



Yoga for Peace of Mind

Yoga has been practiced for more than 5,000 years, and currently, close to 11 million Americans enjoy its health benefits. A practice can stave off or relieve problems such as stress, depression and anxiety. The word "yoga" refers not to the postures alone but to the union of mind and body. Without the breathing and meditative elements, you're just having a nice stretch.

Hatha yoga, the most common type of yoga practiced in the U.S. combines 3 elements:

- 1- Physical poses called asanas** (peaceful warrior) – which help with relaxation;
- 2-Controlled breathing** (in through the nose and out through the nose);
- 3-And a short period of deep relaxation or meditation** (typically with the eyes closed) this is often done at the end of class and is called savasana or final relaxation pose and is often done lying on the floor with your eyes closed.

The first element of yoga involves proper relaxation. By getting rid of muscle tension and resting your whole body the nervous system will get revitalized. This will allow you to experience inner peace, causing you to feel refreshed and relaxed. This relaxed feeling will be carried over through your day and will help in the conservation of energy. According to a Harvard Health Publication, yoga can reduce the impact of exaggerated stress responses and may be helpful for both anxiety and depression. Among yoga's anti-stress benefits are a host of biochemical responses. For example, there is a decrease in catecholamines, the hormones produced by the adrenal glands in response to stress. Lowering levels of hormone neurotransmitters -- dopamine, norepinephrine, and epinephrine -- creates a feeling of calm. Some research points to a boost in the hormone oxytocin. This is the so-called "trust" and "bonding" hormone that's associated with feeling relaxed and connected to others.

The second element of yoga involves proper breathing. Breathing properly includes breathing rhythmically and fully so that all parts of the lungs are used to increase the intake of oxygen. To do this you need to regulate the duration and length of the exhalation, inhalation and pauses between each breath. Pranayama or breathing exercises show you how to energize your body and control your mind by regulating the life force or flow of prana. This will enable you to gain a more focused and calmer mind and will increase the levels of energy. According to researchers from Duke University, yoga benefits depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, as well as schizophrenia when done alongside drug therapy. It's also proven to help with sleep problems or insomnia.

The third element of yoga involves meditation and positive thinking. Maintaining a positive approach to life will help you develop a peaceful mind. Meditation and positive thinking also helps you get rid of negative thoughts and brings your mind under control. Practicing yoga can help with short-term memory, concentration and multi-tasking. Because yoga appears to modulate stress response systems, it can reduce heart rate, lower blood pressure, ease respiration and reduce sensitivity to pain. There is even evidence that yoga can help individuals diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In fact, Walter Reed Army Medical Center in D.C. now uses yoga and yogic relaxation in post deployment PTSD awareness courses for veterans.

Yoga offers many health benefits and may even be included as part of some treatment plans. Work closely with your regular health care providers and get proper treatment when you need it.