



## Yoga and Aging

For centuries yoga practitioners have waxed lyrical over the health benefits of yoga and its associated practices. Today, numerous studies are being undertaken to verify the assertions of yoga's amazing benefits, both for general fitness, developing and maintaining mobility, as well as for dealing with specific illnesses or physical disabilities.

### **Foundation of Youth – Stand Tall!**

Yoga is remarkable in that it works on a multitude of levels within both the body and the mind. In a well-structured practice, all major muscle groups are both strengthened and stretched whilst circulation is increased and blood is oxygenated.

In a recent study, researches in the US found that women aged 65 and older who preformed and 1 ½ hour yoga session twice a week showed measurable improvements in their walking speed and balance. On average they gained a centimeter in height as yoga improved their balance, strength, stamina, posture and confidence.

### **Yoga and Arthritis**

Yoga, and particularly Pranayama (breathing exercises), has also been found to be of great benefit for arthritis sufferers. Yoga increases the circulation in joints and limbs and its steady, controlled movements ensure that not too much pressure is exerted on painful joints until the body is ready. Yoga, including meditation practices, has been demonstrated to reduce pain for those suffering pain from multiple sclerosis, auto-immune illnesses, as well as back and neck pain.

By using the body's own weight as resistance, yoga helps to develop body and bone strength and helps prevent the onset or slow the progression of osteoporosis.

It has been said: 'the key to maintaining youthfulness is flexibility'. Well, flexibility is something that all people associate with yoga; unfortunately this often discourages inflexible people from trying it. This is indeed an irony as yoga is primarily a strengthening practice and whilst flexibility is a by-product it is not a perquisite to join a class. If anything, those who are inflexible have far more reason to try yoga than those who are already bendy!

### **Free Your Mind**

Scientists are beginning to uncover evidence that meditation and yoga has a tangible effect on the brain. Yoga is now being perceived not merely as a physical exercise, but as an activity that can actively improve mental health, particularly in reducing stress levels and depression. A study done in the UK suggests that people who suffered from depression, after developing a regular meditation practice, were 50% less likely to have another attack.

In a study in Boston, MRI scans were used analyze the brains of people who have been meditating and doing yoga for several years. The brains of theses experienced practitioners were found to have a difference in the thickness of certain areas of the

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brain's cortex, including areas involving the processing of emotions. This implies that meditation can actually cause the brain to change shape and this also suggests that meditation may combat cognitive decline.

Meditation has also been shown to reduce blood pressure, lower the heart rate and increases circulation throughout the body.

### **Balance In All Things**

For Kate, yoga is about achieving balance in her body and in her life. Her philosophy is that yoga should be done with an ongoing purpose in mind. One does not do "some yoga" but rather seeks a better way of life with yoga playing a central role in one's lifestyle. She is a firm believer that yoga is for 'normal' people, not just the fitness and health fanatics. She feels that the uniqueness of yoga affords you the chance to manage and develop your body at your own pace.

**To quote Abraham Lincoln: "And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."**

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