

## Health benefits of yoga <sup>[1]</sup>

Alice,

What are the health benefits of yoga?

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Looking to stay calm and healthy, grow your physical activity routine, or find your balance? Yoga is a type of physical activity revered by many for its physical and mental health benefits. In Sanskrit, the word *yoga* means "to bring together or merge" — as in joining the mind and body into a single harmonious unit. Although there are many types of yoga, they share similar results for strengthening and calming the body and mind. Some of the most common benefits include improving cardiovascular health, flexibility, muscular strength, and reducing stress and anxiety.

Although there are many different types of yoga, most sessions comprise of breathing exercises, meditation, and assuming postures (sometimes called poses) that aim to stretch, flex, and strengthen various muscle groups. Practitioners of yoga (often called yogis) may find themselves benefitting from all three of these aspects of yoga. Mental health benefits can include improved body image, increased mindfulness, improved stress response, and lowered anxiety. Mindfulness, or a heightened state of psychological awareness, has been credited with reducing stress, improving working memory and increasing focus, helping people control their emotions, and allowing people to better enjoy their relationships, among other benefits. Those looking to improve their mental health may find that yoga is a complementary part of their self-care techniques, along with any treatment program they may be following.

In addition, yogis may find that their bodies become stronger, more limber, and more energetic when they practice a few times a week. In addition, in the long term, yoga can help reduce the risk of heart problems, encourage practitioners to develop better eating habits, and may increase respiratory capacity. Yoga can also use every major muscle group, depending on postures assumed throughout the practice. Therefore, especially when combined with aerobic activities, such as walking, swimming, or cycling, yoga can be an effective addition to a physical activity regimen.

For those looking to start a yoga practice, it's best to consult with a health care provider, as is recommended for any new physical activity plan. Because there are so many different types of yoga, ranging in difficulty, beginners may want to chat with an instructor or studio employee when deciding on classes. Most people can practice yoga, and accommodations can often be made throughout class for those experiencing an injury or illness, those who are pregnant, and for those of all abilities. However, classes can vary vastly, so it's crucial to pick the one that best meets your needs and abilities. There may be local studios or gyms offering yoga classes in your community, so a little research will help to locate available options. It's also the case that some offerings may be pricey, so those who are looking for lower- or no cost options may find that their local community center, health department, college health promotion center, YMCA, or even library offers free or discounted rates. Plus, some studios have a pay-as-you-wish policy. Yoga classes are also available online. It's recommended that those new to the practice try in-person instruction first to ensure the poses are being performed safely, but once a little bit more familiar with yoga, these online classes can be a great option for doing yoga at lower price points and at more convenient times.

All in all, Reader, yoga may be an excellent activity for your body and mind — it's all about finding a class or routine that works for you!

Alice!

Category:

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Published date:

Feb 23, 2001

Last reviewed on:

Jul 13, 2018

## Footer menu

- ▼ Contact Alice!
  - Content Use
  - Media Inquiries
  - Comments & Corrections
- ▼ Syndication & Licensing
  - Licensing Q&As
  - Get Alice! on Your Website
  - Full Site Syndication
  - Link to Go Ask Alice!

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### Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/health-benefits-yoga-0>
- [2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/fitness>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/stretching-flexibility>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/working-out>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/working-out-home-0>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/it-okay-stretch-when-i-am-still-sore-0>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/gymtimidation-intimidated-working-out-fitness-centers>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/dodge-fitness-center-morningside>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/bard-athletic-center-cuimc>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>