

Yoga for Health and Healing

Yoga is a powerful system for promoting overall health and well-being that can change lives and help individuals feel better and live life more fully. Yoga emphasizes the optimum functioning of every system of the body as well as the promotion of mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. This holistic approach simultaneously addresses the wide variety of factors that affect health status. Improving the functioning of one part of the body will improve overall functionality.

“Not every ailment can be healed, but yoga can minimize its physical, mental and emotional impact bringing a state of peace, well-being, and joy of living.” (Larry Payne, Ph.D., [Yoga Rx](#))

Yoga’s holistic emphasis on health and healing compliments conventional medical care, reconciling this ancient world discipline with the modern world’s scientific contributions. Combining the knowledge of these two great systems can result in reducing pain and suffering and maximizing healthy living. In 1998, the UCLA School of Medicine became the first U.S. medical school to include a course in yoga taught by Dr. Larry Payne, co-author of [Yoga Rx](#). Medical schools nationwide now teach yoga classes and provide yoga education in their medical health departments.

“Yoga is an integral part of the paradigm shift in the healthcare field from focusing on chronic disease toward teaching preventative lifestyle changes.” (Suza Francina, The New Yoga for Healthy Aging)

Yoga actively involves people in their own care. Its practice enhances and inspires better moods, self-directed behavioral changes and self-management choices for lifestyle improvement. It can also impart a sense of empowerment that improves chances for recovery from illness.

Yoga cultivates body awareness by helping us tune into our unique physical gifts and challenges. As our bodies give us feedback about our states of health, we become better able to interpret and gain confidence in our perceptions. With this awareness comes the potential to make better treatment choices.

“Yoga is medicine, but it is slow medicine. Don’t expect overnight cures, though for many people it does yield benefits right away. Yoga builds on itself, becoming more effective over time. The longer you stick with it and the more you practice, the better you get and the more you will get out of it.” (Timothy McCall, M.D., [Yoga As Medicine](#))



Stress and Disease

Stress is a contributing factor for virtually every illness and exacerbates existing health conditions. Modern medicine points to a definite link between stress and major health problems like heart disease, hypertension, type II diabetes, cancer, stroke, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, depression, osteoporosis, insomnia, sexual dysfunction and obesity.

When the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is activated, the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol are released. If your stress response system is working well, your stress hormone levels will drop when the “threat” is over. Since most of our “threats” today are not the physical dangers of our ancient ancestors, but the mental and emotional stressors of modern society, the SNS stays activated or is repeatedly activated.

Excess adrenaline in the bloodstream damages arterial walls. This “arterial aging” has profound, systemic effects on one’s health. Elevated cortisol levels are linked to high blood pressure, high triglyceride and cholesterol levels, insulin resistance, increased blood sugar levels, stress-related eating, increased abdominal fat, decreased bone density, repressed immune function, memory loss, increased inflammation and poor sleep. It is well-established that prolonged stress accelerates the aging process.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina studied the effects of three different aerobic exercise intensities on cortisol production. Both 60% and 80% intensities significantly increased cortisol levels, but 40% intensity lowered cortisol levels. For chronically “stressed” individuals, low-intensity training may provide much needed relief from high-circulating cortisol. (Journal of Endocrinological Investigation, “Exercise and Circulating Cortisol Levels”, Hill, E.E. et al, 2008)

Yoga is one of the most effective stress busters available. Because much of our modern-day stress is fueled by our thoughts, the practice of yoga can turn the mind into an ally by slowing down a “busy brain”. Creating a calmer, quieter state of mind through asana, pranayama, guided relaxation and meditation promotes health and potentially extends life.

When we find that inner quiet of complete absorption, we have greater access to healing. Dr. Dean Ornish, the first to introduce yoga’s benefits for the reversal of heart disease, advises practicing stress-management techniques at least one hour daily if you have a serious illness.

“Stress management techniques do not bring peace and happiness; they simply help us experience and rediscover the inner peace that is there already, once we stop disturbing it.” (Dr. Dean Ornish, M.D., [The Spectrum](#))

Stressful lifestyles can result in chronic contraction of our muscles, which leads to back pain and muscle dysfunction. Shortened muscles and tight connective tissues cannot lengthen on their own; they must be brought back into balance by an outside force like a yoga stretch. Releasing chronic muscle tension through yoga lowers stress levels, resulting in natural pain management.

“When you are relaxed and free of stress and your mind is focused and calm, your body has an innate capacity to heal itself.” (Larry Payne, Ph.D., [Yoga Rx](#))