



## HEALTH BENEFITS OF YOGA

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Did you know that yoga is the most ancient system of exercise? The theory and practice of yoga can be traced back over 5,000 years and predates any of the world's existing official religions. The word yoga comes from Sanskrit and means union, or connection. This is because yoga was conceived as the practice of uniting the body, mind, and spirit. There are several main schools and types of yoga that have emerged over time but this concept remains the same throughout.

Yoga helps millions of individuals preserve, improve and restore their health. It is estimated that over 300 million people around the globe practice yoga regularly with Americans making up over 10% of that number. Keep reading for the main benefits and commit to giving yoga a try for your health!

### MUSCULOSKELETAL FITNESS

Yoga consists of multiple postures, called asanas, which involve almost all the groups of bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Yoga postures help improve the flexibility of these tissues as well as strengthen them.

### INJURY PREVENTION AND REHAB

Yoga is an excellent tool for reducing the chance of strains, sprains, muscle spasms, and other injuries. It also promotes concentration and attention which

makes accidents less likely. Certain yoga exercises are used therapeutically during recovery after injuries to enhance and speed up the healing process.

### HEALTHY BREATHING

One of the cornerstones of yoga is proper breathing. It is viewed as a foundation for the healthy functioning of the body and mind. There is even a branch of yoga called "pranayama" which focuses entirely on special breathing techniques.

### ENDOCRINE BALANCE

Regular practice of yoga has been shown to reduce stress hormones, such as cortisol. This has a positive impact on multiple organs and systems of the body as well as mental and emotional health. Regular yoga can help prevent diabetes and even play an important role in its treatment<sup>1</sup>. This is

accomplished through improved glucose uptake by cells in the muscles, promoting weight loss, and certain yoga postures that help stretch the pancreas and stimulate the production of beta cells, which produce insulin.<sup>1</sup>

## **NERVOUS SYSTEM TUNE-UP**

Regular practice of yoga not only helps relax the sympathetic nervous system (responsible for stress response) but also enhances the parasympathetic nervous system (responsible for relaxation)<sup>2</sup>. This helps yoga practitioners adapt more easily to stressful situations and maintain a state of calm. Additionally, brain cells develop new connections in response to the practice of yoga. This not only changes the way the brain functions but also its very structure<sup>3</sup>.

## **COGNITIVE BOOST**

One of the major outcomes of these changes in the brain is improved cognitive capacity. Practicing yoga appears to bolster parts of the brain that are responsible for memory, awareness, attention, thinking, and language. This results in better learning skills, information processing and overall sharper brain functioning<sup>3</sup>. Regular practice of yoga has the potential to help prevent age-related decline in memory and other cognitive skills<sup>3</sup>.

## **CIRCULATION**

A wide variety of asanas coupled with deep regular breathing improve blood flow throughout the body. This means that muscles, tendons, and other connective tissues get the nutrition and oxygen they need, and so do many organs like the brain, lungs, skin, and more. Certain postures help the sympathetic nervous system (responsible for stress response) relax, which leads to better blood flow<sup>2</sup>.

## **IMMUNE SUPPORT**

Emotional stress and chronic inflammation are two major factors that weaken the immune system. Studies have found that yoga not only helps to

achieve emotional balance but also reduces pro-inflammatory markers<sup>4</sup>. This means yoga can be an effective instrument for lowering the overall level of inflammation throughout the body and boosting the immune system.

## **CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH**

Improved circulation, reduced stress hormones, controlled blood sugar, reduced inflammation, and healthy breathing combine to reduce overall stress on the heart. It has also been discovered that regular yoga can help reduce blood pressure and prevent hypertension<sup>5</sup>.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Yoga practice also has a positive impact on mental health. A healthier body, lower risk of injuries and illness, and better cognitive functioning are all benefits that lead to a more optimistic attitude and stronger overall mental health. Better sleep is another benefit of yoga that influences your mental health every day.

## **SOCIAL REWARD**

Yoga classes often bring together like-minded individuals who strive to live a healthy lifestyle. This can be a great opportunity for mutual learning and finding meaningful connections that will have a positive influence on your life.

These are just some of the main advantages of yoga. Some benefits can be experienced after a single session while others come with regular practice. The great thing about yoga is its accessibility. Whether it's a class at your local gym, a book with illustrations of asanas, or one of the videos on the Better Me Portal, yoga is available at your fingertips!

### **References**

1. [Diabetes and yoga](#)
2. [Effect of long-term yoga training on autonomic function among the healthy adults](#)
3. [Yoga for better mental health](#)
4. [New research on how yoga boosts your immune system](#)
5. [Yoga and high blood pressure](#)