

Relax Your Mind and Body by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Is stress wearing you down? Are your muscles tense and your posture less than perfect? Bringing yoga, a touch of Eastern culture, into your Western lifestyle may be the perfect answer to help you unwind both your body and mind.

People of all ages and physical abilities have been practicing yoga for more than 5,000 years for general well-being. Today, an estimated 12 million Americans practice yoga for conditions as varied as addiction, fatigue and weight management.

De-stress and Lower Your Health Risks

Studies show that yoga, like many forms of physical activity, can actually help relieve stress. Emotional stress from daily life often contributes to physical stresses like muscle tension and constricted breathing. Because of its impact on the circulatory system, stress is also linked to cardiovascular disease. By alleviating physical and emotional stress, you may reduce your risk of heart disease and other illnesses.

Some hospitals are making yoga and meditation classes available to cancer patients and reductions in stress levels have been observed. It is yet unclear, however, whether stress reduction influences long-term prognosis for cancer. But studies show that stress relief helps bolster the immune system's ability to fight diseases, including cancer.

Yoga reduces stress by encouraging deep, rhythmic breathing. It also promotes relaxation by increasing the flow of blood and oxygen to each part of the body. Some forms of yoga include meditation or the repetition of a soothing sound or phrase.

Because yoga also lengthens muscles, stretches joints and limbers ligaments, the exercises may actually help reverse some physical effects of aging like arthritis, stiff joints and general aches and pains.

So, take a deep breath and open your mind to this ancient form of exercise.

Pointers for Starting Yoga

- Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program
- Find a yoga instructor in your area by asking other people or visiting the websites www.yogajournal.com or www.yogaalliance.org.
- Start out with simple standing and sitting poses. Some forms can give you an intense workout. If in doubt, ask the instructor to clarify what will be taught.
- As a beginner, it is advisable to choose a gentle, slow form of yoga. Consider one of the following:

Hatha yoga is the most popular branch of yoga from which a lot of other styles originated. Because the practice can vary widely, students should find out exactly what a class offers.

In **Iyengar** yoga, students hold poses, especially standing postures, typically longer than in other forms.

Svaroopa is a consciousness-oriented yoga that promotes healing. Students often begin this form in comfortable chair poses that help the spine.

Integral focuses on integrating yoga teachings into everyday work and relationships.

Office work can be a significant source of stress. To relieve the strain of working at the computer, practice the yoga exercises at www.mydailyyoga.com. Anyone can do these simple exercises at their desk in little time.

