6 Benefits of Yoga for Depression and How to Get Started

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Yoga for Depression: Benefits of Yoga

Exercise of any kind is an amazing way to help relieve stress and use your energy in a positive and healthy way. It's common for those who suffer from depression to feel lethargic and have very little motivation, but once you get into the habit of regular exercise, you should notice a dramatic increase in your mood.

Any type of exercise will release "happy hormones" called endorphins, which help to combat the negative effects of stress.

Yoga is a great exercise to try as it has a myriad of benefits for both your body and your mind. It's a practice that challenges the body through strength, flexibility, and stillness while also challenging the mind to stay focused and attentive.

Often yoga isn't just about strength and flexibility but is actually a form of moving meditation. With most yoga practices, the breath is a key component to all of the poses and movements, which brings the mind inward and helps to keep you grounded in the moment. When exercise incorporates both the body and the mind there are a large number of benefits.

Strength

Most forms of yoga will challenge the body to varying degrees to help build strength. When finding balance and moving gracefully from pose to pose, your body will adapt and grow stronger. There is a lot of muscle control in properly executing the various poses.

Flexibility

This is one of the more obvious benefits of yoga but it will help in all areas of your body. It's also one of the more satisfying benefits because it's so easy to track your progress. With frequent practice, flexibility can be increased greatly and you'd be surprised by what your body is capable of.

Relaxation

Yoga practice forces relaxation of the body and the mind. Your joints will loosen as your muscles relax and lengthen, helping to ease the effects of stress and tension in the body. This feeling of calm often lasts long after your class has ended.

Depression often brings physical and emotional tension into our lives that can be accompanied by feelings of anger and stress. Feeling completely relaxed for an hour or longer offers a great relief from these symptoms and with regular practice can hopefully become part of your daily life.

Next page: learn more about the benefits of yoga for depression, including balancing the body and mind and learning proper breathing.

Balance of the Body

Depression not only brings feelings of lethargy, but it often comes with various physical aches and pains throughout the body.

Yoga helps to relax the muscles and increase blood flow, which should help to ease some of the body pain. As your body loosens, your balance in day-to-day life should increase. When your body is more evenly balanced and the muscles are looser there is less tension in the neck, shoulders, and back making injury and stiffness less likely.

Balance of the Mind

As mentioned above, yoga is a form of moving meditation. This means that while the body is moving from pose to pose, the mind is focused solely on the inflow and outflow of the breath, bringing our thoughts inward.

Symptoms of depression can often include a wide range of strong emotions, whether it's sadness, anger, frustration, or guilt. By focusing on the breath, you are given an opportunity to be away from those feelings.

Being present in the moment with the endorphins running through your system is a chance at a few moments of calm and serenity.

Proper Breathing

Stress and anxiety often cause an increased heart rate and faster breathing. Learning to focus on deep, proper breathing will help to ease feelings of stress and anxiety as it lowers the heart rate and brings your mind inward. It's also a simple way to ease these feelings in daily life.

Once you've decided you want to try yoga for your depression, the next step would be to find a type of yoga that is best suited for you. There are several different kinds of yoga to meet a wide range of skill levels and needs.

It may be beneficial to try a variety of classes so you know for sure which style is best for you. These range from calm and relaxing practices to more intensive workouts.

Gaiam has broken it down into 8 categories:

- **Anusara:** this type of yoga is fairly new to the yoga industry and combines both body and mind for a rigorous workout.
- **Ashtanga:** this version is derived from the original yoga teachings, which follows a specific sequence of poses while linking every movement to a breath making for an intense session.
- **Bikram:** this form of yoga is practiced in a heated room. It's different from Hot Yoga in that its developer Bikram Choudhury trademarked the precise sequence of poses.
- **Hot Yoga:** Generally the same as Bikram yoga because it's practiced in a heated room but follows a different sequence of poses. Many studios will offer a variety of hot yoga classes ranging from a deep relaxation to a very sweaty workout.

Next page: More information on yoga for depression and proper breathing continued.

Proper Breathing

- **Hatha:** this is one of the most popular forms of yoga found in western culture as it refers to any type of yoga that teaches physical postures. It's typically a more introductory style of yoga that definitely has its benefits but likely won't leave you sweating.
- **Iyengar:** (pronounced "eye-yen-gar") is a very strict form of yoga with a strong attention to detail in the poses that are practiced. In order to help students achieve the correct form and posture in these poses, there is often use of props such as blocks, straps, chairs, and blankets.
- **Restorative:** this is an incredibly relaxing and rejuvenating form of yoga that requires almost no exertion in its passive poses.
- **Vinyasa:** (pronounced "vin-yah-sah") this form of yoga is similar to Ashtanga in its intensity but focuses more on the smooth flow from pose to pose keeping you constantly moving.

As the many forms of yoga have become more popular in western culture, finding a class near you shouldn't be too difficult. When first starting out, it's best to participate in an in-class setting. This way the instructor can make sure your form is correct to avoid injury.

The best way to start is to check out your local gyms and rec centers, as they typically would offer classes at a lower fee. This would be a great opportunity to try out the different styles of yoga to see what is best suited for you. There are many yoga studios that usually offer beginner classes as well as more advanced sessions. Signing up for regular classes would be a great way to meet new people as well!

If you can't find classes near you or if you don't feel up to practicing in a public setting, there are various DVDs and a lot of apps available as well. This would be a better option only after you've had some in-class training and found a style of yoga that you enjoy, as you want to make sure you have proper form and are executing the poses correctly to avoid injury.

My Personal Experience With Trying Yoga for Depression

In my personal experience, yoga has been a huge asset in helping me cope with my depression. As I began to practice more regularly, I found that the feeling of relaxation and inner balance stayed with me even when I was off the mat.

A lot of my aches and pains disappeared with frequent classes and I've found that the breathing exercises help to ease the stress of daily life. Meditation through yoga has also become a great way for me to gain some control over my thoughts and emotions.

After regular practice, it became a great way for me to escape and even reverse some of the negative feelings that came with my depression.