

Yoga for Stress and Anxiety

It is very common to hear someone say, “I’ve had such a stressful day today, I need to go to yoga class!” Yoga is a mind-body activity that has many emotional benefits. It combines physical movements, meditation, relaxation, and breath awareness that help lower muscle tension, calm the nervous system, lower heart rate, and help relieve anxiety. Along with physical health, emotional health is another very important part of overall well-being. Stress, anxiety, depression and other emotional issues can all create problems, making it a challenge to achieve your personal goals.

Mood and Emotions

Overall well-being can be improved with regular yoga practice. Moods in the mind create shifts in the body’s chemistry. For example, when you say, “I feel anxious” (or angry, worried, insecure, overwhelmed, disappointed, etc.), you’re acknowledging that your body is creating disturbing physical and emotional sensations. We call these sensations “feelings” because you “feel” them everywhere in your body. Your feelings come from shifts in your hormone levels and in the nerve signals transmitted by your nervous system. Regular yoga practice can help balance hormones and calm our nerves. Over time, your mood can greatly affect how you act, react, and achieve goals.

Living in the Moment

Sometimes you may find yourself pondering over the past, or worrying about the future. The concentration required during yoga practice to hold poses, coordinate the breath with movement, align the body, balance, and meditate tends to focus your attention to the here and now. Practicing being in the here and now, or living in the moment, helps redirect your focus. Instead of wasting your energy on worrying about stresses in your life, you are able to focus on your breath, alignment, and calm thoughts.

Negative Thought Patterns

Regular yoga practice can help release emotional toxicity produced and stored in the body. Just like changing thought patterns can affect the body, changing positions of the body through yoga can affect the mind and release negative emotions. For example, if you carry your stress in your shoulders, neck, or back, yoga postures help you stretch your muscles and expand your range of motion in these tight areas that react to emotional stress.

Judgment and Acceptance

Also, yoga teaches and reminds you to not be so judgmental on others and ourselves. Being hard on yourself can bring about so much stress. So, by focusing inward, we practice not comparing ourselves to others and not being so hard on ourselves. Perfection is not the goal in yoga, instead it’s important to listen to and respect your body’s needs. Yoga reminds you it’s okay to modify, rest, take breaks, or not hold a yoga pose for so long. We learn to accept ourselves just as we are. These values can be applied to your life outside the yoga classroom.

Depression and Stress

Not surprisingly, research published in the Asian Journal of Psychiatry in 2008, showed that yoga can be effective in treating depressive and other mood disorders. In addition, according to the American Institute of Stress, 80 percent of American workers feel stressed on the job, and only half of those stressed

employees feel like they have the tools to handle that stress. Also, in 2005 a study published in the Medical Science Monitor showed that yoga does indeed have positive effects on stress levels. In the study, subjects who followed a yoga program not only reported less perceived stress, but the researchers measured a decline in the physical symptoms related to high stress level.

Emotional Balance

Overall, when you find yourself coping with emotional pain and stress, a solely mental or intellectual approach usually isn't enough. You can try to think your way out of pain, but it's very easy to become confused or trapped in repetitive, negative, and self-destructing thought-patterns that actually intensify the whole situation. So, when you are aware of your mind, spirit, and body, your life becomes more balanced , both physically and emotionally.