



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY

HOW YOGA KEEPS YOU FIT AND HEALTHY

In last month's newsletter I gave you seventeen reasons about the benefits of yoga and how yoga keeps you fit and healthy. Here are more reasons why a yoga practice is so beneficial.

18. Loose Limbs – Do you ever notice yourself holding the telephone or the steering wheel of a car with a death grip or scrunching your face when staring at a computer screen? These unconscious habits can lead to chronic tension, muscle fatigue, and soreness in the wrists, arms, shoulders, neck and face, which can increase stress and worsen your mood. As you practice yoga, you begin to notice where you hold tension. It might be in your eyes or the muscles of your face and neck. If you occasionally smile during your yoga practice, you may be able to release some tension in your eyes and face. Learning to relax the bigger muscles in your body can take longer but can happen with a regular yoga practice.

19. Relax The Nervous System – Yoga can provide relief from the stresses of everyday life. Restorative asanas (postures), guided relaxation, Savasana, pranayama (yoga breathing) and meditation help to relax the nervous system. Studies carried out have shown that a regular yoga practice results in better sleep, which means you'll be less tired and less stressed.

20. Boosting The Immune System – Yoga postures and pranayama improve immune function but, so far, meditation has the strongest scientific support in this area.

21. Learn To Breathe – Practitioners of yoga tend to take fewer breaths of greater volume, which is both calming and more efficient. A 1998 study published in *The Lancet* taught a yogic technique known as "complete breathing" to people with lung problems due to congestive heart failure. After one month, their average respiratory rate decreased from 13.4 breaths per minute to 7.6. Meanwhile, their exercise capacity increased significantly, as did the oxygen saturation of their blood. In addition, yoga has been shown to improve various measures of lung function, including the maximum volume of the breath and the efficiency of the exhalation. Breathing in through the nose in yoga helps to warm the breath. This is especially important for people who are prone to asthma attacks as cold air is more like to trigger an attack.

22. Keep Everything Flowing – Ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome and constipation are all aggravated by stress. If yoga lowers your stress then you'll suffer less. Yoga, like any physical exercise, can ease constipation. This helps lower the risk of colon cancer because moving the body creates rapid transport of food and waste products through the bowels. Twisting postures may also be beneficial in getting waste to move through the system.

23. Peace of Mind – Yoga helps to quieten the mind. It slows down thoughts of frustration, regret, anger, and fear which can all cause stress. Stress is implicated in so many health problems such as migraines, insomnia, MS, eczema, high blood pressure and heart attacks so if you learn to quiet your mind, you'll be likely to live longer and healthier.

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HOW YOGA KEEPS YOU FIT AND HEALTH (continued)

24. Raise Your Self Esteem – Many people suffer from low self-esteem. If you deal with this in a negative way by taking drugs, over eating or drinking too much alcohol you may create health problems. If you decide to take a positive approach to life and practice yoga regularly you may start to see a different side of yourself and sense that you're part of something bigger.

25. Ease Physical Pain – Studies have shown that yoga postures and meditation can reduce pain in people with arthritis, back pain, fibromyalgia, carpal tunnel syndrome and other chronic conditions. When you relieve your pain, your mood improves and you're more inclined to be active.

26. Reduce Feelings Of Anger – Yoga and meditation build awareness and the more aware you are, the easier it is to break free of destructive emotions like anger. Studies suggest that chronic anger and hostility are strongly linked to heart attacks. Yoga appears to reduce anger by increasing feelings of compassion and interconnection and by calming the nervous system and the mind.

27. Good Relations – Cultivating the emotional support of friends, family and community has been demonstrated to improve health and healing. A regular yoga practice helps develop friendliness and compassion.

28. Benefits of Chanting – The basics of yoga – postures, pranayama and meditation - all work to improve your health but consider chanting. Chanting helps to prolong exhalation and when done in a group can be a particularly powerful physical and emotional experience. Humming sounds such as chanting **OM** can help open the sinuses and help with drainage.

29. Guided Imagery – If you contemplate an image in your mind's eye you can effect change in your body. Several studies have found that guided imagery reduced postoperative pain, decreased the frequency of headaches and improved the quality of life for people with cancer and HIV.

30. Helping Others – This is integral to yogic philosophy. A study at the University of Michigan found that older people who volunteered about an hour a week were three times as likely to be alive seven years later. Helping others can give meaning to your life and your problems may not seem so daunting when you see what other people are dealing with.

31. Healing Hope – In much of conventional medicine, most patients are passive recipients of care. In yoga, it's what you do for yourself that matters. Yoga gives you the tools to help you change, and you might start to feel better the first time you try practising. You may also notice that the more you commit to practice, the more you benefit. This results in three things. You get involved in your own care; you discover that your involvement gives you the power to effect change, and seeing that you can effect change gives you hope. And hope itself can be so healing.

32. Connective Tissue – As you read all the ways yoga improves your health, you probably noticed a lot of overlap. That's because they are intensely interwoven. Change your posture and you change the way you breathe. Change your breathing and you change your nervous system. This is one of the great lessons of yoga. Everything is connected. Your bones are connected and your muscles are connected. This interconnection is vital to understanding yoga.

33. Finding a Yoga Teacher – Good yoga teachers can do wonders for your health. A good teacher will guide you through the postures, adjusting your position when necessary, tell you when you can go deeper into a posture or when you should back off. A good teacher will help you to relax and enhance and personalise your practice. A respectful relationship with a teacher goes a long way toward promoting your health.

I hope you enjoyed learning about the benefits of yoga. I certainly enjoyed writing about it, as sometimes even teachers need to be reminded of the power of yoga.