

11 Benefits of YOGA!!



1. Builds full-body strength

Building strength doesn't have to be done solely through gym workouts or strength training sessions. In fact, using your own body weight as resistance is a form of resistance training and can be a great (and free) way to build strength across your entire body.

For example, Chaturanga (a key flowing transition in Yoga) builds strength in your upper body and core whilst Warrior poses works your lower body (hamstrings, quads and glutes).

Pick stronger styles like Vinyasa, Hatha, Power and Rocket to build muscular endurance and strength – just make sure to skew it to your level. Most teachers will give modification advice to make the poses easier, so listen out.

2. Helps to reduce stress and build stress resilience

We get it. It's hard not to feel more than slightly wired (read: stressed out) with emails and social updates erupting out of your inbox. That's where yoga comes in. Shown by *Coventry University* to "reverse" the DNA reactions that cause stress, yoga also lowers levels of inflammatory compounds (cytokine interleukin-6 (IL-6) in the blood.

'Stress makes us tense physically and mentally. Our flight or fight response activates, we get adrenaline rushes and our body releases cortisol which increases our heart rate and sends the blood to the muscles,' describes MoreYoga instructor Anna de Sousa. 'Yoga helps us tune in with our rest and digest nervous system response, instead. Our body starts its recovery, restore and repair functions.'

3. Can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression

With instances of anxiety and depression on the rise, one of the main benefits of Yoga is its ability to combat both. In fact, the *Boston University Medical Centre* found that yoga is actually superior to all forms of exercise when it comes to improving mood – linked to increased GABA (Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid), low levels of which are associated with anxiety and depression), and decreased anxiety.

To reap the rewards, twice-weekly practice is the sweet spot, according to experts. And the best bit? The benefits of yoga for anxiety and depression accumulate over time, according to research published in *Psychological Medicine*.

'Practising breath and breath with movement will soothe your nervous system. We all seem to be in a state of hyperarousal, so, to function at our optimal, we need to balance the active state with rest – yoga will help you to do that,' yoga teacher and founder of The Human Method, Nahid de Belgeonne, explains.

4. There are different types for different times of day

Unless you're a hardcore night owl, we doubt you want a super energising class to do before bed. Fortunately, yoga is able to be adapted to whatever time of day/type of flow you want – again, working with our nervous systems.

'In classical Indian Yoga morning classes are designed to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system which keeps us energised for the day and evening classes stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system – which helps us relax and enables the body to heal as we sleep,' explains Dr Buldeo.

For early birds, get your heart rate up with Vinyasa classes and sun salutations, then at bedtime pick a soothing restorative or Yin Yoga class.

5. Can be made suitable for all skill levels

One of the big upsides of yoga is the fact it can be scaled for different skill levels. Whether you're looking for yoga for beginners or something more advanced, there's something for everyone.

Leah Kim, Nike master trainer and yoga instructor, suggests starting with sun salutations as they're beginner-friendly and stimulate your cardiovascular system for a full-body workout. 'Sun Salutations are cycles of flowing postures, and you can increase the intensity and number of cycles to increase the physical challenge. Just make sure you're breathing as you're moving,' she advised.

6. Beginners can start with breathing

If you're not ready to jump into the physical poses (called 'asanas'), breathing is an important part of any yoga practice to get to grips with, too.

'Deep breathing (learning to use the diaphragm – our primary inhalation muscle), to its full capacity, is one of the best yoga exercises for beginners,' says Indaba yoga instructor, Sabina Ahmadov.

'You learn how to avoid using accessory muscles to breathe i.e. neck, upper chest and jaw muscles. Learning how to breathe properly before delving into the physical practice is extremely important because it creates a healthy foundation to build a physical practice that is grounding and nourishing.'

How to breathe during yoga:

Sit in a position that feels comfortable for you (if you can, cross-legged) and place your hands in your side ribs.

Take 10 deep breaths feeling the ribcage expand into your hands and feeling the breath fill the belly at the same time.

Exhale gently, hugging the belly in, keeping the awareness on the core.

7. It can help cultivate mindfulness

Ah, the 'M' word. More than a buzzword, mindfulness is a really important aspect of yoga, something Gabriella Espinosa, a Movement for Modern Life yoga teacher is keen to impress.

'Yoga is much more than a physical practice although practising regularly does engage your muscles, building strength and burning calories,' she says. 'Most importantly, yoga is a practice that cultivates awareness of your physical, mental,

emotional and spiritual state and this can improve your mood and how you feel in your body putting you in a better frame of mind to make healthier choices.' Not only that but it can also help to remind us to stay grateful and adopt a "gratitude attitude" when it comes to daily life.

'Yoga encourages us to live a more mindful life, to stay grounded and present and to find gratitude in all the good things in our lives,' explains de Sousa.

8. Easy to do on the go

So long as you've got your yoga mat (and even if you haven't, tbh) it's possible to get a flow going. Whether you prefer to tune into a class, or move to your own beat, it's the perfect travel-friendly home workout to keep you fit, strong and mobile on the move.

9. Can alleviate sleep issues

You've got your sunrise alarm clock, weighted blanket and calming bedtime rituals but good, consistent sleep still evades you. Why? Well, it could be because you're not *actually* calming your nervous system down with IG scrolling or passive Netflix watching. The thing that could help you? Yoga, shockingly.

Research by the *Harvard Medical School* found that a sustained yoga practice improved both the duration and quality of sleep. Similarly, a study presented at the *Associated Professional Sleep Society's* annual meeting in 2015, revealed that people who practise yoga regularly are more likely to get 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

We'd recommend a calming Yin Yoga sequence or short, calming flow to help make bedtime as calm as possible.

10. Able to be done (with doctor's permission) during pregnancy

A lot of things change during pregnancy, including how to exercise safely. One of the things you can (usually) still do during pregnancy is yoga. So long as you have the sign off from your doctor/midwife, getting down to your mat is still A-OK after the first trimester.

In fact, pregnancy yoga has a range of benefits from strengthening your pelvic floor (very important) to helping you learn calming breathing sequences. The key is to make sure you're doing it safely with your body and your pregnancy in mind. If you have any concerns, speak to your doctor, midwife or maternity team. No question too small or too silly.

11. Improves balance

As we age our centre of gravity can shift, this can make it harder to maintain balance. This is due to the liquid that lubricates our joints (synovial fluid) declining as we get older. Add into the mix that our ligaments also tend to lose moisture and elasticity and we have an issue of rigidity and stiffness on our hands.

Exercise stimulates the production of synovial fluid, which is why it's so important to stay moving as we get older. Experts suggest working against resistance to build strength and improve balance simultaneously, something yoga is brilliant for.

Hope that helps!!