

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL YOGA MONTH

This month, yoga studios and instructors around the world are hosting events to introduce people to yoga, the 5,000-year-old practice that is their passion. Individuals can choose from many schools and yoga styles to find those best suited to their body type, personality and stage of life and fitness.

While instructional approaches to the yoga techniques and *asanas*, or postures, may vary, the ultimate goal for most is the yoking of the mind to body and spirit. From the physically challenging to the meditatively transcending, this ancient discipline from India demands respect and commitment from those who seek to receive its benefits. Practitioners attest that stepping onto the yoga mat can lead to extraordinary experiences, greater self-knowledge and better health.

10 Reasons to Try Yoga

Stress Reduction ~ By encouraging relaxation, yoga practice can lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the body. Related reported benefits include lowered blood pressure and heart rate, and a reduction in the symptoms of anxiety, depression, fatigue, asthma and insomnia.

Pain Relief ~ Yoga can ease pain. Studies have demonstrated that practicing yogic asanas and meditation reduced pain among people with cancer, multiple sclerosis, auto-immune diseases, hypertension, arthritis and other chronic conditions. Some practitioners report that even emotional pain can be eased through the practice of yoga.

Better Breathing ~ By teaching people to take slower, deeper breaths, yoga can help to improve lung health and function, trigger the body's relaxation response and increase the amount of oxygen available to the body.

Flexibility ~ Yoga routinely helps to improve flexibility and mobility, increasing range of movement and even reducing joint aches and pains. While many people can't touch their toes during their first yoga class, with practice they are able to do more poses as they stretch muscles and release tensions. Yoga also helps to improve body alignment, resulting in better posture and helping to relieve back, neck, joint and muscle problems.



Increased Strength ~ Asanas use both big and small muscle groups in the body, helping to increase strength from head to toe. Yoga also helps build bone density through weight-bearing postures.

Weight Management ~ All styles of yoga can aid weight control efforts by reducing cortisol in the bloodstream, burning calories and creating muscle mass. Yoga also encourages healthy eating habits through greater body-awareness, and provides a heightened sense of well-being.

Improved Circulation ~ Combining asanas in a series or flow helps to improve circulation in the body and move oxygenated blood to the cells more efficiently. Moving through the postures also helps to flush internal organs and detoxify the body. Improved digestion and immune system function are other reported benefits of yoga.

Cardiovascular Conditioning ~ Even gentle yoga practice can provide cardiovascular benefits by lowering the resting heart rate, increasing endurance and improving oxygen uptake during exercise.

Sharper Mind ~ Like meditation, yoga keeps practitioners focused on the present moment, which opens the way to improved concentration, coordination, reaction time and memory. Research shows that such mindfulness practices can actually create new neural pathways in the brain.

Inner Peace ~ Yoga's meditative aspects often help practitioners feel more calm and centered within themselves. Many who begin the practice for other reasons say that this sense of peace is what brings them back to the mat time and again.

Sources: YogaAlliance.org; Medical-NewsToday.com; [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine](http://NationalCenterforComplementaryandAlternativeMedicine) at <http://nccam.nih.gov>; and [U.S. National Library of Medicine](http://U.S.NationalLibraryofMedicine) at ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/.