

77 Surprising Health Benefits of Yoga

By Meredith Walker

Over the past several years, yoga has experienced an upsurge in popularity in the western world among medical professionals and celebrities alike. While many associate yoga with new age mysticism or the latest fad at the gym, yoga is actually an ancient practice that connects the mind, body, and spirit through body poses, controlled breathing, and meditation. The practice of yoga has many health benefits associated with it, so read below to discover 77 benefits of incorporating yoga in to your or your patient's fitness program.

Health Benefits Within

From lowering blood pressure to increasing pain tolerance, the following health benefits can all be discovered within the body:

1. **Blood pressure.** A consistent yoga practice decreases blood pressure through better circulation and oxygenation of the body.
2. **Pulse rate.** A slower pulse rate indicates that your heart is strong enough to pump more blood with fewer beats. Regularly practicing yoga provides a lower pulse rate.
3. **Circulation.** Yoga improves blood circulation. By transporting nutrients and oxygen throughout your body, yoga practice provides healthier organs, skin, and brain.
4. **Respiratory.** Like the circulatory system, a lower respiratory rate indicates that the lungs are working more efficiently. Yoga decreases the respiratory rate through a combination of controlled breathing exercises and better fitness.
5. **Cardiovascular endurance.** A combination of lower heart rate and improved oxygenation to the body (both benefits of yoga) results in higher cardiovascular endurance.
6. **Organs.** Yoga practice massages internal organs, thus improving the ability of the body to prevent disease. Additionally, an experienced yoga practitioner becomes better attuned to her body to know at first sign if something isn't functioning properly, thereby allowing for quicker response to head off disease.
7. **Gastrointestinal.** Gastrointestinal functions have been shown to improve in both men and women who practice yoga.
8. **Immunity.** Yoga practice has frequently been correlated with a stronger immune system.
9. **Pain.** Pain tolerance is much higher among those who practice yoga regularly. In addition to pain tolerance, some instances of chronic pain, such as back pain, are lessened or eliminated through yoga (see below for more on back pain).
9. **Metabolism.** Having a balanced metabolism results in maintaining a healthy weight and controlling hunger. Consistent yoga practice helps find the balance and creates a more efficient metabolism.

Health Benefits Without

Just as many health benefits occur within the body, there are many benefits that can actually be experienced from without the body. From better sleep to more energy and strength, this list provides several benefits found on the outside of the body.

11. **Aging.** Yoga stimulates the detoxification process within the body. Detoxification has been shown to delay aging, among many other health benefits.
12. **Posture.** The very nature of yoga teaches the practitioner how to hold and control one's body in a more healthful position. Through consistent practice, your posture will improve so that you look more confident and healthy.
13. **Strength.** One of the premises of yoga is that you are using the weight of your own body for overall strength.
14. **Energy.** Regular yoga practice provides consistent energy. In fact, most yogis state that when you perform your yoga correctly, you will feel energized after your yoga session rather than tired.
15. **Weight.** The benefits of a better metabolism along with the exercise of yoga work to keep your weight in check. Additionally, the stretching of muscles longwise helps to reduce the amount of cellulite that can build around muscles.
16. **Sleep.** Because of the many benefits to both body and mind that a yoga routine can provide, many find that their sleep is much better.
17. **Balance.** An integral part of the yoga practice is balance and control over your body. With a consistent practice, you will find that your overall balance will improve outside the yoga class.
18. **Integrated function of the body.** Yoga is derived from Sanskrit and means "to join together and direct one's attention." This is exactly what happens to your body after you start practicing yoga. Yogis find that their body works together much better, resulting in more graceful and efficient body movements.
19. **Body Awareness:** Doing yoga will give you an increased awareness of your own body. You are often called upon to make small, subtle movements to improve your alignment. Over time, this will increase your level of comfort in your own body. This can lead to improved posture and greater self-confidence.
20. **Core strength.** With a strong body core, you receive better posture and overall body strength. A strong core helps heal and reduce injuries. This is why a lot of athletes do yoga as cross training.
21. **Sexuality.** Yoga can improve your sexuality through better control, more relaxation, and more self-confidence.

Emotional Health Benefits

Due to the strong mind-body connection of yoga, there are many emotional benefits to be gained from a consistent yoga practice. Find out how yoga can help improve emotional health with this list.

22. **Mood.** Overall well-being improves with yoga practice. The combination of creating a strong mind-body connection, creating a healthy body, and focusing inward can all lead to improvement in your mood.

23. **Stress Reduction.** The concentration required during yoga practice tends to focus your attention on the matter at hand, thereby reducing the emphasis you may have been putting on the stress in your life.
24. **Anxiety.** One benefit to the controlled breathing used in yoga is a reduction in anxiety.
25. **Depression.** Some believe the negative feelings that you may be repressing are brought to the surface during some types of yoga exercise. When this happens, the negative energy is no longer stuck within you, but released through exercise. Regularly releasing this negativity leads to a reduction of depression in many people.
26. **Self-acceptance.** Focusing inward and realizing through your yoga practice that perfection is not the goal, self-acceptance begins to take over.
27. **Self-control.** The controlled movements of yoga teach you how to translate that self-control to all aspects of your life.
28. **Mind-body connection.** Few other exercises offer the same mind-body connection that yoga does. As you match your controlled breathing with the movements of your body, you retrain your mind to find that place of calm and peace that long-time yogis know.
29. **Positive outlook on life.** Continued practice of yoga results in a balance of many hormones and nervous system, which brings about a more stable, positive approach to life.
30. **Hostility.** Most yogis report a huge reduction in the amount of hostility they feel as well as a sense of control when anger flares. This calm effect is likely from the relaxation and meditation that is incorporated in their yoga practice that leads to an overall calming of the nervous system. Less hostility means lower blood pressure and stress and a healthier approach to life.
31. **Concentration.** Researchers have shown that as little as eight weeks of yoga practice can result in better concentration and more motivation.
32. **Memory.** Improved blood circulation to the brain as well as the reduction in stress and improved focus results in a better memory.
33. **Attention.** The attention required in yoga to maintain the structured breathing in conjunction with yoga poses sharpens the ability to keep a sharp focus on tasks.
34. **Social skills.** In yoga, you learn the interconnectedness of all of life. Your yoga practice soon evolves from a personal journey to one connecting to the community at large where your social skills improve along with your yoga practice.
35. **Calmness.** Concentrating so intently on what your body is doing has the effect of bringing calmness. Yoga also introduces you to meditation techniques, such as watching how you breathe and disengagement from your thoughts, which help calm the mind.

Body Chemistry

Several aspects of body chemistry such as glucose levels and red blood cells are affected by yoga. Learn how you can improve your body chemistry through yoga.

36. **Cholesterol.** Yoga practice lowers cholesterol through increased blood circulation and burning fat. Yoga practice is a great tool to fight against harmful cholesterol levels.
37. **Lymphatic system.** Your lymphatic system boosts your immunity and reduces toxins in your body. The only way to get your lymphatic system flowing well is by movement. The

specific movements involved in yoga are particularly well-suited for promoting a strong lymphatic system.

38. **Glucose.** There is evidence to suggest that yoga may lower blood glucose levels.
39. **Sodium.** As does any good exercise program, yoga reduces the sodium levels in your body. In today's world of processed and fast foods that are full of sodium, lessening these levels is a great idea.
40. **Endocrine functions.** Practicing yoga helps to regulate and control hormone secretion. An improved endocrine system keeps hormones in balance and promotes better overall physical and emotional health.
41. **Triglycerides.** Triglycerides are the chemical form of fat in the blood, and elevated levels can indicate a risk for heart disease and high blood pressure. A recent study shows that yoga can lead to "significantly lower" levels of triglycerides.
42. **Red blood cells.** Yoga has been shown to increase the level of red blood cells in the body. Red blood cells are responsible for carrying oxygen through the blood, and too few can result in anemia and low energy.
43. **Vitamin C.** Vitamin C helps boost immunity, helps produce collagen, and is a powerful antioxidant; and a yoga regimen can increase the vitamin C in your body.

Exercise Health Benefits

As a form of exercise, yoga offers benefits that are sometimes not easily found among other exercise regimens. Check out these reasons to include yoga in your or your patients health program.

44. **Low risk of injury.** Due to the low impact of yoga and the controlled aspect of the motions, there is a very low risk of injury during yoga practice compared to other forms of exercise.
45. **Parasympathetic Nervous System.** In many forms of exercise, the sympathetic nervous system kicks in, providing you with that fight-or-flight sensation. Yoga does the opposite and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic system lowers blood pressure and slows the pace of your breathing, which allows relaxation and healing.
46. **Muscle tone.** Consistently practicing yoga leads to better muscle tone.
47. **Subcortex.** Subcortical regions of brain are associated with well-being, and yoga is thought to dominate the subcortex rather than the cortex (where most exercise dominates).
48. **Reduced oxygen consumption.** Yoga consumes less oxygen than traditional exercise routines, thereby allowing the body to work more efficiently.
49. **Breathing.** With yoga, breathing is more natural and controlled during exercise. This type of breathing provides more oxygen-rich air for your body and also provides more energy with less fatigue.
50. **Balanced workout of opposing muscle groups.** As with all of yoga, balance is key. If a muscle group is worked in one direction, it will also be worked in the opposite direction to maintain balance. This balance results in a better overall workout for the body.
51. **Non-competitive.** The introspective and self-building nature of yoga removes any need of competition in the exercise regimen. With the lack of competition, the yogi is free to

work slowly to avoid any undue injury as well as promote a more balanced and stress-free workout.

52. **Joint range of motion.** A study at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine indicated that joint range of motion was improved by participants who practiced yoga.
53. **Eye-hand coordination.** Without practice, eye-hand coordination diminishes. Yoga maintains and improves eye-hand coordination.
54. **Dexterity.** The strong mind-body connection and flexibility gained from yoga leads to grace and skill.
55. **Reaction time.** Research done in India shows that reaction time can be improved with specific yoga breathing exercises in conjunction with an already established yoga practice. The improvement was attributed to the faster rate of processing and improved concentration gained from yoga.
56. **Endurance.** Working the entire body, yoga improves endurance and is frequently used by endurance athletes as a supplement to their sport-specific training.
57. **Depth perception.** Becoming aware of your body and how it moves, as one does in yoga practice, leads to increased depth perception.

Disease Prevention

Doctors and nurses love yoga because studies indicate that it can help prevent the following diseases.

58. **Heart disease.** Yoga reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, keeps off weight, and improves cardiovascular health, all of which lead to reducing your risk of heart disease.
59. **Osteoporosis.** It is well documented that weight-bearing exercise strengthens bones and helps prevent osteoporosis. Additionally, yoga's ability to lower levels of cortisol may help keep calcium in the bones.
60. **Alzheimer's.** A new study indicates that yoga can help elevate brain gamma-aminobutyric (GABA) levels. Low GABA levels are associated with the onset of Alzheimer's. Meditation like that practiced in yoga has also been shown to slow the progression of Alzheimer's.
61. **Type II diabetes.** In addition to the glucose reducing capabilities of yoga, it is also an excellent source of physical exercise and stress reduction that, along with the potential for yoga to encourage insulin production in the pancreas, can serve as an excellent preventative for type II diabetes.

Symptom Reduction or Alleviation

Medical professionals have learned that the following diseases or disorders can all be helped by maintaining a yoga practice.

62. **Carpal tunnel syndrome.** Individuals with carpal tunnel syndrome who practiced yoga showed greater improvement than those who wore a splint or received no treatment at all. Researchers saw improved grip strength and reduction of pain in the study participants.

63. **Asthma.** There is some evidence to show that reducing symptoms of asthma and even reduction in asthma medication are the result of regular yoga.
64. **Arthritis.** The slow, deliberate movement of yoga poses coupled with the gentle pressure exerted on the joints provides an excellent exercise to relieve arthritis symptoms. Also, the stress relief associated with yoga loosens muscles that tighten joints.
65. **Multiple sclerosis.** Yoga has been recognized as an excellent means of MS management." Additionally, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is funding a clinical trial of yoga for treating multiple sclerosis.
66. **Cancer.** Those fighting or recovering from cancer frequently take advantage of the benefits that yoga provides. Cancer patients who practice yoga gain strength, raise red blood cells, experience less nausea during chemotherapy, and have a better overall well-being.
67. **Muscular dystrophy.** Using yoga in the early stages of muscular dystrophy can help return some physical functions. The practice of Pranayam yoga helped one teen regain many of his abilities lost to muscular dystrophy.
68. **Migraines.** Regular yoga practice has been shown to reduce the number of migraines in chronic migraine sufferers.
69. **Scoliosis.** Yoga can straighten the curvature of the spine associated with scoliosis.
70. **Chronic bronchitis.** Exercise that does not elevate respiration, yet increase oxygen levels in the body is ideal for treating chronic bronchitis. Luckily, yoga can do this, as well as aerate the lungs and provide energy.
71. **Epilepsy.** Focusing on stress reduction, breathing, and restoring overall balance in the body are the focus of how yoga can help prevent epileptic seizures.
72. **Sciatica.** The intense pain associated with sciatica can be alleviated with specific yoga poses.
73. **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.** Studies of people with OCD have shown that practicing yoga has led to a reduction in symptoms—resulting in less medication or medication no longer needed.
74. **Constipation.** Due to the practice of yoga and overall better posture, the digestive and elimination systems work more efficiently. If the practitioner also has a healthy diet, any constipation will be eliminated through yoga.
75. **Allergies.** Using a neti pot to clear the sinuses is an ancient form of yoga to help reduce or eliminate allergy symptoms. Certain types of breathing can also help clear the nasal passages.
76. **Menopause.** Yoga practice can help control some of the side effects of menopause.
77. **Back pain.** Yoga reduces spinal compression and helps overall body alignment to reduce back pain.

Excerpted from an article in the Nursing Degree blog.