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## Impact of Ashtanga yoga on physical and mental health

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### Abstract

In our daily lives we are over stimulated. Work obligations, family responsibilities and noise from outside overwhelm our senses constantly. A dedicated practice of yoga brings one back to oneself on a daily basis keeping one's centered. One's inner world is replenished and nourished so there is more of one to go around. Breath awareness is front and center in this practice. Through constant focus on the breath one recognizes long established breathing patterns and correlative behavioral patterns. This deeper awareness allows one's to breathe more effectively and alter patterns of unwanted behavior. Greater awareness of the breath extends to all facets of one's life. Ultimately it leads to enlightenment.

**Keywords:** Ashtanga yoga, physical health & mental health

### Introduction

Yoga works on the sub consciousness which has a powerful effect over the body. Ashtanga Yoga is often called Patanjali Yoga, referring to Maharishi Patanjali, the ancient author of the famous Patanjali Yoga Sutras that describes Ashtanga Yoga. Historians place the writing of these scriptures at around 200 B.C., but the original is probably thousands of years older. These teachings belong to an oral tradition, passed on unchanged by memorization of the verses in which their wisdom was captured. More recently (15th century) the term Raja Yoga is also often used instead of Ashtanga Yoga, meaning "royal yoga". (Sanatana Society)

### The eight limbs of Ashtanga yoga, described as practices

1. **Yama (control):** A series of don'ts in contact with the world outside, so that your relationships as well as your energy remain harmonious, providing the peaceful background needed for deep meditation. The disciplines in Yama typically include nonviolence, truth, honesty, sexual continence, forbearance, fortitude, kindness, straightforwardness, moderation in diet and bodily purity.
2. **Niyama (rules of conduct):** A series of do's that helping in detaching from the world and the ego, so that it becomes easier to let go of the doer in deep meditation. Activities in Niyama typically consist of austerity, contentment, belief in God, charity, worship of God, study of teachings and scriptures, modesty, having a discerning mind, repetition of prayers (japa), observance of vows and performing sacrifices.
3. **Asana (posture):** As a motionless body makes the mind quiet, and as an unstable body cannot remain motionless in deep meditation, many postures have been described of which at the least one sitting posture must be mastered in order to reach a deep state of meditation.
4. **Pranayama (control of breath):** Control of breath brings mind under control, while the main aim is to store the energy that will be needed when in deep meditation breathing has stopped.
5. **Pratyahara (withdrawal of sensory perceptions):** Removing the attention from sensory input, so that it ceases to disturb meditation. This may be preceded by some focus on purifying sensory input, such as in rituals, use of meditative sounds, etc. Ultimately prana is withdrawn from the nadis that transport sensory input.
6. **Dharana (concentration):** The focus of mind on any single object, for example a mantras, or deep concentration on the six subtle centers of the chakras starting from the first and gradually approaching the seventh, etc.

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7. **Dhyana (uninterrupted meditation):** In which the concentration is uninterrupted, without a single disturbing thought, though this concentration still requires some effort.
8. **Samadhi (effortless meditation, absorption, equilibrium):** Concentration is maintained, but it requires no effort. The doer has disappeared from consciousness. This stage allows for a rather long purification process through which the individual consciousness is finally dissolved in pure cosmic consciousness. After a prolonged practice of samadhi there is no need to practice any longer, because the conscious connection to the divine is everlasting, it is called natural Samadhi.

### One's

A consistent Ashtanga practice ultimately gets rooted to one's being so that when one does not do it your mind and body feel the difference. To live to our full potential each and every day, we need to live from our authentic self. In a world where there are so many external influences taking us away from our true nature, a daily Ashtanga practice takes one back inside to one's center.

Naylor, a therapist at the Yoga Therapy Centre at Royal Homoeopathic Hospital, London, uses yoga to treat conditions that involve the brain. He explains "A lot of people deny that the brain is involved in their medical condition but often for example lower back pain can be caused by mental tension which leads to stiffness in the neck or back. Yoga works on the subconscious which has a powerful effect over the body. It can get into the subconscious, which might be holding tensions caused by stress, and help to let them go in a controlled safe fashion and eventually the medical or health problem that was caused by the tension will disappear.

When Shri K. Pattabhi Jois, the foremost exponent of Ashtanga yoga, visited London this month hundreds of people flocked to his classes. Pattabhi Jois, who is now in his eighties, modified Ashtanga yoga after translating ancient texts on the technique. The technique, which is the most vigorous form of yoga, has become increasingly popular throughout the western world. Pattabhi Jois who still teaches daily at his research institute in Mysore, India has said that yoga is mind medicine. "Ashtanga yoga is helping many people throughout the world to balance the mental, physical and spiritual pressures and stresses posed by the modern world we live in today," he said. The basic premise of Ashtanga yoga is that it produces an intense internal heat through synchronizing movement with breathing while practicing a set sequence of postures. Pattabhi Jois says that this heat purifies the muscles and organs, expelling unwanted toxins as well as releasing beneficial hormones and minerals which can nourish the body when the sweat is absorbed back into the skin.

Ken Simmons, chairman of the British Wheel of Yoga, the governing body of yoga in the UK said "Everyone can benefit from practicing yoga as it's a holistic discipline that helps the body, mentally, physically and spiritually."

There are many obvious benefits to yoga, for example: better breathing, a limber body, a stronger immune system, a better ability to cope with depression. But then there are the other ones, the unusual benefits, the edgy ones, the ones worth exploring.

Unusual Benefits of Yoga have been explained by Claudia Azula Altucher that there are many obvious benefits to yoga, for example: better breathing, a limber body, a stronger

immune system, a better ability to cope with depression. But then there are the other ones, the unusual benefits, the edgy ones, the ones worth exploring.

1. Discipline – yoga helps us to be in present moment.
2. Better Breathing- It helps us to focus on our breathing. Just the simple awareness can improve the quality of life.
3. Effective use of resources-Getting on the mat every day for an hour and a half helps us to use our energy with care, to ensure it will last for the session. We can detect quickly where there are clogs, where the energy gets obstructed.
4. Having perfect weight- without being hard on ourselves or by being strong or weak, it can be done through yoga.
5. No complaints- Complaining is the biggest obstacle to success. It is a waste of energy and a leak in the system. When we used to be in to it, "victim" archetype show begins and take over. It is not a good conduit for growth or creativity.
6. Relationships clarity-Love addiction is a trend very much kept in denial, the thrill of the chase, the playing hard to get, the phrases we keep in the collective consciousness as a way to escape and that ultimately do not serve us right, do not bring us meaningful relationships. Through the practice of yoga we can understand that in relationships blame game is not a healthy practice. A real solid relationship, based on trust, and on a mutual desire to see each other grow and develop, on love is developed
7. A better tool set to deal with difficult situations- yoga gives us strength to deal with dramatic events, and to be honest in solving our problems. But life is suffering, that is the first precept the Buddha (an enlightened being) taught, and he is right, being a yogi does not make anyone exempt from having stuff happening to them. Yoga is the foundation that realizes us that how to survive.
8. Clarity of Mind- yoga helps to develop a crystal clear vision that allows us for inquiry, reflection, journal writing, and deep thinking.
9. Listening skills-Yoga removes egoistic attitude it helps us to listen a bit deeper,
10. Better wording choices-The best kept secret in our world is the power of the word. How we phrase things, the way in which we say what we want to say means the difference between a broken relationship and a flourishing one, between a success or a failure, between a gentle continuation or an abrupt stop in a practice. Words are powerful, they are spells we cast, taking a moment to honor them and to choose them with care brings about an abundance of new possibilities.

### Conclusion

In spite of all this yoga helps to develop the ability to embracing Uncertainty. Gratitude touches everything we do. It develops the ability to relate better. Yoga practitioners claim that all forms of the discipline offer health and physical benefits - from lowering blood pressure to improving flexibility. Often the first basic lesson of a yoga class is deep, rhythmic breathing, which practitioners say can help to relieve respiratory complaints including asthma, as well as feeding more oxygen to the muscles to boost their strength. It also helps to improve posture by teaching relaxation of the neck, shoulders and upper back, easing tension that can trigger aches and pains in the back. Certain postures can also help to lengthen and strengthen the spine. Yoga practitioners also claim that specific postures such as abdominal twists

gently massage internal organs including the kidneys to improve their efficiency while forward bends can stimulate the digestive processes to help ease indigestion problems. The inverted postures such as the head and shoulder stands boost blood circulation and therefore improve skin tone. The deep relaxation exercises normally practiced at the end of a class can also relieve stress and anxiety, they claim.

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