

## Importance of yoga in physical fitness

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### Abstract

Yoga has been practiced for around 5,000 years. Several schools and organizations of yoga have emerged over time to time. It can be overwhelming at first to find a style of yoga that resonates with you. If you are a competitive athlete, it is best to tailor your yoga practice to your training schedule because a particular sport can develop certain muscle groups while ignoring others. Over time, this process causes imbalances in the muscles and joints, leading to overuse injuries. Yoga helps the muscles, tendons, and ligaments move through a full range of motion, thus cultivating balance and core strength which is a huge benefit to athletes in their chosen sports. A tri-athlete from San Diego, Heidi Resiert said, "I'm glad I found yoga and added it to my weekly workout routine. Not only do I feel stronger, but I also feel more confident that I will continue to be injury free." Another essential element in yoga is breath work (*pranayama*). The attention to breath during yoga can be considered one of the most important benefits to athletes. Learning to stay focused and centered through uncomfortable poses by concentrating on even inhalations and exhalations sets up the athlete to stay focused during a race or challenging workout. The mind-body connection in yoga is essential to helping athletes develop mental acuity and concentration. In addition, yoga helps you to relax not just tight muscles, but also anxious and overstressed minds. Yoga works not just in the sagittal plane, but in the frontal and transverse planes as well, ensuring well-rounded development. Being more relaxed will also aid in athletic performance. So, why not enhance your game performance and prevent injury by adding yoga to your training plan now.

**Keywords:** Athlete, yoga, injury, muscle, performance

### 1. Introduction

The word yoga is Sanskrit for *Yoke*, or union. In the practice of yoga we seek to create union between the mind and body. Yoga is the perfect example of holistic health because of this combination of mind and body. After all the body cannot exist without the mind and vice versa. By repairing the body, we are more able to repair the mind. If you feel tense in the neck, shoulders, or hips, you'll find it more difficult to relax and be happy. In order to do this Yoga is comprised of the asana (physical postures) and a philosophy that offers tools to finding true, lasting happiness.



Fig 1

### 2. History

Yoga is a 5000 year old tradition. In India monks went into seclusion for years with the goal of creating a dis-ease free

strong body. The original intention was to be able to sit in meditation for hours but with an achy body that is impossible to do.

The postures of yoga were each created for a specific health purpose. To Detoxify, realign musculature, strengthen muscle, and create flexibility.

Along with correcting the fallacies of the body, these yogis went about trying to find how to correct fallacies of the mind. An entire philosophy was created, based solely around leading a human being finding his or her bliss. The teachings were so dead-on that they are still practiced 5000 years later.

Yoga has become more popular than ever, with celebrities, politicians, business people, and almost every walk of life currently practicing.

The important thing to understand about this way of thinking is yoga is not a religion. You can be from any background and reap its benefits.

### 3. Different Types of Yoga

While the philosophy remains fairly consistent among different disciplines the physical aspect of yoga comes in a few forms.

- Vinyasa- a strengthening flow class, postures lead into postures
- Hatha- postures are held for minutes, this is believed to really affect the body, as each posture is designed to gain health benefits. The longer you hold the pose, the more effective it is.
- Vini- a gentle type of yoga, well suited for those just starting out, or for those who'd like to go at a slower pace
- Kundalini- this school of thought believes that nerve

- centers in the body can get clogged up or inactive and this leads to poor health.
- Kundalini’s repetitive posture flows (kriyas) unlock these blocks and leave you feeling wonderfully energized yet peaceful.
- Thai Yoga Massage- in some circumstances it is more helpful to have your instructor stretch your body out. First working out the muscles with massage technique then stretching them.
- Aero Yoga- also known as partner yoga, involving holds, mutual balancing, and a lot of fun

- Iyengar Yoga- (prop yoga) created by a yoga master named Iyengar in India, this type of yoga is very therapeutic. You are placed into positions with various props (blocks, straps, chairs blankets) and once you are comfortable are left in the pose for minutes. Poses are chosen by how you are feeling and various dis-ease in the body that needs to be relieved.
- Restorative Yoga-Similar to Iyengar Yoga only reclined (on the back or floor) very therapeutic and completely relaxing. It turns the body’s endocrine and nervous system on so the body can heal itself.

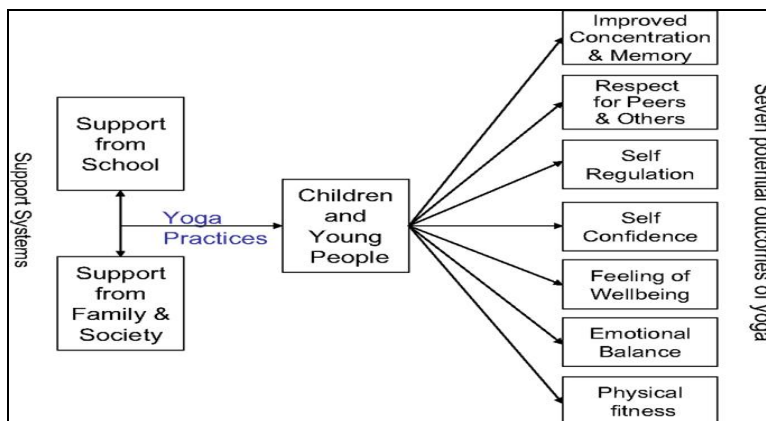


Fig 2

**4. Benefits of Yoga**

- When performed properly, in conjunction with proper related breathing techniques, Yoga helps stimulate the circulatory system, the digestive process as well as the nervous and endocrine system



Fig 3

**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.

**5. Massaging of ALL Organs of the Body**

Yoga is perhaps the only form of activity which massages all the internal glands and organs of the body in a thorough manner, including those – such as the prostate – that hardly

get externally stimulated during our entire lifetime. Yoga acts in a wholesome manner on the various body parts. This stimulation and massage of the organs in turn benefits us by keeping away disease and providing a forewarning at the first possible instance of a likely onset of disease or disorder.

**Increasing lubrication of the joints, ligaments and tendons**

Likewise, the well-researched yoga positions exercise the different tendons and ligaments of the body. Surprisingly it has been found that the body which may have been quite rigid starts experiencing a remarkable flexibility in even those parts which have not been consciously work upon. Why? It is here that the remarkable research behind yoga positions proves its mettle. Seemingly unrelated “non strenuous” yoga positions act upon certain parts of the body in an interrelated manner. When done together, they work in harmony to create a situation where flexibility is attained relatively easily.

**Increasing Flexibility**

Yoga has positions that act upon the various joints of the body including those joints that are never really on the ‘radar screen’ let alone exercised.

**Complete Detoxification**

By gently stretching muscles and joints as well as massaging the various organs, yoga ensures the optimum blood supply to various parts of the body. This helps in the flushing out of toxins from every nook and cranny as well as providing nourishment up to the last point. This leads to benefits such as delayed ageing, energy and a remarkable zest for life.

**Excellent toning of the muscles**

Muscles that have become flaccid or weak are stimulated repeatedly to shed excess flab and flaccidity.

## 6. 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."

## 7. Yoga and Physical Fitness

There was one critical review which evaluated whether yoga can engender fitness in older adults. Ten studies with 544 participants were included; 5 of these studies were RCTs, and 5 studies had a single-arm pre/post-design. With respect to physical fitness and function, the studies reported moderate effect sizes for gait, balance, body flexibility, body strength, and weight loss. However, there is still a need for additional research trials with adequate control interventions (active and specific) to verify these promising findings.

One may expect that retaining physical fitness and improving physical functioning can have a positive effect on functional abilities and self-autonomy in older adults. Further studies should address whether or not individuals' self-esteem and self-confidence will increase during the courses, and whether or not regular classes may also improve social competence and involvement. A problem with studies enrolling elderly subjects can be compliance with the study protocol leading to low levels of study completion and long-term follow-up data. Future studies should investigate the most appropriate duration of yoga intervention and the most suitable postures and yoga style for the elderly.

## 8. Conclusion

The beauty of Yoga is that it can be practiced by anyone. It doesn't matter how old you are or what shape you are in. If you desire a more limber body, Yoga is one of the quickest ways to attain it. Yoga also increases an individual's physical coordination and promotes better posture. And it does all this without potentially hazardous negative effects that are often incurred in high-impact forms of exercise. The studies comparing the effects of yoga and exercise seem to indicate that, in both healthy and diseased populations, yoga may be as effective as or better than exercise at improving a variety of health-related outcome measures. Future clinical trials are needed to examine the distinctions between exercise and yoga, particularly how the two modalities may differ in their effects on the SNS/HPA axis. Additional studies using rigorous methodologies are needed to examine the health benefits of the various types of yoga.

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