Yoga practice

Every movement, breath and thought · Yoga Loznica · 25 January 2020

Yoga practice is a short, regular session in which we train the body, the breath and attention together. Here is how to begin.



> **Note.** We practise in line with our own sense and our own abilities. This text is an encouragement to practise, and everyone knows best how their own body responds.

Yoga practice is a session in which we train the body, the breath and attention together. You need no special equipment: a mat, a quiet room and ten to twenty minutes, every day. One session has three parts:

- **Asanas** (body postures) stretch, strengthen and wake up the body.
- **Pranayama** (breathing exercises) calm the breath, and with it the mind.
- **Relaxation and meditation** at the end: a few minutes of lying still and noticing how we feel.

If you are just starting, do not rush. In yoga it does not matter how far you got, but how present you were in the movement.

Why yoga

Our ancestors moved all day: they hunted, ran, climbed and swam [1]. Today we sit for most of the day. The World Health Organization advises adults to move at least 150 minutes a week, do strength exercises and sit less [2].

Physical work benefits the body only if it is varied and engages all the muscles evenly. Modern sports develop the muscles, but often one-sidedly: the fencer the right arm and thigh, the tennis player the right arm, the skater the thighs and calves. Most sports strain the heart, the organs and the glands that govern their work a great deal, so athletes must constantly take care not to overdo it. Yoga teaches us something different: not to strain the heart, the organs and the glands that govern them at all. We practise calmly, breathe evenly and perform the movements without effort, so that after the practice we feel relief, not tiredness. If we want evenly developed muscles, it is useful to take up different activities.

Yoga is a simple way to develop the body evenly, without much time. Gymnastics often repeats movements without thinking; in yoga we perform every movement consciously, with full attention [1].

Research shows that yoga helps with long-lasting pain in the lower back: through regular practice we stretch and strengthen the muscles around the spine, the pain eases and everyday movements become easier [3][4].

Attention, sensations and words

During practice, attention goes to the part of the body we are exercising. We do not picture it as an image; we **feel** it: warmth, weight, stretch, pulse, the breath in that part. These sensations are the most reliable guide: when attention stays in a muscle or a joint, we notice at once what holds us back and when it is time to stop [1].

We do not deal in beliefs, but in affirmations: short, true sentences that we say to ourselves, such as “I breathe calmly” or “I practise with attention”. Words shape the way we think, so we choose the ones that support us.

Imagination is the creative force of people: it is creativity. The world we know depends on human ideas, from the first tools to books and cities. So let us use it for what builds: new habits, a new way of practising, a new feeling towards ourselves.

> ***Let us believe in what does not exist yet, so that it may come to be: imagination is a creative force in our hands.***

The body as a whole

The body works as a set of connected systems: musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, nervous, digestive. The endocrine system, the glands that send messages to all the others through hormones, keeps their work in step. That is why a calm, even rhythm of practice and of life is good for the whole body: asanas change muscles and joints, the breath calms the nervous and cardiovascular systems, and a relaxed body leaves the endocrine system room to balance the rest. It is not hard to be healthy: it is enough to look after ourselves regularly.

How to begin

- **Choose a regular time.** Morning or evening, whatever suits you. It matters more that it is every day than that it is long.
- **Start with ten minutes.** Short and regular is worth more than long and once a month.
- **Open the window.** We practise in clean air, without smoke or strong smells.
- **Follow yourself.** Stop where the movement is pleasant.
- **Practise with someone.** It is easier to stay with it when we are not alone. Classes are online, and live by arrangement in Loznica.

Habits that support the practice

The authors of the book [1] recommend a few simple habits:

- **Sleep at the same time**, not too late.
- **Walk barefoot** whenever you can: on grass, in the woods or by the river.
- **Keep the nose clear.** In the morning it helps to rinse it with lukewarm, lightly salted water.
- **Eat moderately** and chew well.
- **Stay composed.** Do not let circumstances easily throw you off balance.

For ourselves and for others

Everyone is responsible towards themselves, their body and mind, and towards the people they share their surroundings with, as far as their abilities allow. When we practise, we look after ourselves, and a healthy, composed person brings peace to family, friends and colleagues. That is the aim of this practice: that you feel better and share that good with others.

In more detail, according to the same authors [1]:

- **Sleep rhythm.** Body and mind have their own rhythm. After waking it is good to concentrate briefly on health and strength.
- **Walking barefoot.** City dwellers tire easily partly because they are constantly in shoes, on concrete and asphalt. Before sleep it is good to move the toes one by one, so that we feel them better.

- **Fresh air.** A brief exposure of the skin to the air, when conditions are pleasant and privacy is assured, is what the authors call an “air bath”. If we start in summer and gradually, we can develop resistance to changes in the weather. We do not expose the body to cold too suddenly.
- **A clear nose.** With a persistent runny nose or inflammation, we should not rely on rinsing alone.
- **Food.** Chewing well helps digestion and the health of the teeth. The authors recommend a diet based on fruit, vegetables, nuts, cereals, honey and dairy products, with moderation in meat.
- **Stool.** Regular emptying of the bowels is an important part of health. Some yoga postures can help, and long-lasting difficulties call for a professional examination.
- **Tobacco, alcohol and psychoactive substances.** It is recommended to avoid them, because they weaken attention and the sense of the body.
- **Mood.** Envy, hatred, arrogance and jealousy consume energy and burden body and spirit. It is good to practise composure and serenity of spirit.
- **Speech.** We speak when we have something to say; needless chatter consumes attention and strength.
- **Silence and fasting.** Some practitioners devote one day a month to silence and abstaining from rich food. Fasting is not for everyone (especially not for pregnant women, children, people with chronic illness and people with eating disorders) and we decide about it carefully, in line with our own health.
- **Space for practice.** When we enter the room where we exercise, we leave our worries outside and begin the practice with deep breathing.

Photograph

Photograph: Yoga Loznica.

Sources

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