

# The Health Benefits of Yoga

Compiled by the International Association of Yoga Therapists  
<http://www.iayt.org/index>

This following information is based on the regular practice of traditional yoga poses, breathing exercises, and meditation.

## Yoga Compared to Conventional Exercise

<i>Yoga</i>	<i>Exercise</i>
<p>Parasympathetic nervous system dominates</p> <p>Subcortical regions of brain dominate</p> <p>Slow dynamic and static movements</p> <p>Normalization of muscle tone</p> <p>Low risk of injuring muscles and ligaments</p> <p>Low caloric consumption</p> <p>Effort is minimized, relaxed</p> <p>Energizing (breathing is natural or controlled)</p> <p>Balanced activity of opposing muscle groups</p> <p>Noncompetitive, process-oriented</p> <p>Awareness is internal (focus is on breath and the infinite)</p> <p>Limitless possibilities for growth in self-awareness</p>	<p>Sympathetic nervous system dominates</p> <p>Cortical regions of brain dominate</p> <p>Rapid forceful movements</p> <p>Increased muscle tension</p> <p>Higher risk of injury</p> <p>Moderate to high caloric consumption</p> <p>Effort is maximized</p> <p>Fatiguing (breathing is taxed)</p> <p>Imbalanced activity of opposing groups</p> <p>Competitive, goal-oriented</p> <p>Awareness is external (focus is on reaching the toes, reaching the finish line, etc.)</p> <p>Boredom factor</p>

### Physiological Benefits

- Stable autonomic nervous system equilibrium, with a tendency toward parasympathetic nervous system dominance rather than the usual stress-induced sympathetic nervous system dominance
- Pulse rate decreases
- Respiratory rate decreases
- Blood pressure decreases (of special

significance for hyporeactors)

- Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) increases
- EEG - alpha waves increase (theta, delta, and beta waves also increase during various stages of meditation)
- EMG activity decreases
- Cardiovascular efficiency increases
- Respiratory efficiency increases (respiratory amplitude and smoothness increase, tidal volume increases, vital

capacity increases, breath-holding time increases)

- Gastrointestinal function normalizes
- Endocrine function normalizes
- Excretory functions improve
- Musculoskeletal flexibility and joint range of motion increase
- Posture improves
- Strength and resiliency increase
- Endurance increases
- Energy level increases
- Weight normalizes
- Sleep improves
- Immunity increases
- Pain decreases

### **Psychological Benefits**

- Somatic and kinesthetic awareness increase
- Mood improves and subjective well-being increases
- Self-acceptance and self-actualization increase
- Social adjustment increases
- Anxiety and depression decrease
- Hostility decreases

• *Psychomotor functions improve:*

- Grip strength increases
- Dexterity and fine skills improve
- Eye-hand coordination improves
- Choice reaction time improves
- Steadiness improves
- Depth perception improves
- Balance improves
- Integrated functioning of body parts improves

• *Cognitive function improves:*

- Attention improves
- Concentration improves
- Memory improves
- Learning efficiency improves
- Symbol coding improves
- Depth perception improves
- Flicker fusion frequency improves

### **Biochemical Effects**

The biochemical profile improves, indicating an antistress and antioxidant effect, important in the prevention of degenerative diseases.

- Glucose decreases
- Sodium decreases
- Total cholesterol decreases
- Triglycerides decrease
- HDL cholesterol increases
- LDL cholesterol decreases
- VLDL cholesterol decreases
- Cholinesterase increases
- Catecholamines decrease
- ATPase increases
- Hematocrit increases
- Hemoglobin increases
- Lymphocyte count increases
- Total white blood cell count decreases
- Thyroxin increases
- Vitamin C increases
- Total serum protein increases
- Oxytocin increases
- Prolactin increases
- Oxygen levels in the brain increase

## Select General References

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For additional references, see the extensive bibliography "Psychophysiological Effects" at the IAYT website, [www.iayt.org/biblio.html](http://www.iayt.org/biblio.html).

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