

The Benefits of Yoga

Like yoga, the [osteopathic approach to wellness](#) focuses on your body's natural tendency toward health and self-healing.

"The purpose of yoga is to create strength, awareness and harmony in both the mind and body," explains Natalie Nevins, DO, a board-certified osteopathic family physician and certified Kundalini Yoga instructor in Hollywood, California.

While there are more than 100 different types, or schools, of yoga, most sessions are typically include breathing exercises, meditation, and assuming postures (sometimes called asana or poses) that stretch and flex various muscle groups.

"As an osteopathic physician, I focus a lot of my efforts on preventive medicine and practices, and in the body's ability to heal itself," says Dr. Nevins. "Yoga is a great tool for staying healthy because it is based on similar principles."

Physical Benefits

"The relaxation techniques incorporated in yoga can lessen chronic pain, such as lower back pain, arthritis, headaches and carpal tunnel syndrome," explains Dr. Nevins. "Yoga can also lower blood pressure and reduce insomnia."

Other physical benefits of yoga include:

- Increased flexibility
- Increased muscle strength and tone
- Improved respiration, energy and vitality
- Maintaining a balanced metabolism
- Weight reduction
- Cardio and circulatory health
- Improved athletic performance
- Protection from injury

Mental Benefits

Aside from the physical benefits, one of the best benefits of yoga is how it helps a person manage stress, which is known to have devastating effects on the body and mind. "Stress can reveal itself in many ways, including back or neck pain, sleeping problems, headaches, drug abuse, and an inability to concentrate," says Dr. Nevins. "Yoga can be very effective in developing coping skills and reaching a more positive outlook on life."

Yoga's incorporation of meditation and breathing can help improve a person's mental well-being. "Regular yoga practice creates mental clarity and calmness; increases body

awareness; relieves chronic stress patterns; relaxes the mind; centers attention; and sharpens concentration,” says Dr. Nevins. Body- and self-awareness are particularly beneficial, she adds, “because they can help with early detection of physical problems and allow for early preventive action.”

Beginners Welcome

Because there are so many different kinds of yoga practices, it is possible for anyone to start. “Whether you’re a couch potato or a professional athlete, size and fitness levels do not matter because there are modifications for every yoga pose and beginner classes in every style,” says Dr. Nevins. “The idea is to explore your limits, not strive for some pretzel-like perfection. It is a great way to get in tune with your body and your inner self.”

<http://www.osteopathic.org/osteopathic-health/about-your-health/health-conditions-library/general-health/Pages/yoga.aspx>