when electing the room where you will be holding the class, to choose a place as far away from distractions - such as radio, street noise, TV - as possible. The place also needs to be clean and quite and, if possible, ventilated. A blanket is the accessory that you absolutely need in order to gain comfort when carrying out the exercises and the meditation, as they are performed in either sitting or lying positions, but, however, a towel or a mat, could work, as well.

In what concerns the clothes you are supposed to wear, try to select something very comfortable and loose, such as training suits, sweat pants and a t-shirt, shorts or loose pajamas. Some people would rather wear no clothes at all, but, nevertheless, most practitioners put something on, especially if the yoga session is not private.

It is also highly recommended to have an empty stomach, before starting your yoga exercises. As a general rule, one or two hours after a main meal is the ideal time for practicing yoga. As breathing is a key element in yoga training, do not forget to also clean your nostrils and your throat.

In case you have not decided which could represent the best moment of the day for carrying out your yoga session, you have to know that both morning and evening practices can result very beneficial to your body and mind. Thus, performing the exercises in the morning can contribute to your good shape for the whole day, as it improves your vitality level. On the other hand, evening yoga practices helps inducing a restful and peaceful sleep.

Your yoga session should not exhaust you. Do not hesitate to take a break, when you feel tired. Actually, short breaks are common, between difficult exercises. Keep in mind that as little as 15 minutes of correct yoga practice can produce marvelous results on your body and mind.

As a final idea, try to remember that the most important thing, when practicing yoga, is your attitude and your desire to discover the incredible sensations and experiences this ancient philosophy can provide.

The Yoga Diet

One of the essential things about yoga, together with the positive attitude, is the diet. It is highly recommended to perform your yoga session after about 2 hours from a main meal. Many specialists agree that what we eat is reflected

both in our appearance, as well as in our health state. In other words, it is important to mind the things we consume, in order to prevent illnesses and discomforts.

However, the question related to what does healthy food mean, remains a constant reason of inquiry for many people. According to reliable studies, a very diversified diet represents the ideal food for any human organism. However, fruits and vegetables, containing fibers and vitamins should be a permanent component of your daily meals. Furthermore, everything that can be defined as natural food is recommended, when it comes to preserving your state of well being.

Despite the fact that many people try to eat as little as possible, as they believe food can produce them harm, you have to keep in mind that your body needs nutrients, in order to properly function. Nevertheless, do not exaggerate when eating, even if you are consuming healthy food, because it will not have the same beneficial effect on you. Try to stop eating once you are not hungry anymore, or, even better, stop before reaching the full saturation state. By doing this, you will discover that the state of fatigue, which we sometimes experience after eating, is considerably diminished, while your energy level goes up substantially.

Another issue related to eating is how often should a healthy person eat? Should we have three meals a day? Should we avoid having dinner, in order to prevent becoming overweight, because we do not move sufficiently during the night? Or is it better not to have lunch, so that you do not have to deal, in the middle of the day, with the unpleasant sensation of fatigue, which we experience after serving a consistent meal? Well, the right answer to all these questions would be to eat whenever you are hungry, as your body needs to be fed in order to function at the standards you desire, but, nevertheless, pay attention to what and how much you are eating.

More than a simple energy source, food can be a way of purifying one's body and soul, which is why, together with the variety of exercises, yoga trainers

encourage the practitioners to keep a wise diet, based mainly on natural food. This way, their body is protected from the danger of contracting toxins and it is prepared, at the same time, to find the synchronization with the soul and mind, which is actually one of the main goals of yoga practices.

As a final remark, when carrying out constant yoga practices it is important, in order to reach your goals, to meditate both on what you are doing to your own body, as a direct consequence of the food you are eating, and to what level you respond to your soul's and mind's needs.

Yoga Equipment

The degree of preparation for practicing yoga is minimal. It is true that you have to mind your diet, but however, mental preparation is by far more important. Still, when it comes to yoga equipment, there are a few things to keep in mind. These things are not mandatory, but recommended, in order to increase the level of efficiency and comfort.

1. **Yoga clothing:** There is no such thing as a strict rule regarding the type of clothes that one has to wear, while performing yoga exercises. Nevertheless, practice has demonstrated that comfortable, loose, breathable clothes are the most convenient ones for carrying out this routine. Sweat suits, shorts, pajamas and t-shirts are the outfits people mostly opt for. As for certain exercises from a regular yoga routine your head comes below your knees, you might want to put on a t-shirt that is tight to your body.
2. **Shoes:** As a general rule, yoga exercises are performed in bare feet. Most of the times, shoes are left near the entrance. To prevent discomforts caused by the cold sensations, you can put on light cotton socks.
3. **Mats:** In a yoga room or studio it is likely to observe, on the floor, a large number of mats, each one for a different practitioner. These mats are used for various reasons. First of all, they delimitate the personal space dedicated to

each person. Hence, every practitioner can try to reach the state of harmony between the mind and the body, within the space allocated to him, space that he can control and dominate. Another relevant reason for using mats is related to the level of comfort. If you sweat your hands might get slippery and you might lose your stability. For that reason, a mat could help you stay focus on the routine. Especially if you are a beginner in yoga training, you have to deeply consider purchasing a mat, as the hard floor might be a serious cause of discomfort to you. Most yoga studios offer yoga mats for rent, for a dollar or two. However, most people like to purchase their own mats, from the specialized stores.

4. Blankets: It is common for yoga studios to have enormous piles of blankets. Do not hesitate to grab one or two, as they can turn out to be handy during classes. They can either be used as props, while performing exercises in uncomfortable positions, or you can use them to cover yourself, during relaxation at the end of the class, in case you get chilly.

There are other elements such as blocks and straps, for example, which people use to improve their efficiency and level of comfort, while carrying out the yoga exercises.

Fundamental Principles of Yoga

Yoga practices can bring up a series of incredible benefits. However, in order to get to those stages highly appreciated by perseverant yoga practitioners there are a series of fundamental principles that any yogi has to respect.

Most of these rules are related to proper relaxation techniques, to the right manner of breathing, to the sort of diet practitioners should follow and, not in the last place, to thinking positively and trying to meditate objectively on the surrounding realities.

As a general rule, all principles underline the importance of self-discipline, self-control, self-determination and focus, as relevant ways of achieving the status promoted by the yoga ideology. Although at the beginning uninitiated yogi might feel overwhelmed with the richness and the vastness philosophy and practice of yoga, there is, however, a series of basic principles, which can help early stage yoga practitioners understand better this ideology.

Here are some of the fundamental principles of this philosophical practice:

1. Total relaxation of your body and mind is required in order to revitalize your nervous system, achieve inner peace and feel relaxed and refreshed.
2. Your body was designed to move and exercise, which is why, by correctly practicing the yoga exercises, including stretching and toning your muscles, you can increase the flexibility of your joints and spines and contribute to improving your blood circulation.
3. Furthermore, it is crucial to learn how to breathe correctly when performing the yoga movements, so that you achieve the desired state of harmony and purification. Rhythmical and full breathing, using the lungs entirely, in order to increase the quantity of oxygen you intake, is the most recommended. The breathing techniques promoted by yogi have the purpose of relaxing your mind and increasing your energy level.
4. Yogis are convinced that what we eat strongly affects our spiritual awareness, which is why, when practicing yoga is recommended to mind your diet. There is no doubt that the things we eat nourish both our body, as well as our soul and, as a consequence, a balanced diet, based on natural products is the number one option to go. Proper eating implies not the things you eat, but it also involves eating moderately and only when you are hungry. After all, there is no logic in eating only for lack of other activities.
5. Many philosophical concepts, including yoga practices, state that the manner in which we think strongly affects our way of living. As a result, it is always

recommendable to meditate on things and to try to eliminate any negative thoughts, in order to gain control over your own mind.

As a final conclusion, it is vital to understand and be aware of the above mentioned principles, in order to maximize the positive effects of your yoga practice.

Yoga For Relaxation

Reviews show that people tend to practice yoga for a variety of reasons: many of them are interested in the health benefits they obtain, after regularly performing the routines, other are seeking the much desired state of harmony between the inner and the outer self, while another percentage of the practitioners carry out yoga sessions in order to relax.

The state of profound relaxation is achieved either by means of exercising or by correct meditation practices. The result is a sublime state of clearness of the mind, of profound harmony and understanding of the world.

In order to accelerate the process of arriving to the intense relaxation stage, you have to make use of most yoga techniques, but most of all you have to pay special attention to breathing, to your diet, to correctly perform the exercises, to meditating on the true values of the world and mostly, on your own past actions.

Thus, a deep and prolonged breath helps your brain stay oxygenated, which contributes to analyzing things in a clearer manner. Diet, on the other hand, is also relevant because the things we eat influence not only the structure of our body, but also our brain. During the prolonged history of yoga, specialists have determined the exercises, which are likely to produce beneficial results.

However, the routine needs to be carried out correctly; otherwise you might run the risk of wasting your time, without a relevant result.

Anyway, the most important thing that you have to keep in mind is that your attitude and your focus are the key elements, which are able to really make the difference. Entering the profound stage of relaxation and synchronization between your inner and your outer self cannot happen unless you physically and mentally desire it.

Yoga relaxation is a necessary and mandatory stage of every yoga routine. It is quite normal and obvious that you need to relax after practicing the exercises, as they are most of the times very profound and demand a lot of focus.

Moreover, certain practices require an unusual positioning of the body, which can result in discomforts, if the relaxation stage is omitted. Due to the fact that yoga is a connection between the spiritual and common world, relaxation is considered to be the stage, which safely brings you back to the present reality you live in.

As a general rule, during relaxation exercises, you have to lie down comfortably and meditate. Furthermore, you gradually move your feet and arms and position them as suggested by your yoga trainer. Different yoga routines imply different relaxation exercises, but, normally, they all have the purpose to avoid a shocking contact with the surrounding reality. Relaxation also helps you to preserve to a certain degree the level of quietness and peacefulness you experience during the routine.

As a final conclusion, if you still have doubts regarding the relaxation effect yoga practices can provide to you, then you have to know that they are perfectly reliable.

Yoga for Women

Emotional pressure and stress have a pronounced effect on every woman's health. It has been proven that emotional distress often translates into physical

weakness and different illnesses. There are many other factors that affect women's health such as hormonal changes, which are far more pronounced than in the case of men. Yoga offers an excellent solution to most of these issues that are unavoidable.

Different stages in a woman's life may bring various problems. There are issues associated with menstrual cramps and the premenstrual syndrome that affect many women around the world. The noticeable hormonal changes that accompany menopause are another reason why women have to cope with increased stress levels. One of the major changes in a woman's life is associated to pregnancy. This is a stage in which every health problem may be reflected on the health of the baby, so it is vital for the mother to stay healthy throughout the whole pregnancy process. Yoga offers various solutions to all of these issues, enabling women to get passed these inherent obstacles.

Yoga is often used by women to prepare for the last months of pregnancy and labor. A fit and healthy mother has better chances of delivering the baby without any complications what so ever, so the importance of yoga practices becomes even bigger.

Different yoga poses such as the fish yoga pose or the cat pose help the mother develop both the physical and mental strength and focus that will greatly help during labor. Regular yoga practice can lessen the negative effects of various pregnancy problems such as morning sickness. Stretching poses also help the mother relax and strengthen the pelvis muscles, which will function easier during birth. Breathing techniques are invaluable during birth as they allow the mother to focus on the delivery rather than having to fight off the associated birth pain.

Women in the postnatal period or those that just want to improve their vitality and energy levels can try some of the following poses. The fish yoga pose, for example, helps women increase oxygen processing and increases relaxation. This pose is also known to strengthen back and neck muscles, while also

improving the responses of the nervous system. The hero yoga pose is one of the best if the woman is looking for a period of time dedicated to meditation.

The cat pose is one of the most frequent ones to be used by women, regardless of age or physical condition. It is excellent for increasing spinal column flexibility and relaxing the lower back muscles, which carry the weight of the whole upper body while standing. The specific position of the cat pose also favors an increased kidney blood irrigation. This pose can be followed by the head stand, a slightly more difficult pose, but which also produces some beneficial results. This pose allows certain parts of the body rest as they do not have to function to maximum capability due to the reverse of gravity. Women may specifically benefit from this pose as it relieves back pain and lower back muscle pressure.

Yoga for Men

All social categories and age groups can enjoy yoga as a hobby or even as a life style. Yoga practitioners studied the physical and psychological differences between men and women for a long time. In general, men are known to be less emotional than women and they often suppress their emotions. This can lead to stress and, ultimately, to an increased risk of heart problems.

The higher physical strength of men is acknowledged by most dedicated yoga practices. This is why some of the poses dedicated to men involve more muscle power and stamina. Many male yoga practitioners have found that a combination of yoga and weight training can provide them with the necessary vitality and positive thinking. In many cases, the balance between mind and body is broken by different adverse outside factors such as stress, pressure, social problems and so on. The close link between body and spirit can be often seen in such cases: if the spirit is defeated, the body will soon get ill and weakened.

This is why the more physical aspects of yoga are highly recommended to men. Society imposes certain standards - and staying fit and looking good are just some of them.

In order to have self-confidence and respect for your own self you need to take care of your body properly. Some of the yoga poses you will read about later on in this article are great for keeping the body in perfect physical shape, especially when a balanced and nutritious diet is considered. Needless to say that physical yoga training greatly reduces the chances of various illnesses such as lowered blood pressure, heart attacks and osteoporosis.

Yoga also favors meditation and relaxation as some of its most efficient shields against stress. Half an hour of stretching your muscles and deep breathing can bring any yoga practitioner into a state of peace and relaxation that gives both mind and body the chance to replenish their energy. Special yoga poses such as the head stand are excellent for aiding circulation and allowing the heart rate to drop. This kind of position also "forces" you to breathe deeply, thus improving brain oxygenation. Another similar pose would be the shoulder stand, which enhances the positive effects of breathing by increasing the lung's capacity to process oxygen. Both these poses are beneficial to the spine as well, as they allow it to stretch and relax at the same time. The plough pose may also be used in order to strengthen the abdominal and lower back muscles. Savasana, also known as the corpse pose, is excellent for relaxing the body between asanas.

The above-mentioned poses need to be accompanied by some special breathing techniques. The Anuloma Viloma technique balances the prana levels in the organism and is recommended for use during physical exercises. The Ujjayi breathing method clears the nasal passages and throat of phlegm and allows for a better air circulation. This technique also works well for improving the responses of the nervous system.

Yoga for Elders

One of the things that made yoga such a popular practice is its accessibility. Of course, the advanced stages of yoga may be hard to reach by some people, but the basic principles can be put to good use by any age category. For example, Indians believe that an age of fifty years is perfect for yoga, as the accumulated experience will help them reach higher levels of consciousness.

Yoga practices lead towards a greater union between body and spirit. Perspectives on life and ourselves tend to change as we progress in age.

The spiritual side of the world receives more importance as we grow older - this forms an excellent foundation for elderly people to start practicing yoga. Some of the more acrobatic yoga poses are not advisable, of course, but elders can successfully apply most of the breathing and relaxation techniques.

Unfortunately our society is becoming less and less active, as far as physical movement is concerned. Many elders are affected severely by their sedentary lives in which television programs dictate most of the day's schedule. The weakened muscles will become even weaker if they are not used for hours in a row. Just some of the negative side effects of a sedentary life style may include back pain, muscle cramps, weak bones, osteoporosis, joint pain and decreased mobility. The problem is that all these can form a vicious circle in which the elder allows himself to get caught. Yoga may be the solution to the lack of determination and will power that can lead to such a poor life style.

It is important for elders to begin practicing yoga with gentle movements. The whole practice can be formed, for weeks or even months, of only warm up exercises. One of the most important principles of yoga practices for the elderly is gradualism. By taking yoga physical exercises step by step to a higher level they can enjoy strengthened muscles and better blood circulation. Yoga is known as one of the best techniques for massaging muscles and internal organs, a key factor in a healthy and strong organism. Apart from this,

yoga also helps oxygenate blood vessels better. This translates not only in increased physical strength, but also in a sharp and focused memory and increased attention span.

While physical exercises may also be replaced by other forms of staying fit, such as gentle jogging or light gym exercises, there is a practice related to yoga that is absolutely vital: breathing. We are not even conscious of our breathing although it is the one keeping us alive. Yoga practices rely heavily on breathing techniques that can improve energy and concentration. An average human being breathes over 2000 times a day - imagine the potential benefits that can be drawn from improving each breath even by 1%. Deep and controlled breathing will help any elder face the problems of old age with a more positive and relaxed attitude.

You don't have to spend years and years of practice in order to enjoy yoga. On the contrary, many elders feel that this is not hard work - it is fun! When practiced correctly yoga is safe and it brings with it numerous positive changes that can turn into joy and vitality no matter what your age is.

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