

With a Foreword by DEEPAK CHOPRA

# YOGA CURES

## REMEDIES FOR

- ANXIETY
- ARTHRITIS
- BROKEN HEART
- CELLULITE
- DEPRESSION
- THE FLU
- HANGOVER
- HOT FLASHES
- INSOMNIA
- MIGRAINES
- PMS
- SHIN SPLINTS
- SUGAR CRAVINGS
- TENSION
- VERTIGO
- WRINKLES



Simple Routines  
to Conquer Over  
50 Common  
Ailments and  
Live Pain-Free

## Tara Stiles

author of *SLIM, CALM, SEXY YOGA*  
and owner of STRALA YOGA



# YOGA CURES

Simple Routines to Conquer  
More Than 50 Common Ailments  
and Live Pain-Free

TARA STILES

Author of *Slim Calm Sexy Yoga*

THREE RIVERS PRESS • NEW YORK

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Published in the United States by Three Rivers Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

[www.crownpublishing.com](http://www.crownpublishing.com)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stiles, Tara.

Yoga cures: simple routines to conquer more than 50 common ailments and live pain-free/by Tara Stiles; foreword by Deepak Chopra.

p. cm.

1. Yoga. I. Title.

RA781.7.S754 2011

613.7046—dc23

2011034283

eISBN: 978-0-307-95486-2

*Interior and jacket photographs by Justin Borucki*

*Jacket design by Jessie Sayward Bright*

v3.1

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## ***Foreword by Deepak Chopra***

Between work, raising a family, and coping with an uncertain economy, stress has become a “normal” part of daily life for most people. That could explain why so many Americans—about 16 million at latest count—have started taking yoga classes or doing yoga at home. For those seeking a lasting cure for anxiety or health issues and a greater sense of connectedness, yoga provides real and lasting benefits if they practice regularly. This ancient system connects mind and body through a series of postures, breathing exercises, and meditation. By stretching and toning the muscles, flexing the spine, and focusing the mind inward, yoga helps reduce stress. That can impact your overall health since stress plays at least some role in many illnesses. Studies show that chronic stress doubles the risk of heart attack, for instance.

Research into the health benefits of yoga is still in its infancy. But recent pilot studies point in promising directions. Yoga has been shown to lower blood pressure and heart rate, which can help reduce a person’s risk of heart disease. There may be other heart benefits, too: a 2006 study found that yoga helped lower cholesterol levels and improve circulation in people who have cardiovascular disease. Some hospitals have incorporated yoga into their postcardiac rehabilitation programs.

While the evidence of yoga’s success in reducing a person’s body mass is mixed, one study did find that yoga can help people lose weight by leading them to a healthier lifestyle. The study reported that people who regularly practiced yoga started eating less, eating more slowly, and choosing healthier foods. They also showed fewer symptoms of eating disorders.

Many people report that yoga gives them an overall feeling of well-being. Research shows that it may also help alleviate specific kinds of pain, including migraine headaches, lower back problems, arthritis, and pain during childbirth. Researchers are not sure what mechanism is at work, but one theory is that the yoga postures work the way massage works. A yoga posture quickly sends the signal for “pressure” to the brain via myelinated (insulated) nerve fibers, while the signal for “pain” reaches the brain more slowly via less myelinated nerve fibers. The signal for “pressure” closes the receptor gate and shuts out the “pain” stimulus. Another theory is that yoga causes an increase in serotonin, the body’s natural anti-pain chemical.

While more research is needed into these areas, people who practice yoga have also reported that they experience less insomnia and better digestive health. Pregnant women in particular seem to have an easier time sleeping when they do yoga. They are also less likely to develop high blood pressure or deliver prematurely.

Since yoga involves the mind as well as the body, it’s not surprising that it may help reduce anxiety and depression, especially in people whose anxiety is related to an illness like cancer. A pilot study suggests that yoga may influence depression by increasing the alpha waves in the brain, which are

associated with relaxation. Another possibility is that yoga reduces the amount of cortisol, a hormone that the body releases in response to stress. Some scientists think chronic high levels of cortisol may be tied to depression, as well as impaired immune function.

If the potential health benefits of yoga aren't enough to make you want to try it, consider this: Yoga can also make you look more toned and fit and help you move with greater ease, especially as you grow older. A 2007 study of the Hatha yoga style showed that it increased muscular strength, flexibility, and endurance. It's no wonder that many athletes use yoga to cross-train.

While yoga might not cure everything that ails you—or make your boss nicer—it will help you deal with stress better, and find your way more easily to feeling good in your life. And that can make a big difference in your overall health. So let's all take a big, deep breath and get started on your best path to overall health and happiness.

## *Introduction*

Yoga brings you back to you ... where all the good stuff is.

Anyone can do yoga and reap all its rewards. You don't need to be able to tie yourself into a pretzel or spend a year in silent devotion to gain all the amazing benefits of the practice. If you can breathe, you can do yoga. It's that simple. If you think you know yoga, or have never tried it because it seemed too woo-woo, chant-filled, mystical, and Om-centered (translate: OMG, I'm so bored!), then you should check out this book. Yoga is something both cooler and simpler, and it's fierce in what it can do for your life and health.

What do you really have to know to get started?

Inhale. Exhale. Repeat.

Don't let anyone fool you. It's not much harder than that. Once you rest your attention on your breath, everything else begins to open up with ease. There is no need to put a great, elevated authority between you and what you need. You can be your own great authority! I'm sure you've heard the old expression "Wherever you go, there you are." Well, it's true. So we might as well start to make where we are a great place to be!

Yoga can cure your body, settle your mind, and skyrocket your energy back to kindergarten levels! And if you're lifting an eyebrow and asking "Really?" just keep reading. How about being a ridiculously happy person with a super-healthy body and calm, focused mind? Yoga can cure everything from depression to anxiety; from old sports injuries and back pain to allergies, PMS, and even hangovers. I can't think of any reason why someone shouldn't at least try it, considering all of the incredible and practical benefits that come along with its regular practice. And that's what this book means to encompass: easy, fun cures using yoga in a fresh way to help alleviate or cure common complaints.

Exhaustion cure? I've got it.

Suffering from "couch-stination" (a lack of desire to get off the couch)? Yep, that's here.

Feeling like the hunchback from hell after a week at the office? Your back is cramped, neck hurts, shoulders ache, and eyes burn? Check.

Suffering from desk fog (an overstressed, frazzled, and fried brain)? A few simple poses and deep

breathing can help.

If you are in need of a little panic attack intervention, help for a droopy booty, saggy shoulders, mom-jean body, or bulging belly, or if you're suffering from "I can't touch my toes syndrome," there's something in here for you. But *Yoga Cures* covers the usual suspects as well: high blood pressure, colds, flu, vertigo, depression, thyroid imbalance, PMS, arthritis, and much more.

If you're feeling stretched to the limit, let these fifty-plus cures and the correlated routines unbind and de-stress you.



## ZENSPARATION

*Imagine having your own personal room to breathe in that keeps expanding every time you practice. That's yoga.*

## A LITTLE ABOUT ME

I've always been a goofball, tomboy, hippie girl who is much more comfortable in sweatpants and a hoodie than in fancy yoga gear. I don't like to think of myself as a yoga teacher, because it sets up a student/teacher thing that makes me feel like I need a ruler and a notebook to strut around the room. I prefer "yoga guide." I can help you get plugged in, but you don't owe me anything. No pledge of allegiance or donating your firstborn children. Nope. Just do the work. Be healthy and happy. That's cool enough for me. At the end of the day, you are your best teacher. I am just simply here to ride shotgun on your journey back to yourself.

My aim is to connect you back to you, where you'll find all the intuition you'll need to help you achieve your potential and live a healthy, inspired, creative, and joyful life. A yoga teacher once told me that she thought it was useful and great that I connect with the "Average Joe." That statement illustrates one of the main problems with how yoga has evolved. The problem with that thinking is that we are not separate from the Average Joe. In fact, we all are the Average Joe.

I've never thought of myself in any other way than interconnected with everyone on this planet. I depend on you. You depend on me. We are all connected and that's just how it is. Nothing woo-woo or out there about it. That's just nature. When we ignore the laws of nature we get out of balance. When we operate in harmony with nature we feel connected and in a state of flow, where everything starts to click and make sense. When we give over our power to others, yoga teacher or whomever, we stop following our own intuition and we disconnect from ourselves. Not good.

My life has taken me from country hippie girl to ballet dancer to Ford model. Then from there to YouTuber, blogger, and yoga studio owner. And now I am fortunate to call Deepak Chopra a friend, a teacher, and a student, and I am surrounded by many amazing people who are living out their dreams. If I can live my dream life, so can you.

If you were fortunate enough as a child you had at least one person who told you, "You can do anything you want with your life!" And hopefully as a grown up, you've surrounded yourself with many people who cheer you on and support you in all your endeavors. If not, let me be that person. Any others along the way that tell you you'll never make it, well, they are only right if you let them be.



Ultimately you're the only one holding yourself back or propelling yourself into your goals, desires, and dreams.

What does this have to do with yoga and yoga cures? Well, it's actually where the yoga comes in. You do the work. You get the results. The more you dive toward your goals, the more you'll realize the process is the ultimate destination. The great news is you start from right where you are, so you're already right where you need to be.

Often we spend our lives striving to decorate and improve our surroundings—a bigger house, a better car. We can spend our lives acquiring stuff with which to surround ourselves. But when we do yoga, we turn our attention inward and remember that our first home—our bodies and minds—needs to be dusted, remodeled, refreshed, and cared for if it is to remain strong. When we care for our inner world, our outer world reflects that care, and it also has a solid foundation from which to grow. Again, everything you need to know to build the life, health, and body you want is right there inside of you.

## **GET HAPPY, RIDICULOUSLY SO**

We've all had moments where we feel absolutely fantastic. Better than fantastic, invincible. Cheesily happy and full of life. Maybe that feeling is now a distant childhood memory, or maybe that type of feeling happens sometimes, but not frequently and not commonly. When you do yoga regularly those ridiculously happy moments begin to happen more often, until they link together and become your life. Do you think I'm promising you too much? I'm not. We're all "wired" to have great capabilities, and that wiring can be enhanced based on how we live.

Your vagus nerve stretches from deep within the brainstem all the way into the belly. *Vagus* means wanderer. The nerve wanders through the body carrying impulses, winding its way up through the abdomen, diaphragm, and chest, up the neck outside the spinal cord, and into the brain. It's the literal stuff that makes up the mind/body connection. Vagus nerve stimulation therapy has been provided to epilepsy patients since 1997, using a pacemaker-like device implanted in their chests. It is being considered as a treatment for clinical depression as well. Fortunately, there is a noninvasive way to stimulate the vagus nerve and get our mind-body connection working up to speed. Ujjayi breathing in yoga, referred to often as Darth Vader breath, stimulates your vagus nerve, which literally sets off signals that make you happy. When you breathe deeply in yoga the vagus nerve sends messages between the central nervous system and the major organs; the hormone oxytocin is released, which helps us relax and reduces blood pressure and cortisol (aka stress) levels. We have our own ready-to-go anti-stress system within us at all times. We simply need to breathe deeply to access it.

We arrive in the world full of raw potential. Our life's work is either to deny this potential and hide under tension and fears, or strive to cultivate our individuality and refine our talents and see what we can make of ourselves.

I firmly believe that when enough people understand and experience the transformative and healing power of a regular yoga practice, we will become not only radiantly healthy as a culture, but more compassionate toward ourselves and others—happier, joyful, and full of life.

Ready to give it a try?

## **YOGA'S SEVEN BIG BENEFITS**

**Physical:** The movements of yoga will carve out a long, lean, strong, and confident body.

**Mental:** All those deep breaths reset your mind back to its natural state: calm, focused, and sharp.

**Psychological:** All the focusing inward illuminates our behaviors and tendencies. The same habits we have on our mat are the ones we have in our lives. We see this, and we gain the freedom of choice. Who do I want to be? We get to create or re-create ourselves each day. Regular practice gives you a clear mind and the inspiration and courage to be constantly expanding and improving your life.

**Neurological:** When your brain is “on yoga” your neurological system is brought back into balance and is conditioned to steer you naturally toward a healthy lifestyle. Our bodies are constantly rewired to make whatever we practice get easier. When we practice healthy, balanced living we get more healthy, balanced living.

**Intuitive:** When there is tension in the body and mind, your intuition gets buried and your body switches to survival mode. Your yoga practice makes space in your body physically, releases tension, and calms your mind, making room for your intuition to float to the surface and guide you.

**Creative:** Creative juices start to flow when your body and mind begin to release mental blocks. Creativity doesn't like to come out when there are stressors, whether from physical tension or mental cloudiness. When the stress melts away, creativity can come out to play.

**Connected:** Yoga is the practice of getting connected. However you choose to view your spirituality, when you practice yoga, you remember that we all are connected, here to help each other, and that we have so much potential when we are kind to others.

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## *Part 1*

# **STRIKE a POSE**



Yoga is made up of a series of fluid poses that are designed to heal your body and mind, with the breath guiding the way. Poses are rich with movement, whether the action is you flowing into the next pose, or breathing while remaining in one position. Your full, deep inhales and exhales bring the poses to life and connect you with your entire self.



## ZENSPARATION

*There is no hurry. You have your whole life to practice, so enjoy being where you are right now. You're somewhere completely different each time you practice.*

When you breathe through the movement, things can flow with ease. The body can open and strengthen without resistance, and the mind will focus and settle. This quality of attention to the breath and calm awareness of movement separates the therapeutic power of yoga from other physical forms of movement, like sports, gymnastics, and dance.

Yoga is a moving meditation that unites the inner and outer you. Focusing on your breath is the core of any state of meditation. And it's true of yoga as well. Nothing is static or stuck in yoga.


A proper approach to physical alignment of the body is important for safety and therapeutic purposes, but making

an extreme shape is not the goal. When you move with your breath, your body will tell you where it is ready to go, and you'll be at ease enough not to push or force it to move beyond that point. With yoga you start where you are, and you're somewhere different every day.


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## Chapter 1

# What Is Yoga?

  
*You are not just a drop in the ocean, you are the mighty ocean in the drop.*

—Rumi



Yoga means union. The Sanskrit word *yoga* has many meanings: to unite, to join, to contemplate, and to be absorbed. When we practice it regularly, we unite our mind, body, and spirit. We connect with ourselves, and we are able to connect more meaningfully with others and the world we are in. It's like calling a meeting with your whole self so that you can check in on you.

Yoga is the ultimate act of self-study. It is a daily dive deep into ourselves, where we come back refreshed and ready for all comers. Yoga goes much deeper than stretching. How you live in your body, how you experience it, is how you live in your mind, and the other way around, too. What do I mean by this? If your mind is tense your body is tense, and it dominos through the rest of your life. If your mind is out of balance, your body is out of balance, and your life can spiral out of control. If your mind is calm, open, and focused, your body and life also reflect and expand accordingly.

Yoga shows us how to wrangle the mind to serve us throughout our lives. Without such wrangling, the mind can spin off in many destructive directions. But get that monkey mind in hand, and your potential is limitless. Boundaries fade and life expands ... the more you practice.

Why believe me? I'm not the only one to expound on the benefits of yoga. Many researchers throughout the world have studied yoga and meditation. They've just firmed up what we who do it already know: a regular yoga practice reduces stress, calms the mind, makes you happier, eases pain, increases mental sharpness, and prevents and heals all kinds of ailments and diseases. Yoga is a practice for living a better life, one deep breath at a time.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOGA—VERY BRIEF**

No one knows exactly when the practice of yoga began, which makes sense since it is something that exists always and is inside of all of us. Traditionally, yoga is a practice to unite with the Absolute, recognizing that the Absolute is within all of us. Yoga joins together the body, mind, and spirit as one. Like air, water, and earth, yoga is an element that is contained in all of us. In the Indus Valley of northwestern India, stone carvings depicting figures in yoga poses have been found dating back five thousand years or more. There is a common misconception that yoga developed out of Hinduism.

However, Hinduism's religious structures evolved much later and incorporated practices and ideas that are yoga traditions. Yoga probably arrived in the United States in the late 1800s, but it did not become widely known until the 1960s, when it became popular in the entertainment, pop culture, hippie, and intellectual scenes. George Harrison's interest in Eastern mysticism was sparked upon meeting with Swami Vishnu-devananda, the founder of Sivananda Yoga centers around the world, who handed Harrison a copy of his book *The Illustrated Book of Yoga* while the Beatles were on location in the Bahamas filming *Help!* The Beatles began to study Transcendental Meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in London and Wales, and eventually at his ashram in Rishikesh in the Himalayas. The Beatles were joined by Mia Farrow, Donovan, and Mike Love of the Beach Boys, who all jumped on the bandwagon.

Around the same time, Harvard professor Richard Alpert, now known as Ram Dass, conducted meditation and psychedelic experiments on prisoners. Upon being asked to leave Harvard for his unorthodox experiments, Alpert went to India to be with Neem Karoli Baba, who would become his guru and give him the name Ram Dass, meaning servant of Lord Rama. Yogis Sri Krishnamacharya, Swami Sivananda, Shri Yogendra, and Swami Kuvalayananda made efforts to include women and foreigners, who had been excluded from the practice. They also believed that Indian philosophy could coexist with Western science and medicine, an innovative idea that carries into the present. Swami Satchidananda, one of Sivananda's students, demonstrated yoga at Woodstock. The practice of yoga spread even deeper into the West when the influential B.K.S. Iyengar began his teacher/student relationship with the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin in 1954. Today, over \$6 billion a year is spent on yoga, and approximately 15 million people in the United States are practicing. There are many styles, and hybrid styles, of yoga practice.

The poses are designed to heal you from the inside out. Each pose has specific purposes and benefits ranging from improving circulation, regulating digestion, enhancing metabolism, and improving range of motion to control, balance, and more. The yoga poses will carve out an optimal functioning body and mind. They will strengthen, lengthen, and shape your muscles in the best way to operate your entire system. An added bonus is that your body will be energized, strong, lean, and toned. Your skin will be glowing and fresh with life. The poses, in short, are designed to build your body's energy stores from the inside out. Unfortunately the history of yoga hasn't been immune to setbacks, misunderstandings, and corruption. Turned off by false gurus, religious overtones, attempted ownership, aggressive styles, and rigid prerequisites, many people have been excluded from the massive benefits of a practice that is a gift to everyone.

Patanjali was a sage and a scholar who compiled one of the earliest texts on yoga, called the Yoga Sutras. The Sutras could have been written as early as the first or second century BC or as late as the fifth century AD, exact dates are unknown. In the text, he outlined the Yamas and Niyamas, which together made up an ethical code of conduct for yogis to observe. Before we look at his code, I want to pause for a moment to focus on one aspect of it: ahimsa. It is an observance in the Yamas that calls for one to practice nonviolence. It's a practice in kindness to all living things, including ourselves.

Yoga is about recognizing and being good to ourselves from the inside out. Don't confuse being good to yourself with being selfish. We cannot extend love to others unless we truly love ourselves. If we are constantly hard on and judging ourselves, we do the same to others. We extend to others how we feel about ourselves. An easy way to see how we are treating ourselves is to look to those around us. They are a reflection of what's going on with us.

Hopefully, we have all treated ourselves well at times and have enjoyed how good that feels. The more we practice yoga, the better we feel, and the better we are able to cultivate a lasting attitude of kindness. This sets us up for a whole lot more ease in all areas of our lives.

## THE EIGHT LIMBS OF YOGA

Patanjali wrote about the system known as Ashtanga Yoga, or the eight limbs of yoga. Here are the ethical guidelines he developed to be followed by any practitioner of yoga, including you, if you're so inclined:

1. **Yama:** Restraint, which lets us refrain from violence, lying, and stealing.
2. **Niyama:** Observances. Following a set of outlined rules that lead to contentment, purity, and tolerance.
3. **Asana:** The physical exercises (yoga poses).
4. **Pranayama:** The breathing techniques.
5. **Pratyahara:** The preparation for meditation, a withdrawal of the mind from the senses.
6. **Dharana:** A state of concentration and being able to hold the mind on one object for a specific time.
7. **Dhyana:** The act of meditation, the ability to focus on nothing, or no objects, indefinitely.
8. **Samadhi:** Absorption. Being present, and the realization of the essential nature of the self.

I believe that when the number of people practicing yoga reaches a critical mass, many of our collective mental and physical health problems will begin to fade away. But for yoga to really go mainstream people need to understand that its practice is something anyone can do.

You don't have to follow Patanjali's eight-limbed path, or move away to an ashram to have yoga benefit your life. You just have to begin to practice it. Simple. Easy. Powerful.

What do you do first? Breathe.

What next? Observe.

## OBSERVE WITHOUT JUDGMENT



*In meditation we can watch the itch instead of scratching it.*

—*Ram Dass*



Observation without judgment is the basis for all meditation including yoga, which after all is simply a moving meditation. Yoga becomes truly useful when you can translate this attention and observation into all areas of your life. Otherwise, it would just be a lot of stretching and bending, which is fine and good, but not really the point.

You are the same person whether you're on the yoga mat or off of it. Practicing yoga is a great opportunity to observe your habits and tendencies. Do you give up too easily? Work too hard, but not effectively? Get down on yourself when things don't work out? Show off when things are going well? When we practice yoga we are giving ourselves the space to observe all this without judgment, to gain perspective, and cultivate positive, lasting change.

When we practice observing without judgment, we are giving ourselves the space and time to remove ourselves from the stresses of getting emotionally involved in the moment and simultaneously softening the desire to react solely on impulse. This will decrease stress and unwind tension at its source. Increased stress and anxiety can raise blood pressure, affect the immune system, and over time can promote sickness and disease. Good thing those long, deep breaths are available to rush in and save the day!

## **BALANCING ACT: BEING HERE, NOW**

When you are balancing perfectly in a tree pose, everything is easy; your breath is deep and relaxed, and your muscles are working for you just as you'd like. It's pure and simple. Efficient. When you are having a great day, the same things occur. Your breathing is relaxed, your body is working harmoniously with your mind; everything just feels easier because you are in a state of balance.

Why is balance important? From a life lesson standpoint, it's about learning to enjoy yourself without getting the ego involved. Say you're doing a headstand. The moment you think to yourself, "Wow, I'm doing this pose!" is usually the moment you'll topple out of it. You take yourself out of the moment and knock yourself off balance when you judge and think about what you are doing, rather than experiencing and enjoying what you are doing.

That's what yoga teaches. How to be fully present now, no matter the circumstance. We focus on breathing because each inhale creates more space in our bodies. We focus on movement, as each movement reminds us that every moment invites a new opportunity for change. Each exhale allows us to let go of the moment that has just passed. Our attention to each breath keeps us in the now.

Learning to savor the moment keeps us from living in constant worry and fear and tension over things that haven't happened yet and may never come to pass. Practicing yoga helps us to undo these bad mental habits and stress triggers that we often unknowingly pick up along the way.

But you might be asking, "What if the now is crappy? How can living in the moment help that?" When your life is not in balance and you're struggling to achieve stability, practicing observation without judgment gets really interesting ... and very useful. How? Because you can learn to distance yourself from the roller-coaster ride of your emotions and circumstances but still enjoy the ride of life.

Outside means of escape like alcohol, drug use, and even overeating are a means of pushing uncertainty away and covering it up temporarily. And they may feel comforting for a moment, but I don't need to tell you that eventually they will cause more trouble than they ever solve. There is a big lesson in experiencing uncertainty and calamity with a sober focus. The most chaotic moments are the ones from which we can learn the most. Let's go back to tree pose. When your tree pose is going crazy and you're falling, and your leg is burning, and it feels impossible to maintain any sort of stability, practice observing what's happening instead of getting wrapped up in the circumstance. If you can learn to be easy with your breath in these moments, your body and mind will follow.

All the body's systems and processes—your nerves, your emotions—take instruction from what is going on with your breath. When your breathing is easy and deep, your body works efficiently and your mind settles. That doesn't mean that your balance (in tree pose or anywhere else) will be perfect and your life will be seamless, but you'll be better equipped to deal with the wobbles and earthquakes that get thrown into the mix.

You can fall out of a tree pose with ease, or with frustration and a sense of defeat. Just like you can take a spill in your life and decide to dust yourself off—with a chuckle or an annoyed grunt—and get

back up, or you can stay down, lie there, and give up. It's entirely up to you. It's your life ... and your practice. And as I said before, what you practice on the mat is what you end up doing in your life.

Any of the yoga poses could be substituted in this analogy. How you practice is much more meaningful than what yoga moves you can or cannot do. A successful tree pose probably won't change your life. Learning how to keep your breath easy, long, and deep no matter what the circumstance? It absolutely will.



## ZENSPARATION

*Try it now. Stop whatever you are doing just for a moment. Close your eyes and draw your attention inward. Begin to observe without getting involved. Watch sensations as they come and go. Do this for one minute, three times a day. You'll enjoy a calm sense of ease.*

## FIND YOUR MEANING

I'm going to challenge you over and over to imagine yoga as moving beyond the poses and even the breath. I'd like to persuade you to expand your idea of what yoga can do for you beyond deep breaths, down dogs, and feeling great, although yoga is also about all of the above. What if you could be practicing and enjoying all the benefits of yoga and meditation at every moment during your entire life? Imagine having an extra split second to make decisions, more space inside your body and mind, and the ability to feel energized, creative, strong, open, and inspired all day long.

The more often we check in, or tune in, the more we feel connected, the healthier our bodies and minds get, and the more inspired and aware we become. It's like juicing up a rechargeable lightbulb with no limit to the brightness and quality of the bulb. You are the bulb. Your yoga is the current. Your possibilities are endless.

When you are in the state of flow, you come into balance and experience happiness, health, and joy. The practice of yoga is designed to keep you in the state of flow so you can experience health, happiness, and joy during your entire life. The practice of yoga clears the clutter that collects on you like dust during each day. The practice of yoga brings you back to remembering your true nature, back to happiness, health, and joy. You didn't arrive in this world full of worries. Yoga shows you how to dissolve anything that is blocking you from living out your full potential.

Yoga is on your side big-time!

## DISCOVERING YOUR YOGA

Yoga was discovered, not invented, the same as water and fire. You can't experience water until you drink a glass. Same with yoga. When you practice it, you get it. When you do yoga you feel incredibly fantastic. When you do it consistently for a long time you feel invincible, like a superhero. Over the



years, as with many traditions and systems that make people feel good (often religions), people have built complicated layers on top of yoga, putting themselves in positions of power as gatekeepers to secrets. This tends to corrupt people, as well as muddle the traditions themselves.

In many ancient traditions, yoga has been passed down from guru to disciple. The guru is someone who has gained understanding and is living the experience of yoga. The student comes to the guru for guidance. Any good guru will always point you back to yourself, point you inward.

Yoga is available to everyone. We all are our own masters. And we all have what we need to be healthy and happy inside of us. We have to get plugged into that today—not by copying what an old guru said we should do, but by doing yoga. Period. Proper guidance and teachers are helpful, but your best teacher is yourself. All the answers are right there inside.

Your yoga practice should ground you and bring out the best in you. The practice of yoga isn't meant to take you out of or away from your life. You don't have to live out some idea of yoga that might be floating around from the past; you don't have to live someone else's yoga. You don't have to change your name to something Sanskrit, adopt a new identity, and isolate yourself in an ashram to live your yoga. Your yoga practice is there to ground you and bring out the best in you for your entire life, beginning exactly where you are now.

## **TIME TO MAKE THE YOGA**

All of the yoga poses have been designed and refined to serve the needs of the body and mind. Yoga is an ever-evolving practice that you can tailor to your own needs and requirements. We have different needs than yogis thousands of years ago did. Ancient yogis never had to deal with carpal tunnel syndrome, frazzled eyes from computer screens, and tight hips from sitting at desks all day. They seemed to be on to something by practicing regular meditation and feeling at peace in the world.

Yoga works. It can cure us when we stay at ease in our bodies, and follow our breath. It doesn't work by pushing or forcing poses to happen. There are so many variations and options within the poses that you can stay where you are and never worry about forcing your body to do something that doesn't feel right. When practicing yoga you will feel your muscles working and your mind focusing, but you should be able to stay relaxed and at ease during the entire practice.

Practicing being at ease is much more useful than practicing frustration. When something frustrates or presents itself as a major block, simply back off, wait for your breath to return to a long and deep rhythm, then come back to what you are doing.

If a door is open, walk through. If it is closed, knock and wait a few breaths. If it stays closed, you can return another day. When you practice with ease, eventually things aren't as challenging because you have changed your approach. If you muscle through a pose you might achieve the shape of the pose, but in terms of your energy you'll be a wound-up ball of stress with high blood pressure, a tense mind that can't focus, and a body so tight that it can't move. It's a mistake to believe that forcing is better than easing your way into a pose ... or into life for that matter. When you move with ease, you'll be at ease. You'll get more done with less effort. You'll get further faster. It's a mirage to believe that tension and agitated striving is the way.

What else do you need to know before you begin? You know to breathe, observe, ease into it ... but how? Where do you "put" your body during all this? That's up next.

## **THE LINE STARTS HERE: ESSENTIAL ALIGNMENT**

There are a few simple alignment tips that can be useful in your practice. With them in mind, you can experience yoga fully and have a good time without injury.

### **Always Favor Backing Off Rather Than Pushing**

Though I just said it, it bears repeating: take it easy. You should always be able to carry on a casual conversation during yoga. (Not that you should talk to your neighbors during yoga class, but the state of your breath should be easy and not strained.) When you feel your breath getting forced and shortened, back out of the pose, or rest until you can breathe deeply again. Child's pose is a great place to take a breather.

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### **CHILD'S POSE**

Gently come onto all fours. Relax your hips and sit back on your heels. Rest your forehead on the ground and breathe deeply into your back. Stay here for five long, deep breaths.

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## **HEALTHY AND SUPPORTED WRISTS**

### **Hands and Knees Wrist Release**

A lot of yoga poses are spent bearing weight on your arms, get into the habit of warming up your wrists before you practice to avoid pain and injury. If you spend a lot of time working at a computer it's good to do this exercise daily to maintain healthy wrists. When you are practicing, spread the fingers wide like you are digging into wet sand. You want to give your hands a strong and steady foundation.

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## **FIND YOUR FEET**

### **Standing**

Your feet are your foundation in a lot of the poses. Make sure you stand firm on them! Stand at the top of your yoga mat. Feet are parallel and slightly apart, under your hip bones. Your hip bones aren't at the outside of your hips so make sure your feet aren't too far apart. You can check by placing two fists between your feet. That's about the width of your hip bones. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Lengthen and deepen your inhales and exhales and continue breathing at this nice, slow pace for five full breaths. Gently open your eyes.

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## **KNEES OVER TOES**

### **Warrior 2**

This alignment rule is good for the health of your knees and other joints. In warrior poses and most standing poses you want to make sure your knees are over your ankles, not rolling in or out, or moving past your toes. You may not feel strain in your knees right away if you compromise your alignment, but over time misalignment causes wear and tear. So make sure to always check the alignment of your knees over your ankles.

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## **LENGTHEN THE SPINE**

## Bridge

Yoga is about creating space in the body. Most poses involve the spine whether they are forward bending, twisting, or back bending. Always consider creating more space between each vertebra and the next, rather than rounding and crunching the spine. When arching, the tailbone is rooted down and the chest lifted. Try to avoid crunching and sinking into the lower back. Make sure to extend evenly through your entire spine, from the back of your neck through your tailbone. Lengthening the spine will ward away a lot of back problems.

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**DON'T GRIP YOUR MUSCLES**

**Chair**

Your muscles will do what they need to do to be in a pose. There is no need to grip your muscles to hold a position. Engage the muscles that you need for each pose and rest what you don't need. You'll find your body can work much more efficiently when you avoid gripping and flexing your muscles while moving. And don't worry, you are still getting all the workout you'll need. No flexing required.

### **Always Remember to Breathe**

After you've gotten your alignment down, don't forget to come back to the breath and feel each pose and movement. When you are this focused on the breath, it becomes the guiding yoga pose. All the movements come out of the breath like a wave. Your body takes on a lightness and a sense of efficiency and ease and your mind calms. Whenever you lose track of the breath, simply guide your attention back. The breath will always be there waiting for you to follow it.

A good guideline for breathing is to expand, lengthen, and strengthen your body with each breath in, and release, ease, and relax your body with every breath out. Moving through challenges becomes far easier when you can get your breath working for you this way. To have lasting strength, we need to begin by embodying flexibility. When we hold our breath we tense. The body becomes stiff, the mind goes into frazzled mode, and things can spiral out of control. Deep breaths allow the body to work efficiently, the mind to focus in a calm way. When you hold your breath and attempt to push through the movements, not much happens except a lot of forcing, building up tension and stress that can lead to a habit of forcing and injury. When you breathe with ease the poses happen smoothly, and when they don't you learn the needed patience that allows you to breathe through the tension.

What else do you need to remember before you get started? It's all about taking CARE...

### **TAKE "CARE" OF YOURSELF; THE YOGA WILL FOLLOW**

If you have clarity, attention, relaxation, and ease, you'll be on your way to feeling great with yoga. Remembering these four qualities, remembering to CARE, can help you through your practice every step of the way.

**Clarity.** Know what you are doing and why. Are you practicing to heal from a specific ailment, to de-stress, or something else? Your reasons might change daily, but considering what they are is useful. Forming an intention and approaching your practice with clarity will get you started—and keep you pointed—in the right direction.

**Attention.** By now you know, attention is the foundation of yoga. Keeping your attention on your breath during meditation and yoga (moving meditation) takes practice. Whenever your attention wanders, just simply guide it back.

**Relaxation.** It's interesting that we have to learn how to relax. We spend a lot of our lives tensing up in preparation to "do battle" each day, with our families, bosses, or our to-do list. When we release the tension, step away from the fray, we have more room in our bodies and minds. And yes, again, it's all in your breathing. Deep, attended breaths lead directly to relaxation.

**Ease.** Finding an ease in your body and mind is essential in yoga. When your breathing gets shorter and faster, know that you can always bring it back to full and deep. Again, your body and mind will follow your breath. So control it, rather than the other way around. And again, you don't "grip" it, you just

attend to it ... the lungs will open up all on their own.

Want to find out what else yoga can help with when practiced regularly? Check out the next chapter: it's a look at the science and at some real people who've been helped by doing yoga. Do you need to read it before doing the cures? No ... and yes. No, because the poses work when you do them. Period. Yes, because with a clear understanding of why you are doing anything, you get more, you get further, and you get there faster.

## **THE POCKET YOGA GUIDE: Five Steps to Always Remember**

### **Step 1. Become an observer**

It's quite interesting to step outside and watch yourself. You will learn something new every time. Observing your actions takes you out of reacting mode. You gain more time to see what's going on and adjust accordingly.

### **Step 2. Watch, don't judge**

While doing this, remember not to judge. You can learn a lot more about your habits and behaviors if you can simply observe without judgment. This doesn't mean you abandon all ability to discern good from not good! It just means you get to take a break from instant reactivity, just to watch.

### **Step 3. Wait**

The reason it's called practice is because it requires practice. Every day you keep at it. At first, it may not seem like much of anything is happening. But if you keep at it your body will open and strengthen and your mind will calm and settle. Have patience with yourself. Yoga doesn't always work on the schedule you may want it to. Allow time for its lessons to simmer. Enjoy the process. Remember life is a work in progress and you're always right in the middle of it ... so that progress is sometimes hard to see.

### **Step 4. Keep it up**

If you feel like giving up, because nothing good seems to be happening, keep practicing. Things are changing in your body and mind. Trust the process. Trust yourself. Neither will let you down.

### **Step 5. Don't worry**

There is nothing to worry about. You are right where you need to be and you have all the tools you need.

When you calm your mind, everything opens up. Stress melts away, worries dissolve, the body gets crazy healthy, and your energy levels skyrocket. The only thing standing in your way is your own limited thinking about yourself. Remember what I said earlier? That you have it all within you? You do. Always. You just need to quiet down and really listen.

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## *Chapter 2*

# **The Mind/Body Connection and the Science Behind How Yoga Cures**



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