

Stress

Don't Let It Worry You Sick

by Rachel Lightbird, September 2003



Yoga, meditation and deep breathing practices have been shown to calm the mind, relax the body and strengthen the immune system – all powerful benefits, when you consider that many medical studies pinpoint emotional stress as a major cause of physical illness.

In today's fast-paced and often challenging world it can be difficult to avoid anxiety-provoking situations. From wars with Iraq, to traffic jams on the way to work, to demanding work schedules, and financial and familial difficulties, it's no secret that stress and stress-related illness is on the increase. However, that stress does not have to make us sick. Yoga and meditation are among the activities that can help your mind and body rejuvenate, strengthen and relax – helping prevent you from getting depressed, run down, and even physically ill.

It is easy to see how a stressed out mental state can detrimentally affect your health. Consider what happens when you are nervous. Your heart starts to race, your palms start to sweat. You experience a whole range of uncomfortable physical symptoms in response to stressful thoughts. If these effects continue, they produce wear and tear on your body and immune system, ultimately creating physical disease.

The practices of (note - not the thinking about) yoga, meditation and deep breathing have been medically proven to decrease anxiety and calm the mind, keeping you happier, healthier and more relaxed, no matter what is going on in your outside world. Yoga also increases strength, flexibility, and stamina, making it the ideal exercise solution for toning the body as well as combating stress.

It is well documented that yoga helps cure many forms of injury, sicknesses and health imbalances. The increase in strength and flexibility helps prevent, counteract and heal the many injuries directly caused by inflexibility, and weaknesses in the muscular skeletal structure.



Yoga Can Help To Detoxify, Rebalance and Strengthen

Yoga detoxifies the inner organs, and rebalances the hormonal system. And, for reasons that are not quite clear, the body's natural defence mechanisms are dramatically improved. It is common for long-term yoga practitioners to look up to 10 to 20 years younger than their physical age. Apart from the obvious esteem-boosting aspect of this unexpected benefit, this indicates that a regular yoga practice induces rejuvenating factors at a cellular and energetic level.

Although your yoga practice will begin as an exercise routine, it will develop into so much more than merely physical. It will begin to calm your thoughts and open your mind in ways that you had never before imagined possible. Yoga changed my life - why not let it change yours.

*Rachel Lightbird has been practicing yoga for 5 years and now teaches astanga and hatha forms of yoga in Aberdeen, Scotland. **Astanga** is a powerful, dynamic yoga suitable for people who like a challenge and do not suffer from any major health or physical problems. **Hatha** is a gentler yoga, suitable for the strong and not so strong alike, that is easily modified to compensate for and help heal physical injuries and illnesses.*

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Stress Related Illness Is On The Increase In Today's World

Stress has been implicated as a causal factor in many illnesses, including heart disease, cancer, asthma, chronic fatigue, high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome and eczema. Unmanaged stress can also lower your resistance to infections. During times of stress, existing medical conditions may also get worse. Although it is important to deal with the root causes of stress, we can also prevent unavoidable stress from making us sick by learning and practicing good stress-management techniques.

Recognising Stress: Common Signs

Several of these reactions occurring together and frequently may indicate that stress is getting out of control.

Physical

Absent Periods (& not pregnant)
Chest Pains
Neckache, Backache
Breathing Difficulties
Digestive Disturbances
Upset Stomach, Ulcers, Diarrhoea
Skin Problems
Pale & Drawn Face
Dizziness and/or Nausea
Fatigue
Dry Mouth
Frequent Urination
Frequent Colds/Flu/Headaches
Increased Heart Rate
Sexual Disinterest
Numbness
Tired, but Unable To Sleep
Unable to Relax
Profuse Sweating
Tense and Uptight
Anxious

Behavioural

Increased Smoking
Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse
Nail Biting
Accident Proneness
Panic or Withdrawn Behaviour
Attitude of "Couldn't Care Less"
Absence from Work
Avoiding Social Interaction
Constant Worrying
Cynicism
Loss of Appetite
Excessive Eating
Family/Relationship Problems
Forgetful
Emotional Outbursts
Impulsiveness
Resistant to Change
Speech Difficulties
Lack of Concentration
Self Preoccupation
Restlessness/Jittery

Emotional

Aggression
Anger
Apathy
Boredom
Confusion
Crying for No Reason
Depression
Discouragement
Frustration
Guilt and/or Shame
Irritability
Low Self Esteem
Moodiness
Negative Thoughts
Nervousness
Paranoia
Resentment
Overwhelming Sadness
Sense of Failure
Helpless Feelings
Isolation

