

Pandemic? Do Yoga.

By Alex Kotis Rimmele, Western Springs Resident and Owner of Grit and Grace Yoga

Yes, that's right. Even in a pandemic yoga can help, but how?

Yoga is good for what ails you. Specifically, research shows that yoga helps manage or control anxiety, back pain, blood pressure, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic fatigue, depression, headaches, stress (yes, even in a pandemic), and other conditions and diseases. Yoga also improves muscle tone, flexibility, strength, and stamina, reduces stress and tension, drains your lymphs and boosts immunity, as well as improves concentration and creativity. And that's just the surface stuff. In fact, most of the benefits mentioned above are secondary to yoga's original purpose: the pursuit of happiness.

Developed in India, yoga is a spiritual practice that has been evolving for the last 5,000 years or so. According to yoga philosophy, santosha, which means contentment, is a form of self-discipline. In other words, happiness is a skill and practice. Happier people do not have easier lives, with less hard work, sadness, or financial strain than the rest of us. They're simply more grateful for what they have and choose to be conscious of their contentment more often.

Modern yogis view yoga as a process of self-improvement, uniting the body and mind (the word "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root "yuj", meaning "to join" or "to yoke" or "to unite"). We do yoga so that we can get better at it, physically, but we also practice yoga for spiritual reasons or for self-actualization, to fulfill our potential...and to simply be happier.

How do I begin and how often should I practice?

First, start with an intention. An intention that motivates you and you can repeat every day for a week. My intention for this week is to...create space where I was once stuck. It's driven from one of my favorite quotes by Rachel Brathen, "The yoga pose is not the goal. Becoming flexible is not the goal. Standing on your hands is not the goal. The goal is to create space where you were once stuck. To unveil the layers of protection you've built around your heart. To appreciate your body and become aware of the mind and the noise it creates. To make peace with who you are. The goal is to love, well...You."

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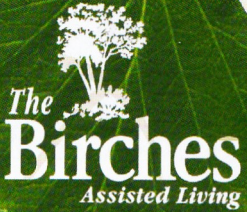
Next, practice every day. I practice with friends and family and often at the same time each day to keep me on schedule. I can spend 30 minutes to an hour flowing through a sequence. Often, we say, "but I don't have time;" then get up 30 minutes earlier to get it in. I can promise you will never regret giving yourself 30 minutes of yoga, especially in a pandemic.

I often joke with my students that performing a headstand won't save you from losing your job, or getting dumped, or having a bad day. But the learning process, the attention to detail, the challenge of finally getting into that headstand—that has positive compounding effects on all of you—physically and mentally. It's all part of a higher mission: enjoying the process and getting happier.

Want more? Please join me in my live outside classes or online by visiting www.GritandGraceYoga.com.


Namaste,

Alex R



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