



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

Issue no: 16

May 2008

## Is yoga enough to keep you fit?

John Schumacher, a student of B. K. S. Iyengar for 20 years, was always convinced that yoga provides a complete fitness regime. He knew three decades of yoga practice—and only yoga practice—had kept him fit.

Four years ago at age 52, Schumacher decided to prove his point. He signed up for physiological testing at a lab. As he expected, Schumacher tested near the top of his age group for a variety of fitness tests, including maximum heart and exercise recovery rates. His doctor told him that he was in excellent physical condition and estimated that Schumacher had less than a one percent chance of suffering a cardiac event. "I've always maintained that yoga provides more than adequate cardiovascular benefits," says Schumacher. "Now I have the evidence that regular yoga practice **at a certain level of intensity** will provide you with what you need."

## Putting Yoga to the Test

In one of the first studies done in the United States that examines the relationship between yoga and fitness, researchers at the University of California recently tested the muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, cardio respiratory fitness and body composition of 10 college students before and after eight weeks of yoga training. Each week, the students attended four sessions that included 10 minutes of pranayama, 15 minutes of warm-up exercises, 50 minutes of asanas, and 10 minutes of meditation. After eight weeks, the students' muscular strength had increased by as much as 31 percent, muscular endurance by 57 percent and flexibility by as much as 188 percent.

A related study done at Ball State University offers further evidence for yoga's fitness benefits. This research looked at how 15 weeks of twice-weekly yoga classes affected the lung capacity of 287 college students. All of the students involved, including athletes, asthmatics, and smokers, significantly improved lung capacity by the end of the study.

## Is yoga enough for you?

Whether yoga is enough to keep you fit depends on how much you dedicate yourself to yoga. Studies done on yoga have included pranayama and meditation in addition to typical yoga poses for more than an hour of practice four days a week. The asanas used in these studies included not just aerobically challenging sequences, like Sun Salutations, but also many strengthening poses.

So if you want to become and stay physically and mentally fit, make sure your yoga practice includes a balance of poses that build strength, stamina, and flexibility, along with pranayama and meditation to help develop body awareness. In particular, include a series of standing poses in your practice. If you practice yoga for less than an hour twice a week, you either include other exercises like walking or swimming in your weekly activities or increase your yoga time by practicing at home.

Beyond fitness, yoga also offers many other gifts. It improves your health, reduces stress, improves sleep, and often acts like a powerful therapy to help heal relationships, improve your career, and boost your overall outlook on life.

Contact Lynne at [lynne.gully@iremia.net](mailto:lynne.gully@iremia.net) or Tel +302892042356

## Posture of the Month – Garudasana

Garuda means ‘eagle’, the king of the birds.

In the book *Light On Yoga* by B.K.S. Iyengar, the instructions for this posture start with the legs. I have found that in my own practice, and when teaching students, better balance in the posture is achieved by starting with the arms.

1. Stand in Tadasana.
2. Bend your arms in front of your chest with your elbows at chest height. Raise your right elbow and cross it over your left elbow in front of your chest.
3. Take your hands behind your back and try to hold the edges of your shoulder blades with your fingers.
4. Keeping your elbows in place, bring your palms together by entwining your left arm around your right arm.
5. Bend your left leg and take it across the front of your right thigh above the knee. Rest the back of your left thigh on the front of your right thigh.
6. Bend your right leg and then move your left foot behind your right calf so that your left leg is now entwined around your right leg. **Beginners:** if your left foot is not ready to go around the back of your right calf, you can rest your foot on the side of your right leg.
7. You are now balancing on your right leg only. **Beginners:** it will take some time to learn to balance in this posture. While learning you can rest your left toes on the floor beside your right foot.
8. Stay in this posture for five breaths.
9. Release the arms and legs and come back to Tadasana.
10. Repeat the posture on the opposite side by crossing your left elbow over your right elbow and standing on your left leg with your right leg entwined around your left leg.
11. Stay for an equal length of time on both sides.
12. Always come back to Tadasana before starting another posture.

### Contraindications and Cautions

Students with knee injuries should only perform this posture with the toes touching the floor and not with the foot behind the calf.

### Benefits of this posture

- Strengthens and stretches the ankles and calves
- Stretches the thighs, hips, shoulders and upper back
- Removes stiffness in the shoulders
- Prevents cramps in the calf muscles
- Improves sense of balance
- Improves concentration



**Virasana** is another posture that removes cramps in the legs and relieves pain.

- Kneel on the floor with your knees together and take your feet apart either side of your thighs. Sit down between your feet with your toes pointing back. When you first start doing this posture you may need to sit on one or two blocks for support.
- Interlock your fingers and stretch your arms straight over your head, palms up.
- Stay in this posture for one minute with deep breathing.