



Yoga Exercises for Men

In India, where yoga originated millennia ago, men were the majority of yoga practitioners. It has only recently (within the last century) become customary for women to practice and this was due to the great yoga teacher, Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya whose translation of the ancient Sanskrit texts of Nathamuni, indicated that yoga was a beneficial practice for women.

Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) taught many of the world-renowned yoga teachers, such as Indra Devi who was often called "The First Lady of Yoga." She was admitted to his school in 1937, making her the first woman chela (pupil) and the first Western woman ever at an Indian ashram. Other well known students of his were BKS Iyengar, known for his 'Iyengar' Style of yoga; Sri K Pattabhi Jois who is famous for the popular Astanga Yoga style; and his own son and principle student, Sri TKV Desikachar whose yoga therapy teachings are well known (some call it viniyoga).

All of these great yoga teachers and their trained teachers, have large numbers of women students in the west that out number the men students. It seems that many men have the wrong impression about yoga – perhaps they think that limber leotard-clad women sit in the lotus position on the floor chanting OM for the duration of the class!

Benefits of Yoga for Men

Fortunately though that is now changing and more men are entering the field of yoga for various reasons. The benefits of yoga for men have been written about and talked about. Even in gyms yoga is now available as an alternate workout to weight-training and aerobic exercises. Yoga uses the person's own body weight to lift and lower, and flow sequences and pranayama (breathing exercises) stimulate and improve the cardio-vascular system.

Seldom are injuries experienced if mind-body integration is taking place while practicing as awareness of pain is experienced and the practice modified before the injury can happen. A strong and flexible body results, with a focused and calm mind. This improves job productivity, relationships – whether personal or at work, reduces harmful stress, and is all in all a more healthy position to be in.

An article from Men's Fitness (Dec 1998) says, "Guys are the most resistant to yoga, yet they often have the most to gain. It's one of the most practical workouts around because (the combination of stretches and resistance exercises) simultaneously strengthens and loosens the body. It's designed to alleviate everything from stiff backs and sore muscles to low energy and

work-related stress. Taking even 15 minutes to concentrate on your body instead of business clears your mind of any distractions, letting you focus on your job.”

Yoga is all about relationships between the body and the breath, the muscles and the skeletal structure, between your physical self and your emotions, your mind and your body, yourself and your community. It gives men permission to stop and listen to their inner voice. It's hard to believe that something so low-impact can boost stamina, but yoga's deep, controlled breathing means more oxygen is distributed throughout your body as energy. Similarly, each time you stretch a muscle, your body responds by bringing in more oxygenated blood. Your muscles use the oxygen to stay active longer, and the process also helps flush out excess lactic acid, preventing post-workout soreness

More Men Yogis

It is now common to see a few men in each yoga class. As more Western men are training to become yoga teachers they are encouraging men into their classes and the ratio of men to women in their classes has increased. The evening classes also have a higher percentage of men, as they come from work. They are realising that although it is not a competitive sport they enjoy spending some time with ‘themselves’, while the body is getting a good workout.

Yoga and Sport

It is interesting to see that most ‘warm-up’ exercises for team and individual sports are utilising yoga stretches and postures without knowing it. When watching the national rugby or cricket team at practice I see yoga! Using yoga as cross training is also becoming more popular, as it brings the body into balance and alignment after one-sided sports such as golf, fencing, tennis. It improves balance and concentration in sports such as surfing, archery, table tennis, even skateboarding.

The yoga teacher would focus on stamina, endurance, focus and strength for athletes wanting to add yoga to their training regimens. Mountaineers might like to focus on improving their mental acuity, agility and awareness.

By learning yogic concentration and meditation skills the sportsman is able to move into ‘the zone’ while performing, which takes him one step further at attaining his goals. He becomes one with the sport and achievements are reached.

Body-Mind-Sport

It is a known that eighty percent of people do no physical exercise even though they know it is ‘good for them’ because they do not enjoy it. A program initiated by Dr John Douillard from the USA, changes this thinking around as it uses the Body-Mind-Sport concept which is based on a knowledge of Yoga and Ayurveda. By having an assessment to find your body-mind type and organizing an exercise or sport programme to suit this – exercise can once again become pleasurable and fun. This would be ideal in the High school situation where boys are deciding which sport would be best to participate in.

BMS research has proven that people can take a meditation state or relaxation state coherent brain wave pattern into maximal level exercise on a regular basis. This means that the elusive "zone" or "runner's high" is now available to anyone even while walking around the block. This makes exercise fun, euphoric and safe as you learn to listen to your body, and to know exactly how much exercise is good for you and how much more is harmful. Most importantly, this calm experience in the midst of stressful situations is carried with you into daily life.

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