

# The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

Yoga has quickly become one of the most loved practices for health and wellness gurus here in North America. With millions of participants across the world there is no way that this is just a trend. For those who practice yoga regularly it is a lifestyle. Yoga just makes you feel good. Anyone who has done yoga for an extended period of time can tell you that there is a lot more to yoga than just twisting, bending and looking impressive on a mat. There is a combination of forces between the mind, body and breath that somehow revitalizes the soul. If you are just thinking about the idea of trying yoga for the first time or you are a seasoned practitioner (a yogi) that would like a little inspiration, here are a few reasons to roll out that mat.

Whether you choose to undertake a slow steady pace or a more physically demanding pace- yoga builds long strong muscles. Unlike traditional weight training exercises, in yoga your body provides the resistance. Many poses in yoga are done very slowly holding a single pose for several breaths. This is much more challenging for your muscles. Moving through poses slowly does not allow for momentum. In addition many poses require enormous muscle control. Whether you choose to use yoga as your primary means of strength training or you want to supplement other exercises, yoga targets all of your muscles, making them fit, balanced and strong.

Those good old sit-ups and crunches we all love so much will only take us so far, as they become repetitive your abdominal muscles become familiar with the same movements. Overdoing abdominal exercises can lead to back pain creating a weakened spinal structure. Yoga can help you develop the perfect balance between back and abdominal strength. For people with lower back pain, stretching is very important. Yoga exercises help expand the motion in the pelvis, decreasing stress across the lower back and strengthening both the abdominal and back muscles together. So the next time you're critically eyeing your stomach, and your back feels tight you might consider making yoga a part of your fitness regimen. After all, all you need is 20 minutes and a mat.

Headaches, stiff neck, tight shoulders, poor posture, shortness of breath, clenched teeth, fatigue, and anxiety. Need I go on? What do all these things have in common? They are all symptoms of stress. How can we eliminate them? YOGA! Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve peacefulness of body and mind, helping you relax and manage stress and anxiety. With its quiet, precise movements, yoga draws the focus away from your busy, chaotic day, toward a sense of calmness as you move your body through poses that require balance and concentration.

Men can benefit immensely from practicing yoga. Many men choose to participate in sports such as hockey, tennis, soccer, basketball, football etc... these sports tend to utilize only 10 to 15 per cent of the muscles in the body, whereas yoga provides a workout that incorporates every muscle. Yoga oxygenates the blood, creating more energy when you finish the exercise as opposed to depleting the body of energy. For all those athletes out there - yoga will increase your flexibility "which is known to help put inches on to any vertical leap", build stabilizer muscles for better balance (which are often forgotten about when weight training) and gain real core strength from abdominal strengthening exercises that are far better than regular crunches.

Yoga practice is a wonderful thing to pass onto your children. Yoga isn't like running or other sports that are difficult for kids to do alongside us grown-ups. It is the perfect exercise program for both young and old which makes it even more valuable. Yoga builds confident kids! When kids can move and breathe and accomplish the poses, they feel a sense of self confidence. When children practice yoga, they learn how to be still. This helps them to listen with attention and make good decisions. Yoga maintains a child's natural flexibility, which can begin to change from a surprisingly young age, especially as they spend more and more time sitting at their school desks, in front of the computer, playing video games, and watching T.V. It's only a matter of time before kids turn into the highly stressed adults many of us have become

Insomnia—the inability to get to sleep or to sleep soundly—can be either temporary or chronic, lasting a few days to weeks. It affects many Canadians young and old. To get a decent night's sleep, many turn to pills. But drugs aren't always effective, some have negative side effects, and worst of all, as soon as you stop taking them, the insomnia often returns. Yoga can help to improve your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. The gentle stretches and deep breathing help to rid your body of toxins, increase your supply of oxygen, and blood flow to your brain. Yoga doesn't have to be a lengthy ordeal. In fact, just 10 minutes can be extremely beneficial in helping you sleep better.

Finally, Dinner, drinks and a movie \$\$\$\$ can't compete with a \$10 yoga class. Yoga is a simple and cost effective way to improve physical activity and mental health. If interested? YUSA offers on-site, group yoga classes. They are free to join and conveniently take place at lunch time.

A Yoga motto: "Don't just do something - lye there and relax!"

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