

YOGA

WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga is an ancient system of health that promotes physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. The word 'yoga' means 'union' or 'oneness' of your body, mind, breath, and spirit. The practice of yoga enables you to learn to use your body, mind, breath, and spirit all as one unit, therefore bringing balance and harmony into your life. This results in an overall existence of optimal HEALTH and WELL BEING.

Paths of Yoga: *(Adapted from PYTS School of Yoga, Ginger Garner, 2003-2008)*

There are basically six different types of Yoga, some of which do not emphasize the practice of asana (physical postures) with which most Westerners are familiar. These are Raja, Hatha, Bhakti, Jnana, Karma, and Kriya Yoga.

Hatha Yoga: is what most Westerners know as "Yoga". Hatha Yoga refers to the physical postures (asana) and breath work (pranayama). Hatha yoga is not one kind of yoga but is a broad description of many different styles known today in the West (including Ashtanga, Iyengar, Bikram, Anusara, Kundalini, Kripalu, Vinyasa/Flow, Purna, Viniyoga, Sivananda).

Raja Yoga: includes lifestyle, physical postures, breath work, and meditation. It is based on Patanjali's eight-limbed path:

1. YAMA: universal ethical principles
2. NIYAMA: rules of personal conduct
3. ASANA: the practice of yoga postures
4. PRANAYAMA: the practice of yoga breathing techniques
5. PRATYAHARA: control of the senses
6. DHARANA: concentration of the mind
7. DHYANA: meditation
8. SAMADHI: aware of the infinite/eternal

These various elements help one adopt a yogic approach to life both on and off the yoga mat.

Bhakti Yoga: is the Yoga of devotional love. Practice of Bhakti Yoga includes singing, chanting, and service.

Jnana Yoga: is the path of self-realization and focuses on developing intuitive wisdom through study.

Karma Yoga: is the Yoga of action. Karma Yoga emphasizes “selfless service”, or action without being attached to the fruits of our actions or results. It is to act simply in the benefit of others.

Kriya Yoga: practices to cleanse the body

WHAT IS YOGA THERAPY?

Yoga therapy is the application of yoga principles, methods, and techniques to specific acute or chronic illnesses or states of disease or imbalance. Yoga therapy enhances health and promotes an optimum state of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health through the integration of traditional yoga methods and Western medicine.

Yoga therapy is a personalized program consisting of yoga postures, breathing practices, meditations, lifestyle modifications and a knowledge of anatomy, physiology and pathology. Yoga therapists create individualized treatment plans to address common health issues and individual well-being recognizing the interconnection of mind, body, emotions and spirit.

Yoga therapy is an emerging profession brought about by the tremendous popularity of yoga today and the realization that it presents a model for wellness as well as methods for helping both chronic and acute conditions. Medical research shows that Yoga therapy is among the most effective complementary therapies for treating numerous mental and physical health problems.

-Adapted from Mount Royal College, Calgary, AB.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF YOGA?

When practiced REGULARLY, the benefits of yoga are countless. Physically, various yoga postures (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayama) can optimize the function of all systems of the body by improving your muscular strength, endurance, flexibility, postural alignment, body awareness, vascular circulation, digestion, hormonal balance, and respiration. Mentally, yoga can improve your mental alertness, concentration, reduce stress and anxiety, improve your ability to relax, and improve sleep patterns.

All of these benefits ultimately result in optimizing the health of your joints, muscles, nerves, heart, lungs, digestive tract, vascular system, reproductive system, as well as your overall mental and emotional health; therefore reducing the potential for acquiring states of “dis-ease”, illnesses, or imbalances.

The key benefit is an overall, holistic state of health and well-being.

WHO CAN PRACTICE YOGA?

Everyone. Any gender, age, body type or level of health and fitness. Yoga poses are modified to adapt to each individual's need. If you have a health issue (minor or major) or are pregnant, it is your responsibility to inform your instructor prior to class, so that she or he knows to make the necessary modifications or avoid certain postures to ensure your yoga practice is safe. Some postures may be contraindicated if you have certain health concerns; so it is important that you let your instructor know before class begins.

With some medical/health problems (acute or chronic), a Certified Yoga Therapist will be better able to individually assess and develop a specialized treatment plan to address your specific needs in a more personalized and safe environment.

During class, if pain is felt, you need to stop, and let your instructor know; and again, the appropriate modifications will be made.

If you are in PAIN, then you are not practicing yoga. Yoga should not hurt!

WHAT YOGA IS NOT:

- Yoga is NOT a religion. There is no deity to worship in Yoga. Yoga has no worship services to attend. There are no rituals to perform in Yoga. Yoga has no formal statement of religious belief. There is no institutional structure of overseers or leaders, nor any system of temples or churches. Yoga CAN be incorporated into your own belief system; and can actually deepen your own personal faith.
- Yoga is NOT competitive. You practice at your own pace, and only for yourself. It is very personal. It is the actual practice of yoga that is important and NOT the achievement of the end posture. Everyone's body is different and therefore certain postures will be easier for some and more difficulty for others. Do NOT compare yourself to others. The focus and practice of yoga is from within!

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- Ensure you are very warm during yoga. This is important so you avoid injury to cold muscles. A warmer body temperature also facilitates the body's metabolic reactions. You may want to dress in layers.
- Breakdown of class: 1.25 hour consists of 3 basic parts:

-MEDITATION: to become aware of your 'self' (body, mind and breath); focus on clearing your mind in preparation for the asanas (postures).

-ASANAS and PRANAYAMA (yoga postures and breathing): various poses are practiced that focus on numerous aspects of the body, along with breathing methods.

-SAVASANA: relaxation techniques, quieting the mind.

- You are strongly encouraged to practice a little yoga daily. If you are serious about reaping the benefits of yoga, you must practice it regularly and make it part of your life. Remember, yoga is NOT A FORM OF EXERCISE, rather, it's a WAY OF LIFE. A way of a well balanced life, full of overall health and vitality!

Meditation

Meditation is a Way of life. It is a Way of experiencing Faith in ourselves and in the Universe as a Whole. Faith is a felt confidence in the Vast Wisdom that upholds our bodies and all the Infinite forms throughout time and space. The experience of Faith encourages us to live our life journey with dignity, wisdom, and compassion for self and others. Meditation is a Way of being intimate with your spirituality and your infinite worth. Meditation is to be silent and trusting of your wisdom in your very body and in each breath. Meditation is to listen to your Self unconditionally—to let go of your expectations, desires, and judgements.

Meditation is to open ourselves in stillness to the unconditional embrace of a Whole Universe. When our body, heart, and mind are surrendered in silence and stillness, we can authentically reflect from a place of gratitude, clarity and openness.

“Have Faith in Yourself, Honor the Truth as a Friend, Walk with Dignity and Wakefulness, Live Compassion for Self and Others.”

Adapted from “Take a Breath” by Andrew Shugyo Daijo Bonnici from YOGA magazine, Feb.2009

JUST “BE”, AND ABOVE ALL, HAVE FUN!

**Shelly Prosko
Physical Therapist**

Certified Yoga Therapist-Candidate
Certified Pilates Instructor
proskoyoga@gmail.com