

BEING HEALTHY – BEING HAPPY

PRACTICING YOGA...

Well, we all know that yoga is (by and large) good for us – that’s what keeps us coming to the mat week after week. We know this from our own personal experience but here’s another thirty eight ways how yoga can improve your health.

1. flexibility – quite simply regular practice improves flexibility – which can diminish aches, pains and poor posture.
2. strength – strong muscles protect us from conditions such as back pain and arthritis.
3. standing tall – letting the head be at the top of the spine (rather than forwards or backwards) is one of the great benefits of yoga.
4. joints – by taking joints through their range of movement, it ensures that they stay open and healthy.
5. spinal discs – like joints, they need movement to stay healthy – and yoga provides the movement that they crave.
6. bones – weight-bearing exercises strengthen bones and helps ward off conditions such as osteoporosis.
7. blood flow – yoga gets the blood flowing which improves circulation and gets oxygen to your cells.
8. lymph lesson – by contracting and stretching muscles, the drainage of the lymphatic system is increased.
9. heart start – by regularly getting your heart into the aerobic range, this lowers risk of heart attack and can relieve depression.
10. pressure drop – studies indicate that practice of yoga (particularly savasana) can relieve high blood pressure.
11. brain tendencies – as yoga lowers cortisol levels in the body, this protects the immune system, improves the memory and can diminish craving behaviour.
12. happy hour – one study found that consistent yoga practice improved depression and led to a significant increase in serotonin levels.
13. weight matters – move more, eat less: yoga is movement and it can encourage you to address eating and weight problems on a deeper level.
14. low show – yoga has been found to lower blood sugar levels and boost HDL (‘good’) cholesterol.
15. brain waves – studies have found that regular practice improves co-ordination, reaction time, memory and even IQ scores.
16. nerve centre – yoga shifts the balance from the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight response) to the parasympathetic system (calming and restorative).
17. space place – regularly practicing increases proprioception (ability to feel what the body is doing and where it is) and improves balance.
18. control centre – some advanced yogis can induce unusual heart rhythms, generate specific brain wave patterns and raise temperature of their hands by 15 degrees F.
19. loose limbs – by relaxing the body (shoulders, hands, eyeballs...) we can diminish chronic tension, muscle fatigue, soreness in joints and stress levels (which can decrease number of bad moods).

20. chill pill – yoga can provide relief from the hustle and bustle of modern life, giving a break for the nervous system and improving sleep quality.
21. immune boom – physical practice probably improves immune function but the strongest evidence is for meditation in terms of supporting the immune system.
22. breathing room – people who practice yoga tend to take fewer breaths of greater volume which is both calming and more efficient – and lung functioning is improved.
23. poop scoop – yoga can ease constipation and twisting poses may be beneficial in getting waste to move through the system.
24. peace of mind – yoga quells the fluctuations of the mind according to Patanjali's Yoga Sutra: slowing down the mental loops of regret, anger, fear, and desire.
25. divine sign – yoga can help us to glimpse that we are worthwhile: and a foundation of worth leads to feelings of gratitude, empathy and forgiveness as well as a sense that we're part of something bigger.
26. pain drain – yoga can ease levels of pain according to studies and when pain is relieved, mood is improved and there is less need for medication.
27. getting disciplined – yoga can help to make changes in life: through the discipline of regular practice, we can become more disciplined in other areas of life.
28. drug free – studies have shown that people with, for example, asthma take lower dosages of medication when they practice yoga, so reducing bills and minimising side-effects.
29. anger attack – yoga and meditation build awareness which makes it easier to break free of emotions such as anger and hostility and increases ability to remain steady.
30. good relations – a regular yoga practice helps develop friendliness, compassion and greater equanimity and this has a beneficial impact on our relationships.
31. sound system – practices such as chanting prolong the exhalation which shifts the balance towards the parasympathetic nervous system (meaning more calmness).
32. vision quest – contemplating an image in the mind develops the ability to guide imagery which can effect changes in the body.
33. clean machine – from breathing exercises to gentle sluicing of nasal passages with salt water, yogic practices are cleansing for the inner body.
34. karma yoga – serving others can give meaning to your life and your problems may not seem so daunting when you see what other people are dealing with.
35. healing hope – unlike much conventional medicine, in yoga it's what you do for yourself that matters: involvement gives you the power to effect change and seeing that you can effect change gives you hope.
36. connective tissue – one of the great lessons of yoga: everything is connected, all is intensely interwoven, from hipbone to anklebone to community to world.
37. placebo power – just believing you will get better can make you better, so if something facilitates healing (even if it's so-called 'placebo') why not do it?
38. the pleasure principle – because it can be so enjoyable: not always, but most times, taking our place and moving through postures and experiencing the body and maintaining focus can be enormously enjoyable.

This information has been taken from 'Count on yoga' by Timothy McCall (Yoga Journal January 2005)

Norman Blair

www.yogawithnorman.co.uk