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The Benefits of Yoga; How Yoga Can Improve Your Mental and Physical Health

Many people struggle with health problems. Some struggle with physical ailments, some with mental and emotional issues. Whichever one you're struggling with, yoga can be extremely beneficial to both. This paper will discuss my own personal account with participating in the practice of yoga for my health, and other information that I have researched about yoga benefiting health. Yoga has especially helped my scoliosis and anxiety, as it can with many others.

My Experience with Yoga

I have struggled with anxiety for most of my entire life. If anyone knows anything about anxiety, they know it can affect someone in many ways. At one point, my anxiety was so bad that it was affecting my sleep, eating habits, happiness, and relationships with others. It was then that I turned to yoga for help. I practice yoga at least 30 minutes every day but if you don't have time for that, even just 10-15 minutes would benefit your health.

Another way that yoga has helped me is with my scoliosis. Scoliosis is an abnormal lateral curvature of the spine that is very painful for most individuals that suffer from it. I have mild scoliosis and it often makes life painful. Sitting for long periods of time, slouching over, working on a computer, and certain other activities are difficult for me to

participate in, and by the end of the day, my back is in a lot of pain. Muscle tension from stress also affects my back and scoliosis, making the pain worse because both spine and muscle pains are simultaneously hurting. Yoga has helped with much of the pain that has been caused by my scoliosis by opening up the hips, lengthening my spine, and has helped with the alignment of the vertebrates. Many poses such as “downward dog,” “child’s pose,” “two-knee twist,” and “pigeon pose” stretch the muscles of the back and alleviate pain. Those poses also align the spine, balancing your body.

Working at a Yoga Studio

I work at a yoga studio in Johnson City called Downtown Yoga, and I have learned so much from working there. I’ve been there for about 4 months, and it has improved the form of my yoga practice greatly. Even before working at the studio, I would practice on my own, but going to a studio makes knowing what to do easier, causing your experience with yoga to be more enjoyable. The Yin/Restore class does wonders for calming anxiety and resting the mind. Yin/Restore classes at any yoga studio consist of fewer poses, concentration, clearing of the mind, and serenity. The lights are turned down in the room, the heat is usually at 72, and props such as blocks and bolsters are used to prop up the body in a comfortable pose. At the studio where I work, there are seven instructors. Every instructor has been through a training course and has a license to teach, so every class is very professional and helpful. Depending on the day the teachers teach different classes, but they are all very welcoming and knowledgeable, so no matter which teacher it is you’ll have a great class. There are two rooms that students take classes in. Each room is decorated in cool color tones, and the rooms are spacious and calming. There are blocks, bolsters, and mats for students who don’t bring their own. We offer several different

classes at the studio, all of which help different parts of the body. Besides the Yin/Restore class that I mentioned previously, there is Arm Balances and Inversions, Ashtanga Vinyasa, Gentle Yoga, Heal Your Back, Power Yoga, Rope and Restore, Warm Flow/Yin, Yoga Pilates Fusion, and Yoga to Tame Stress.

- Arm Balances and Inversions involves core strength and balancing. It creates focus and determination within those participation in the class. This class is very helpful for those a little more used to harder yoga poses.
- Ashtanga Vinyasa requires synchronization of breath and heat is used so that toxins are sweated out of the skin and organs.
- Gentle Yoga is the second easiest to Yin/Restore. It involves easier poses and focuses on stretching the muscles and calming the mind. It requires mild balancing and stretching.
- Heal Your Back pretty much involves what it's called. Back pain is one of the most common ailments in the U.S. today. Heal Your Back focuses on the lower back, spine, and back muscles overall. It helps align the spine and helps with the curvature of the spine.
- Power Yoga is a little more strenuous. It involves conscious breath and has a vigorous flow. It's recommended for experienced students. If you're looking for a workout and some cardio, Power Yoga is the way to go.
- Rope and Restore is for all levels. It requires the use of our rope wall, and focuses on strength and balance. Individuals who suffer from athletic injuries, arthritis, sciatica, and many other physical ailments should try this class.
- Warm Flow/Yin is one of the favorites of those who come to the studio. It

involves the same movements and poses as Yin/Restore, except the temperature is raised so that all of your impurities are sweated out. It involves slow, steady breathing, and poses are held for a longer period of time for ultimate stretching of the muscles.

- Yoga Pilates Fusion is a great workout. It trains your body to have better balance, ability, and strength. It is for every fitness level, and easy on the joints.
- Yoga to Tame Stress is an absolutely awesome class for anxiety. It involves very deep breathing from the belly through the lungs, and advocates peacefulness and restorative qualities. The class practices grounding, flow, and mindfulness in order to relieve stress.

Yoga Research by Others

On yogajournal.com, Ginny Graves wrote an article on yoga and anxiety called “How Yoga Calms Anxiety Holistically.” She discusses a story of a woman who was having panic attacks and anxiety because she was under a lot of stress. After taking medications for her anxiety and realizing they made her feel worse, her doctor suggested yoga as a way to heal herself. She started a vinyasa class and her panic attacks began to lessen. Her overall well-being improved. In Grave’s article she states, “Asanas and breathwork have been calming jittery minds for thousands of years... In 2011, Harvard researchers published an analysis of data from a nationally representative sample of people and found that 3 percent (the equivalent of nearly 6.4 million Americans) had been advised by their health care practitioners to use mind-body therapies like yoga and meditation - and more than a third of those “prescriptions” were doled out to those who

had a diagnosis of anxiety” (Graves, yogajournal.com). Many psychologists also recommend yoga as a way of treating anxiety and depression. Yoga is a natural way to heal the mind and body, and does not have side effects that many medicines do.

On the American Osteopathic Association website, an article called “The Benefits of Yoga,” discusses the benefits of yoga on the body when dealing with chronic pain or anxiety. In the article Dr. Natalie Nevins, an osteopathic family physician and yoga instructor in Hollywood, California, talks about her experience with yoga and how she has witnessed the ways it helps patients. She says, “The relaxation techniques incorporated in yoga can lessen chronic pain, such as lower back pain, arthritis, headaches and carpal tunnel syndrome. Yoga can also lower blood pressure and reduce insomnia” (Nevins, osteopathic.org). She also goes on to talk about the mental help it gives. “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. Regular yoga practice creates mental clarity and calmness; increases body awareness; relieves chronic stress patterns; relaxes the mind; centers attention; and sharpens concentration” (Nevins, osteopathic.org). She says body and self-awareness are greatly beneficial, “because they can help with early detection of physical problems and allow for early preventive action” (Nevins, osteopathic.org). Yoga helps in many aspects of life, and doctors have experiences and data to prove it.

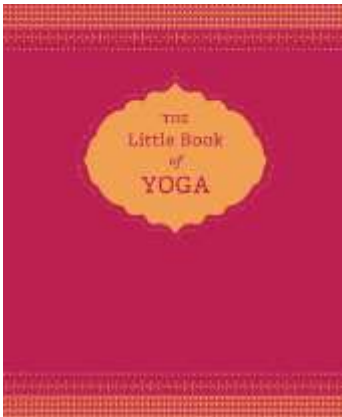
Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many different types of yoga, and every single one of them is

beneficial when trying to cope with and alleviate physical and mental strain on your body. When the mind is healthy, the body feels healthy and visa-versa. Yoga helps balance out the body and creates a beneficial way of relieving pain without harming your body with manmade medicines and toxins.

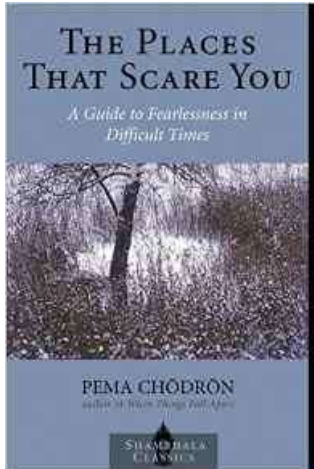
Some Books I Recommend About Yoga

The Little Book of Yoga by Nora Isaacs is a wonderful book if you're wondering what poses are a fit for you and what you're trying to accomplish. It is split into 5 sections and is very easy to read and welcoming to all levels of students.



Another great book which is less about yoga and more about mindfulness, meditation, and healing your body from the wear and tear of anxiety is *The Places That Scare You* by Pema Chodron. It includes many of the mediation practices used in yoga, and teaches you how to use those to enrich your life and face your fears. It's a wonderful book that I would recommend to anyone practicing yoga for healing of any physical or mental ailment. Pema Chodron is an American Buddhist nun that lives in Nova Scotia. She is a resident teacher at Gampo Abbey there. It is the first Tibetan Monastery in North America

for individuals of the West.



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