

# THIRDEYEYOGA

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## HOW YOGA WORKS

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### Part I - Tension, relaxation and breath

Tension inhibits the flow of blood, lymph and life energy in the body. Tension also prevents toxins from being flushed out, and diminishes the circulation of electromagnetic energy. Numbness, coolness and stagnation set in, feeling is reduced, and the biological and electrical resources needed for health decrease. Diminishing the feeling and experience of life within the body, or in specific parts of the body, in effect separates mind and body.

Relaxation, the counterbalance to tension, is an essential component of yoga. Asanas require firm holding and attention to specific areas of the body and relaxation to other areas, along with deep breathing practices. Everyone breathes, but rarely are the breaths full and unrestricted. This is particularly the case when a person is stressed. It is a truism that breath is life, yet most people do not experience a full life because their breath is restricted.

Yoga's contemplative approach (unlike aerobic exercise, which raises the heart rate and blood pressure, and stimulates the adrenal system) activates the relaxation response. It facilitates the currents of blood, lymph and prana which recharge the body's energy reserves and thus evokes feelings of calm and peacefulness. Conscious breathing induces the relaxation response and its ancillary immune-enhancing effects, and the use of relaxation and breathing techniques to reduce stress levels has been shown to mitigate the negative effects of stress on immunity. In addition, the deep breathing, relaxation and concentration which accompany yoga enable detachment; the easily agitated and distracted mind becomes calmer.

Learning to breathe fully also brings more oxygen to the brain and body. Most people breathe into the top third of their lungs. However, the large blood vessels which collect and transport oxygen to the body are located more in the bottom third. Yogic breathing encourages full use of the lungs' capacity. The brain requires three times as much oxygen as the rest of the body and thus an increase in supply of oxygen has a direct effect on the brain: more oxygen to the brain increases alertness and encourages better mental functioning. In addition, increasing oxygen flow to the body's systems encourages them to function more efficiently and effectively.



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A third effect of breathing is to connect the body to its battery, the Solar Plexus, where potential energy is stored. The body has two kinds of energy, kinetic energy (produced by movement and expression) and potential energy (matter and mass). When tapped through yogic breathing, potential energy is released, resulting in physical and mental rejuvenation. In addition, concentrating on and consciously regulating the breath allows greater amounts of life energy to be stored in the nerve centers and the brain.



## Part II - Inactivity and Illness (or Activity and Wellness)

Inactivity is directly associated with much of what is usually considered to be the effects of aging or illness. According to Alice Christensen, in her book *Easy Does It Yoga*, inactive people spend more weeks bedridden, visit doctors more often, have a lower opinion of their health, and die younger than those who maintain an active lifestyle. Inactivity also contributes to a shallow breathing pattern, which decreases the flow of oxygen to the body and brain, causing sleepiness and sluggishness. From this example, it is clear that it is the yoga practitioner's physically active lifestyle which leads to claims of better health, greater longevity, and increased mental alertness.

It is easy to see how a person with the inactive lifestyle described above would also experience feelings of depression and anxiety, and how yoga acts to counteract that effect of inactivity. The body responds to disuse (and pain) by tightening the muscles around the area that is painful or stiff, and this tension often creeps into the rest of the body. As well as creating unnecessary tension and pain in your body, the creeping of muscle contraction from an affected area into the rest of your body can have an effect on your breathing. When your intercostals (the rib tissues) contract, the rib cage and chest are constricted, making breathing difficult, and as we have seen, shallow breathing has all sorts of negative effects.

The expansion of muscle contraction from an affected area to the rest of your body is caused by an overall contraction of the fascia and muscle. The fascia is the membrane, or sac, that holds your body together. It covers, supports and separates the body's muscles. Due to inactivity, the muscles themselves have become weak, and have lost muscle tone and mass, and the fascia has responded to that loss of tone by tightening up. This contraction is a natural reaction to injury or weakness and is part of the body's healing mechanism, the purpose of which is to impede movement so that healing can occur. In addition, slow and progressive contraction of the fascia is a natural process which begins in young adulthood and can be exacerbated by injury or illness. Fascia can also be stimulated to contract by the nervous system, for example, during activation of the fight-or-flight response or other perceived threats to the body/mind. As a person becomes older, it takes less stimulation to contract the fascia, and once contracted, the fascia will take longer to release.

Yoga can help inhibit and perhaps even reverse this process (whether it is due to injury, illness, or inactivity) by facilitating gentle, non-aggressive stretch and release of the fascia and muscles. It is extremely important to note that the advantage arises from the gentle nature of yoga, and it's non-doing approach which does not activate the sympathetic nervous system. The stretching helps develop the ability to relax muscles at will. As muscles stretch, they lengthen; this lengthening of the muscles is beneficial because longer muscles are more efficient and less prone

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to injury. Even if you are currently unable to move a certain part of your body, or its movement is restricted, practicing the yogic breathing and the preparatory steps for an asana can help improve its function. Studies have shown that when you think about moving a part of your body, electrical impulses to that area increase. Continued stimulation of an area with these impulses is a crucial part of regaining its function.

The practice of yoga asanas (or postures) addresses wellness on a whole-body level. Asanas affect the spine, maintaining its flexibility and strength through proper exercise. This in turn increases circulation, ensuring the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the nerves. In addition, asanas work on the internal body, stimulating key pressure points which govern the flow of life energy or prana (also known as qi or chi). The internal organs are also massaged and stimulated by the body's movement into and out of asana, which tones them into functioning more efficiently.



## Part III - Body and Mind Connection

Many of us respond to the normal stresses of life with what could be considered self-destructive behavior. For example, when I don't get enough sleep, I reach for coffee the next morning to override the tiredness I feel, despite all yogic teachings to the contrary, and even though I know and have experienced coffee's negative effects, on both a large and small scale. This is self-destructive behavior. In fact, I need to look at the cause of my sleeplessness, and address that problem, rather than overriding its symptom with stimulants. Grabbing fast food when I'm in a rush is also self-destructive; I would have been better to plan fewer things to do and left the time to eat properly, because the ultimate result of poor eating is ill health. Even in the short term, I will feel consequences of not having eaten properly, such as fatigue.

In contrast, yoga practice can be considered self-constructive behavior, behavior which is psychologically beneficial and health-promoting, as we have seen above. The way I treat my body sends it a message: enjoyable exercises, yoga postures and restorative relaxation tell the body "All is well". Yoga is a way of communicating with the inner self, counteracting helplessness and weakness, and increasing self-esteem.

Beyond the way we treat ourselves, our bodies also respond to the way we think. Try this exercise: Clench your fists and jaw, and wrinkle your eyebrows. At the same time, think of something you don't like, and repeat firmly in your mind, "I can't stand this!" You will soon begin to have feelings of anger and frustration. Maintain it long enough, as we frequently do, and you will experience physical and chemical changes that are observable in rising blood pressure and a faster heart rate.

When we are afraid or threatened (often experienced as anger), the sympathetic nervous system is activated to release adrenaline, increase muscle tension, raise blood pressure, dilate the pupils, and increase the heartbeat. This is called the fight-or-flight response, characterized by sympathetic nervous system dominance. It is activated whenever threat is perceived (perceived being the key word) by the bodymind.

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Being in a prolonged fight-or-flight state leads to what is called psychosomatic illness. It impairs immune system function as well as having many other negative effects. Contrary to popular understanding, psychosomatic illness is not "all in your head". Illness of this nature is as serious as any other. Take, for example, stress-induced heart attacks. They are still heart attacks, clearly no less serious or real than heart attacks from other, so-called physical causes, such as blocked arteries. Psychosomatic illness is simply illness experienced as a result of the effect of psychological distress on the body.

How one reacts to stress has more influence on wellness than the severity of the actual stress event. Positive coping behavior leads to healthy immune function, while poor coping behavior does just the opposite. Feelings of helplessness are especially destructive to immunity in times of stress, but as they decrease, the stress response lessens and the immune system flourishes. Through yoga, a practitioner develops and fine tunes a sense of her or his body. She learns that she can move her body safely, and with practice increases her strength, and flexibility. She or he can also experience the deep feelings of well-being that are available during relaxation, which is the integral and essential conclusion to a yoga practice. These combine to develop what is called in the psychological literature an internal locus of control. In lay language, this can be understood as empowerment, a clear antidote to feelings of helplessness.

To the body/mind, threats include not only fear, but also things like worry or stress, time-pressures, and self-judgment. Negative thinking and self-judgment lower self-esteem and immune function, in addition to creating physical tension. The Yogic approach can be thought of as non-doing or non-striving. In a Yoga practice, the instructor facilitates an environment in which respecting one's self and body is encouraged. Students are instructed to stay within their physical capacity, to listen for their own body cues to move more, or move less. The quiet, tranquil environment of a yoga sadhana encourages slow and mindful movements of the body and breath, increasing the parasympathetic nervous system dominance associated with the experience of pleasant emotions and bodily homeostasis.

Homeostasis is the dynamic internal balance of the body's functioning. Jon Kabat-Zinn describes it this way: "The body has evolved finely-tuned regulatory mechanisms that are controlled by the brain and mediated by the nervous system and the secretion of hormone messenger molecules into the bloodstream to ensure that the conditions throughout the body that are necessary for the optimal functioning of its cells are maintained". The homeostatic system serves to buffer our body from many outside changes and stabilizes our internal chemistry. It also includes built-in repair mechanisms that allow for the recognition and correction of problems such as broken bones, cuts, and infections.



## Part IV - Yoga 'Off The Mat'

Once your body has become accustomed to the positive yogic body/mind state, you can induce and experience this state "off the mat" and in your life. In this way, your yoga practice can, in a sense, "vaccinate" you against illness. Prompt and easy return to homeostasis is important because as we have seen, being in a prolonged fight-or-flight state can lead illness.

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**In summary, the benefits of yoga include:**

## **Yoga and the Body:**

- increases flexibility, body tissue elasticity and range of motion
- strengthens the muscles and tendons, especially stabilizer muscles
- increases bone density of the entire skeletal system
- develops balance and coordination
- corrects posture and body alignment
- improves function of internal organs via (a) proper posture so they're held correctly and (b) internal compression that detoxes and flushes them out for improved function
- enhances cardiovascular ability, both lowering resting heart rate and making oxygen use more efficient
- works with your own body's resistance which is ideal for optimal performance and movement
- burns energy (150-400 calories per hour)
- decreases potential of injury due to improved structural support and stability
- adjusts muscular imbalances
- stimulates the immune system
- incorporates breathing exercises to build stamina, enhance performance, soothe the nervous system and calm the cognitive process
- decreases cortisol levels, resulting in lower blood sugar levels and heightened insulin response, resulting in less inflammation and less chance of diabetes and heart disease
- decreases the chance of arthritis and joint issues by moving full motion and "squeezing and soaking" the cartilage, flushing out toxins and soaking in extra nutrients
- decreases pain and fatigue

## **Yoga and the Mind:**

- increases happiness and improves attitude
- develops discipline
- improves sleep quality
- elevates energy levels
- increases proprioception (the ability for the mind to direct where and how the body moves. Touching your fingers to your nose with your eyes closed, or stepping back and having your foot land perfectly parallel to your other foot without looking takes proprioception)
- develops and enhances coping mechanisms when moving beyond one's comfort zone and dealing with fear, doubt, discomfort
- decreases stress and tension
- improves reaction time and sharpen motor skills
- encourages mindfulness, embodiment & awareness
- enhances mental and creative focus
- invites and encourages the development of a meditation practice
- promotes self-worth and confidence
- accelerates the mode of flow states
- provides a sense of accomplishment, self-acceptance, reward and fulfillment

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## Part V – Why THIRDEYE YOGA?

ThirdEye Yoga continues to be an ideal space for people seeking the support, guidance and environment that every student deserves. We develop the optimal yoga practice personally customized for each person. Our programs guide you to cultivate an awareness of the general principles and tools for smart movement, and to understand the mechanics and essence of somatics that are essential to everyday life activities. We encourage questions, provide demos and offer attentive adjustments. Thirdeye offers practical and realistic rates because we know how invaluable yoga is for optimal health and fitness.

### **Currently we are offering several amazing special packages!**

check out <http://www.thirdeyeyogastudio.com/blog/> to learn more!

**ThirdEye Yoga Movement Programs** are personally customized for fitness, maintenance or therapeutic curriculums based on your goals, anatomy, health and fitness condition and are built upon one or a combination of these general directions:

- maintaining a healthy mixture of strengthening and flexibility through intelligent sequencing that reviews fundamental postures and explores new creative movement
- invigorating movement & dynamic poses to condition the body towards core awareness, increase stamina and endurance
- specific focus on requested postures to break through and transcend beyond assumed limitations
- calming restorative sessions to de-stress and soothe the nervous system (can incorporate meditation)
- incorporating essential nutritional guidelines for full body fitness, health and wellness both inside and out
- self improvement skills that broaden the understanding and application of yoga towards a healthy and positive lifestyle by including awareness of attitude, spirituality, emotional well-being and cognitive focus

### **Check out what YELP has to say about us!**

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/third-eye-yoga-studio-west-hollywood>

### **Sign up for our 'Intro to Yoga' package!**

5 private yoga sessions for \$200 (normally \$75 per session)

A perfect gift for the summer season!

[more >](#)

**It's not just stretching and strengthening, its about reshaping your life!**

**read even MORE amazing information about WHY YOGA WORKS**

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