

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

The Health Benefits of Yoga

Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word “Yuj,” meaning to yoke, join or unite. Sanskrit is the language of ancient India, where yoga originated. The practice of yoga involves joining or integrating all aspects of the individual — body, mind and soul.

Yoga’s principle of a balanced life is also a foundation of chiropractic. Doctors of chiropractic, like Dr. Baker, advocate schedules that allow time for nourishing mind and body. Daily exercise, stress reduction, a healthy diet, adequate sleep, supportive relationships and chiropractic adjustments are all essential components.

The key factor of the chiropractic lifestyle centers on eliminating **vertebral subluxations**, a common spinal condition caused by misaligned spinal bones (vertebrae) or restricted movement between vertebral segments.

Virtually everyone, everyday, encounters multiple risk factors for this condition. An array of physical causes, such as improper work ergonomics, injuries or a minor slip and fall, are often to blame. Emotional triggers, such as stress or depression, and chemical causes, such as environmental toxins, smoking and poor nutrition, are also leading instigators.

Vertebral subluxations are linked to a number of health concerns, such as headaches, neck aches, backaches, ear infections and carpal tunnel syndrome. The good news is that this prevalent and painful condition has a simple

solution: **chiropractic adjustments**, which are safe and gentle maneuvers Dr. Baker performs.

In addition to chiropractic adjustments, doctors of chiropractic often encourage adjunctive therapies, such as yoga, stretches and ergonomic modifications, to hasten recovery. Yoga has many other health and emotional benefits, besides helping to ward off vertebral subluxations. Read on to find out more.

What Is Yoga?

Yoga focuses on creating balance by developing strength and flexibility. It’s a gentle form of nonimpact exercise, accomplished through the performance of poses. While some poses are performed slowly and increase stamina, others are arranged in quick succession, imparting cardiovascular benefits. Stretching and relaxation are also interwoven into yoga practice.

Lessen Low-Back Pain

Dr. Baker wants patients to know that yoga helps reduce low-back pain (LBP).

In one analysis, researchers randomly divided 101 LBP sufferers into three groups. For 12 weeks, one cohort participated in yoga, while a second



group took therapeutic exercise classes. A third cohort was given a self-care book.

Yoga participants showed “superior” improvement in function and pain, as compared with the book and exercise groups. After three months, exercisers had caught up to the yoga group in terms of improvement in function. However, they reported taking more than twice the amount of pain medication as the yoga practice group (*Annals Intern Med* 2005;143:849-56).

Slash Stress

A recent study, performed in Germany, demonstrates how yoga reduces stress, anxiety and depression.

The analysis involved 24 emotionally distressed women. For three months, 16 of the women participated in a bi-weekly 90-minute yoga class, while the other eight were placed on a waiting list for a second class.

After three months, researchers determined that “compared to waiting-list, women who participated in the yoga-training demonstrated pronounced and significant improvements in perceived stress, State and Trait Anxiety, well-being, vigor, fatigue and depression.”



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Levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, “significantly” decreased after participation in the yoga class. Physical well-being also increased: Subjects suffering from headache and back pain reported “marked” pain reduction (*Med Sci Monit* 2005;11:555-61).

Omit Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) can be a painful and disabling condition. Fortunately, new research shows that yoga may help.

For eight weeks, 11 patients with knee OA were enrolled in 90-minute yoga classes once a week. Before and after the classes, doctors evaluated each participant through a series of scientific tests.

The researchers noted a “statistically significant” reduction in pain and stiffness — and increase in physical function — after the eight-week yoga class. All patients enjoyed improvement, and no adverse effects were reported (*J Altern Complement Med* 2005;11:689-93).

Halt Heart Disease

Yoga may be an important way to slash the likelihood of developing cardiovascular disease.

Researchers gave lifestyle advice on diet, stress and exercise to 93 patients with chest pain (angina) or other heart disease risk factors. Fifty-two of the patients also participated in a four-day yoga-training course, followed by practice at home. The remaining 41 control subjects received no yoga instruction.

Researchers measured subjects’ body weight, cholesterol and triglycerides after four, 10 and 14 weeks.

While the control group showed an inconsistent pattern of improvement, “subjects practicing yoga showed a regular decrease in all lipid parameters except HDL [good cholesterol].” (*Indian Heart J* 1999;51:37-40.)

Yoga may also have a favorable effect on heart rate and blood pressure. One study looked at how yoga affects cardiovascular response to exercise and recovery time after exercise.

Before enrolling in a yoga class, subjects were asked to step up and down on a platform in rapid succession for five minutes, or until fatigue, whichever came first.

At seven different times during the exercise test, researchers measured heart rate and blood pressure. Each participant experienced a significant increase in heart rate, systolic blood pressure and a significant decrease in diastolic blood pressure.

After two months of yoga, the participants repeated the same step workout. Exercise-induced changes were significantly reduced — indicating that the heart was in better shape and didn’t need to work as hard for the same results!

“It is concluded that after yoga training a given level of exercise leads to a milder cardiovascular response, suggesting better exercise tolerance.” (*Indian J Physiol Pharmacol* 2004;48:461-5.)

Wave Goodbye to Weight

According to the results of a large-scale study of 15,550 adults, aged 53 to 57 years, practicing yoga may hasten weight loss, especially for overweight individuals. Based on individual self-reports, researchers tallied each participant’s yoga practice, diet, height and weight over a 10-year period.

Individuals who practiced yoga for four or more years were less apt to gain weight than non-yoga subjects. Normal-weight participants who refrained from yoga gained an average of three pounds more weight than yoga enthusiasts. Overweight subjects who avoided yoga workouts gained, on average, 18.5 more pounds (*Altern Ther Health Med* 2005;11:28-33).

Savor Sleep

Research shows that yoga may help with getting those precious zzz’s, especially for seniors who struggle with problems sleeping.

In a recent analysis, researchers divided 69 seniors at a retirement home into three groups. The first group prac-

ticed yoga, relaxation and regulated breathing techniques and attended lectures on yoga philosophy. A second cohort received an herbal supplement but avoided yoga — and a third group was wait-listed with no intervention.

After three and six months, all subjects completed self-assessments of sleep over a one-week period.

“The yoga group showed a significant decrease in the time taken to fall asleep (approximate group average decrease: 10 min), an increase in the total number of hours slept (approximate group average increase: 60 min) and in the feeling of being rested in the morning based on a rating scale after six months.” The non-yoga groups showed no significant improvement (*Indian J Med Res* 2005;121:683-90).

Chiropractic Lifestyle Balance

The chiropractic lifestyle stresses balanced living: an existence that honors the mind and body connection. This chiropractic office is dedicated to educating patients about creative ways to incorporate healthy choices into daily living. Finding the time for everything from exercise and nutritious eating to adequate sleep isn’t easy in today’s fast-paced world — but it’s fundamental for well-being and a balanced life.



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