

Top 10 Reasons to Try Yoga

- Stress Relief:** The practice of yoga is well-demonstrated to reduce the physical effects of stress on the body. The body responds to stress through a fight-or-flight response, which is a combination of the sympathetic nervous system and hormonal pathways activating, releasing cortisol – the stress hormone – from the adrenal glands. Cortisol is often used to measure the stress response. Yoga practice has been demonstrated to reduce the levels of cortisol. Most yoga classes end with savasana, a relaxation pose, which further reduces the experience of stress.
- Pain Relief:** Yoga can ease pain. Studies have shown that practicing yoga asanas (postures), meditation or a combination of the two, reduced pain for people with conditions such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, auto-immune diseases and hypertension as well as arthritis, back and neck pain and other chronic conditions.
- Better Breathing:** Yoga includes breathing practices known as pranayama, which can be effective for reducing our stress response, improving lung function and encouraging relaxation. Many pranayamas emphasize slowing down and deepening the breath, which activates the body's parasympathetic system, or relaxation response. By changing our pattern of breathing, we can significantly affect our body's experience of and response to stress. This may be one of the most profound lessons we can learn from our yoga practice.
- Flexibility:** Yoga can improve flexibility and mobility and increase range of motion. Over time, the ligaments, tendons and muscles lengthen, increasing elasticity.
- Increased Strength:** Yoga asanas use every muscle in the body, increasing strength literally from head to toe. A regular yoga practice can also relieve muscular tension throughout the whole body.
- Weight management:** While most of the evidence for the effects of yoga on weight loss is anecdotal or experiential, yoga teachers, students and practitioners across the country find that yoga helps to support weight loss. Many teachers specialize in yoga programs to promote weight management and find that even gentle yoga practices help support weight loss. People do not have to practice the most vigorous forms of yoga to lose weight. Yoga encourages development of a positive self-image, as more attention is paid to nutrition and the body as a whole. A study from the Journal of Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine found that regular yoga practice was associated with less age-related weight gain. The lifestyle study of 15,500 adults in their 50's covered 10 years of participants' weight history, physical activity, medical history and diet.
- Improved circulation:** Yoga helps to improve circulation by efficiently moving oxygenated blood to the body's cells.
- Cardiovascular Conditioning:** Even a gentle yoga practice can provide cardiovascular benefits by lowering resting heart rate, increasing endurance and improving oxygen uptake during exercise.
- Focus on the Presence:** Yoga connects us with the present moment. The more we practice, the more aware we become of our surroundings and the world around us. It opens the way to improved concentration, coordination, reaction time and memory.
- Inner peace:** The meditative effects of a consistent yoga practice help many cultivate inner peace.