

The Health Benefits of Yoga - - Sandra Amrita McLanahan, M.D.

Part 1: The Overall Health and Healing Effects of Yoga (References: pubmed.com)

1. Muscles are stretched (increases anti-inflammatory prostaglandin hormones) and massaged (relaxes them)
2. Circulation is improved, systematically, to the various parts of the body
3. Increased lymph flow, systematically, to the various parts of the body
4. Lowered blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, LDL-small particle cholesterol
5. Re-balancing of sympathetic(alarm) and parasympathetic(relaxation) nervous systems
6. Decreased stress hormones - - epinephrine(adrenaline)(alarm) and cortisol(decreases immunity)
7. Increased relaxation hormones - - endorphins(natural pain-killers), serotonin(tranquility), melatonin(sleep), dopamine(joy), oxytocin,(bonding)
8. Increased balancing of right-left brain activity
9. Increased alpha, theta, and gamma brain waves
10. EEG synchronicity in the brain
11. Increased size of prefrontal cortex and gray matter within the brain
12. Increased I.Q.

Part 2: How Each Part of a Yoga Class Helps

1. Chanting - - enhances right-left brain balance, and direct relaxation
2. Eye Exercises - - relax the muscles attached to the eyeballs, to help with more acute vision; and to relax the brain via neural pathways
3. Sun Salutation - - overall spine flexibility and circulation
4. Cobra - - opening the chest, improving lymph flow around the heart
5. Locust - - releasing tension in the low back and pelvis
6. Bow - - increasing circulation to the pancreas and other abdominal organs such as the omentum (where abdominal fat is stored)
7. Forward Bends - - increase flexibility of the low back, and increase parasympathetic activity
8. Shoulderstand - - drains lymph, and increases blood flow to thyroid, pituitary and pineal, and help complexion and hair health
9. Fish - - increases lung expansion, and opens the chest to improve lymph flow
10. Spinal Twist - - increases circulation to the kidneys and adrenals
11. Balance Poses (such as the Tree Pose) - - exercise the body's balance mechanisms
12. Yogic Seal - - relaxes the low back, and increases parasympathetic nervous system activity
13. Guided Deep Relaxation - - takes advantage of the body-to-mind connection, then the mind-to-body connection
14. Breathing Exercises - - The most portable of all the yoga stress management tools, they exercise the lungs, take advantage of the Hering-Breuer Reflex for deeper relaxation; Bellows breath energizes the system; alternative nostril breathing balances right-left brain activity and helps to calm the mind
15. Meditation - - As noted above, direct effects on brain structure include increased size of prefrontal cortex and gray matter; EEG activity change to more relaxation, shown by increased alpha waves, theta waves, EEG synchronicity
16. Visualization and Imagery - - Applied meditation, significant health effects