

# Complete Approach to Health

*"Words fail to convey the total value of Yoga. It has to be experienced." - B.K.S. Iyengar*

*Asana is no less a sustained effort and flowing movement as it is a state of inner stillness – of being ‘seated’ or established in a firm position. It balances effort – the act of moving or flowing with the energy of the pose – with quietude, a soft and silent openness to an inner experience of expansion, joy and ease which, when it comes, is felt as a moment of grace.*

*Through the asanas of Hatha Yoga we keep up with life by maintaining a balance of strength, flexibility and relaxation – a balance of effort and graceful ease, not just in our practice, but in our daily approach to life.*

*Working consistently with your posture can be a means of beginning to subtly transform your attitude, changing your own deepest feeling about yourself as well as your orientation toward your world.*

*Yoga may seem like the fabled elixir of life - a cure-all solution to man's daily problems and concerns such as illness. But actually, the benefits that Yogis or Yoga practitioners have been experiencing for thousands of years are only being gradually proven by medical science now.*

## **What is Hatha Yoga?**

To the large majority, it's a mystery, exactly what happens inside when we do Hatha Yoga. Most Hatha yogis are pretty clear about their practice, yet I think most would allow that there is far more to be felt, known and understood. It's a mystery that begins with the attempt to define what our practice is all about.

Definition, while never complete, is nevertheless a good place to start. In Hatha Yoga we practice what is called asana, a Sanskrit word that, like many Sanskrit terms, defies precise translation. Like most yogic concepts, asana refers to a highly refined experience that underlies its unassuming appearance.

## **The Meaning of Asana**

What is an asana? Its most literal meaning is “seat,” a firm positioning of the body. Most of us are familiar with at least some of the shapes into which the yogi extends and twists his body. Our minimalist definition thus might easily be that asana means a specific positioning of the body performed for an intrinsic purpose (i.e. not just for show).



# *Complete Approach to Health*

This is a start, but more could be said. First about how the body is positioned, and second about what this purpose might be. To be more specific about how the body is worked, we could say that asana involves positioning and working the body in ways that stretch and strengthen not only the major muscle groups, but also the deeper postural muscles that maintain the health of the joints and spine. Asana also stimulates and encourages the proper functioning of all of the internal organs that govern our essential life functions.

How to find a word that does justice to that? I have come up with some English equivalents, but they fall short of expressing how asana contributes to our overall health. One word often used in place of asana is “posture.” An asana is a posture, a disposition of the body and its limbs. Whether standing, sitting, folding forward, bending over backward or even standing on one’s head, ‘posture’ gets the gist of this idea across. But the word ‘posture’ nevertheless suggests little more than an accustomed way of being, one that involves habit and unconsciousness. We’re rarely conscious of our posture until someone else comments upon it, or we catch a sideways glance at ourselves in a window. Asana isn’t like that at all. We choose to practice asanas in a **sequential** order, giving full attention to what we are doing and how we are doing it, and with a clear intention to benefit from it. ‘Posture’ doesn’t quite capture the conscious intentionality of asana to promote health and well-being.

Neither does the word ‘pose.’ Like posture, a ‘pose’ suggests something static and artificial. Asanas aren’t really static, though we may gain that impression from pictures in books on Yoga. Asana involves a stream or flow of breath, muscular effort and even movement, which at its apex (the ‘pose’ we recognize as the ‘asana’ proper) does appear quite still. Asana is not just that momentary result; it’s the process by which we arrive at the result.

So asana is no less a sustained effort and flowing movement as it is a state of inner stillness – of being ‘seated’ or established in a firm position. It balances effort – the act of moving or flowing with the energy of the pose – with quietude, a soft and silent openness to an inner experience of expansion, joy and ease which, when it comes, is felt as a moment of grace.

## **The Purpose of Asana**

Which brings us to the purpose of asana. Yoga is usually described as a discipline that combines exercises with relaxation techniques to form a complete system of self-care designed to rejuvenate the body and free the mind from tension and fatigue. This suggests that the asanas of Hatha Yoga reach far more deeply into the body – and mind – than most forms of physical exercise. Athletic training, by contrast, emphasizes working the outer muscles of the body, building the exterior frame often at the expense of the inner body – the inner organs and deeper muscles that keep the structure of the body aligned and functioning well. This becomes an issue when people who train almost exclusively in



# *Complete Approach to Health*

a sport or narrow range of related sports develop chronic problems, usually having to do with joint deterioration and postural problems. Yoga has the opposite effect, which is why many people turn to Yoga to prevent or heal sports and exercise related injuries.

Hatha Yoga encourages attention to the inner body – i.e. proper alignment of the inner structure of the bones as well as attention to the health of the inner organs – as much as it works the outer sheath of muscle. For that reason it differs both physically and philosophically from other forms of exercise. Hatha Yoga operates on a more comprehensive idea of health and fitness, and a broader understanding of strength than just physical power. Yoga develops our awareness of the inner body, encouraging us to work from the core of our being, not just from the surface. The basic premise is that when we are able to contact and work from that core, we achieve a much deeper and more abiding health, which includes emotional and even spiritual health and well-being.

## **Health as Wholeness**

Asana establishes integrity in our being -- integration of body, heart and mind. The word “integrity” comes from the Latin integrare, which means to renew or restore. The purpose of asana is renewal or restoration of the body’s original wholeness. Hatha Yoga has been practiced for over 5,000 years because of the inevitable bumps and bruises, not to mention the stress and tension, of everyday life. Given the rapid acceleration of modern life, this makes Hatha Yoga even more a necessity today. Because of such challenges, maintaining our health – our wholeness or ‘togetherness’ – is always a work in progress. Through the asanas of Hatha Yoga we keep up with life by maintaining a balance of strength, flexibility and relaxation – a balance of effort and graceful ease, not just in our practice, but in our daily approach to life.

## ***...and Attitude!***

The art of living well with the help of Yoga really comes down to attitude. One respect in which the word ‘posture’ is a good translation of asana is that it suggests the primacy of attitude. Our posture is the outer form of an inner attitude, molded in flesh and bone. The physical details of posture are really secondary to attitude, because no matter how much you may ‘correct’ your posture, the body always returns to the shape suggested to it by your mood or mental focus. And yet, our physical life is not simply dictated by our mental life; nor is our mental life to be changed by just ‘positive thinking’ or affirmations alone (a difficult option, for anyone who has tried it). Working consistently with your posture can be a means of beginning to subtly transform your attitude, changing your own deepest feeling about yourself as well as your orientation toward your world.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **Bodily Systems**

Yoga looks at the body as a WHOLE. When there are areas of tightness in the body it causes blockages, energy (oxygen/nutrients/hormones) is restricted creating a malfunction. If the systems of the body are not in harmony then stress is built up, making the body and all its systems (muscular, skeletal, cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, digestive, nervous etc) unable to function at their prime optimum. Yoga brings balance back to the body enabling it to work at its most effective.

Like anything in life it is all about balance, when our lives are in balance everything is working well and going smoothly but when we take on too much, everything can begin to fall apart and this is our warning sign that something needs to change. It's the same with the body, when the body is in balance it works efficiently but when it is out of balance things start to go wrong, we get ill, the body shuts down because it wants to heal itself but what do we do? We 'pop pills' to enable us to 'carry on'. We don't listen to the body and we wonder why our immune system is 'shot to pieces' we pick up bug after bug and we just don't seem able to shrug it off. The human race is gradually losing the ability to listen to our bodies and this is manifesting itself more and more as a real decline in health and well being.

## **Cardiovascular System**

Surya Namaskar provides all of the key health benefits of Yoga in a very succinct package. It is a holistic exercise that provides physical health benefits, but also mental or emotional as well as spiritual benefits. The obvious advantage of Surya Namaskar is the workout it provides for the muscles, but it also benefits joints, ligaments and the skeletal system by improving posture, flexibility and balance.

In addition to these physical benefits, Surya Namaskar practice stimulates and conditions virtually every system in the body. It is good for the heart and stimulates the cardiovascular system. It oxygenates the blood and helps strengthen the heart. Surya Namaskar is good for the digestive system and the nervous system. It stimulates the lymphatic system and supports respiratory system health, as well.

Practicing Surya Namaskar also benefits the Endocrine system and enables the various endocrinal glands to function properly. These include the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands as well as the adrenal gland, testes and ovaries.

Like most forms of exercise, Surya Namaskar provides mental benefits to regular practitioners. You will feel wonderful after performing the Sun Salutation. It is relaxing and rejuvenating, and tension, stress and anxiety melt away as you perform Surya Namaskar.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

Surya Namaskar is an excellent alternative to caffeine and other stimulants. If you suffer from insomnia or sleep disturbances, you will find practicing Surya Namaskar aids in helping you fall asleep without the need for depressants.

With regular practice, Surya Namaskar is an excellent way to manage stress and alleviate depression. You will expend a tremendous amount of energy as you move through the two sets of poses. Surya Namaskar teaches you to concentrate, and learning to achieve the poses is incredibly gratifying.

## **Digestive System**

Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend) gives an intense stretch to the entire back of the body. It stretches the hamstring muscles and increases flexibility in the hip joints. It stretches and straightens the spine, returning it to its correct alignment. It regenerates the intervertebral cartilages and it stimulates circulation to each of these areas, in particular, the nerves and muscles of the spine. This is enhanced by having the heart at approximately the same level as the head (reducing pressure on the cardiovascular system). This extra blood flow can then calm and balance the brain and nervous system.

The other important benefit of paschimottanasana, is that it tones and massages the abdomen and digestive organs: Including the liver, pancreas, spleen, kidneys, and adrenal glands. Thus digestion and elimination through the Gastrointestinal tract are improved. Paschimottanasana is also beneficial for the reproductive system (particularly in women as it is an internal system).

Muscular system – It stretches the muscles of the back side of the body from head to the cervical region. It contracts the muscles of the anterior part of the body. This creates pressure on the thorax & abdomen, improving the process of respiration & the functions of the intra abdominal glands especially the secretions.

- Improves the flexibility of the lumbar region, the hips & thigh ( back side of thigh & calf)
- Improves the blood circulation in the back region & tones up the spinal nerves.
- Improves alignment of the vertebral column.
- Removes the fat from the hips, the abdomen & thigh region.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **Endocrine System**

The metabolism of our body is regulated by the endocrine system, particularly the thyroid. Regularly practicing Yoga is believed to be extremely beneficial for the endocrine system because each asana helps in stimulating the endocrine organs, particularly the thyroid and parathyroid glands. When performing the various Yoga postures, the body is compressed, stretched and twisted at different angles; this helps in massaging the glands related to the endocrine system, increasing blood flow to them, and regulating their function.

Under hypothyroidism, as the name suggests, the bloodstream lacks the necessary thyroid hormone. In this condition, the thyroid gland is regarded as being “under active” as it does not produce the required amount of the thyroid hormone that is needed for the proper functioning of the body.

Sarvangasana (The Shoulder Stand Pose) is said to be the most effective asana for treatment of an under active thyroid gland. In this pose, the body is inverted, and as a result, the blood flow is reversed, allowing the blood to flow to the neck, where the thyroid gland is located. This increased blood flow to the neck region is believed to stimulate and nourish the thyroid gland by providing it with the much needed oxygenated blood.

- The Jalandhar Bandha improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands due to the increase oxygen and blood. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by the pituitary gland and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all other systems of the body and the reduction of emotional and mental stress .
- Stagnant blood from the lower regions of the body, i.e. legs and abdomen is drained to the heart thereby improving the supply of fresh blood to these parts and the whole circulatory system. Blood supply to the head area i.e. brain, eyes, ears, nose and throat is improved thereby improving their functioning. Therefore all of the pelvic and abdominal area circulation, ear, throat and nose ailments are improved.
- The lung capacity is increased as the diaphragm, which is the muscle of respiration, has to work against gravity in this posture, this helps in the abdominal respiration and is therefore helpful in the treatment of asthma. Toxins in the respiratory system are drained thereby improving the respiratory system.
- Prevents and cures varicose veins.
- Detoxification of the body due to improved efficiency of the organs of the body which leads to youthfulness and anti-ageing effects
- Normalizes body weight due to its effect on the thyroid.



# Complete Approach to Health

- Due to the effect this asana has on the hormonal system, particularly the thyroid, it balances the circulatory, digestive, reproductive and nervous system.
- Due to the increased blood flow to the head the mind is tranquilized, stress and psychological disturbances are removed.
- The increased blood flow can be beneficial for those who suffer from headaches, though it should not be practiced at the time of headache.
- The thymus gland is stimulated which boosts the immune system.
- It balances the parathyroid glands which ensures regeneration and normal development of the bones.
- It releases the normal gravitational pressure from the anus muscles which helps with hemorrhoids.
- The nerves passing through the neck are toned and the neck flexibility is increased.
- The digestive system is greatly improved due to the increase in blood circulation and drainage of stagnant blood.
- The pranic flow is harmonized, increasing energy and having a positive effect on all the body systems.

## **Muscular System**

Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

Muscular system – Toning of abdominal & thigh muscles, intercostals muscles.

### *Other benefits of Matsyasana....*

- Endocrine system – It causes a stretching on the thyroid gland, there by improving the function of the same.
- Digestive system- It stretches the intestines, liver, pancreas, bladder and other abdominal organs which results in improved functioning and efficiency.
- Circulatory system – Reduces blood supply to legs and redirects it to reproductive organs (pelvic organs). Stagnant blood around vertebral column is drained. Improves supply to brain and face, also puts stretch on carotid artery.
- Reproductive system – Due to increased blood supply the function is improved.
- Respiratory system – Toning of intercostals muscles help in deep breathing, so it is helpful in asthma & bronchitis



# Complete Approach to Health

## **Nervous System**

Halasana (Plough Pose)

Nervous system – Improves the working of spinal nerves, pressurizes the nerves in the neck region which are predominantly sympathetic.

### ***Other benefits of Halasana.....***

- Digestive system – Improves the function of abdominal organs, especially the pancreas is stimulated for secretion of insulin. The breathing movements of diaphragm help to massage the abdominal organs.
- Muscular system – Improves the tone and strength of back muscles as the back is folded, also the leg muscles and abdominal muscles, it also removes the rigidity of the back muscles.
- Endocrine system - Improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by these main glands and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all the systems of the body.

## **Respiratory System**

Dhanurasana (Bow Posture)

Respiratory system - It widens and opens the chest area thereby improving respiration relieving asthma, bronchitis and is helpful for breast development.

### ***Other benefits of Dhanurasana.....***

- Abdominal - The body weight is balanced on the abdominal muscles and they are given pressure so that the intra-abdominal organs, i.e. stomach, liver, spleen pancreas and intestines, are massaged by the change in pressure. It also improves the secretions of these organ. It improves the peristalsis of the intestine and relieves constipation. The blood flow to the abdominal organs is also improved. With regular practice it will reduce the fat around the abdomen and thigh areas.
- Muscular system - This asana creates strength in the muscles of the spinal cord and the nerves of the back. It also strengthens the muscles of the arms and thighs.
- Circulation - There is an improvement in the circulation of lymph and blood throughout the body especially the arms and legs due to the toning of the muscles.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **Skeletal System**

All asanas are designed to improve health and bring energy to the body and mind. Asanas free all the body's different joints, opening them up to relieve pressure on the protective cartilage and restore correct alignment of the bones. By keeping muscles and ligaments healthy and posture correct, you can prevent damage to the joints.

## **Reproductive System**

Being a gentle form of exercise, it is especially ideal through the various phases of pregnancy, including conception.

Trying to conceive can be an exciting, emotional and stressful process. Practicing Yoga can boost your chances of getting pregnant, while improving overall health. Yoga is known to boost hormones and stimulate the reproductive organs. It is also very effective in combating stress. Stress can put a spanner in the works as it disrupts the menstrual cycle and delays ovulation. For men stress has a telling negative impact on the sperm count. Yoga helps relieve the stress and relax the body.

Bridge Pose – Is an excellent posture to stimulate the hormones. Lie on the floor with your knees bent and feet as close to your buttocks as you possibly can. As you exhale lift your pelvis off the floor so that it is parallel with the ground. Hold the pose for as long as you can before returning to the original position. Repeat movement. Don't forget to breathe through the routine.

## **Immune System**

The immune system is a multilayered defense structure that battles the millions of bacteria, microbes, viruses, toxins and parasites vying to invade the body. Good health and a strong immune system are synonymous, and a fully functioning immune system is crucial to well being.

Many factors have a positive or negative effect on the immune system's efficiency. Some causes of a weakened immune system may include:

- Toxins in the environment and/or food
- Poor diet
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Lack of exercise
- Stress

While a range of symptoms from the common cold to pneumonia may result from a weakened immune system, basic Yoga practices bolster the immune system and help to optimize its functionality.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **How Yoga Affects the Immune System**

A strong immune system not only leads to less occurrences of illness, but also helps prevent more extreme manifestations of illness. A few of the ways that Yoga positively impacts the immune system include:

- Supporting the thymus gland
- Improving circulation
- Improving oxygen flow and aiding the transfer of energy from nutrients to cells
- Improving the flow of the sinuses and flushing out mucous from the lungs
- Increasing lung mobility
- Massaging and rejuvenating internal organs
- Relaxing the nervous system and boosting immune response

## **Stimulating the Thymus Gland through Chest-Opening Poses and Upper Back Bends**

The locus of the immune system, the thymus gland occupies the area between the heart and the breastbone and is responsible for producing T-Cells, a heterogeneous group of cells essential in protecting the body against invasions by foreign organisms.

## **Integumentary**

An often-overlooked benefit of Simhasana (Lion Pose) is that helps keep the platysma (a flat, thin, rectangular-shaped muscle on the front of the throat) firm as we grow older. The platysma, when contracted, pulls down on the corners of the mouth and wrinkles the skin of the neck. Simhasana gives stretch to face and arms and relieves tension in the chest and face. It can also relieve a sore throat and other respiratory ailments.

## **Excretory**

This consists of the kidneys, the ureters, the bladder, the urethra, as well as the skin, and the large intestines. The kidneys (two in number) are situated in the abdominal cavity on the two sides of the body. They contain a network of very minute tube like structures through which blood is strained, and the unwanted materials like extra amount of water, salts, waste products of digestion and other biochemical processes, are separated from the blood. This forms the urine, which goes down from the kidneys through two tubes called the ureters, to the bladder. The urine is passed out of the body through a duct called urethra.

The skin provides another arrangement for getting rid of excess salts and water in the blood. This is achieved by minute glands called the sweat glands which are situated under the skin. When the blood flows through the sweat glands, they separate some salts and water, along with some other unwanted materials, from the blood. The separated fluid



# Complete Approach to Health

comes to the surface in the form of sweat, and evaporates. This helps to keep the body temperature normal during hot summer days.

Even though Uttanasana is a simple pose, it has numerous benefits.

- It is a stretching pose, which strengthens the muscles of the legs, hips, hamstrings, thighs, knees, calves, as well as the spine, making them more flexible.
- It tones and stimulates the organs in the abdominal area, such as the kidneys and liver, and also helps to improve digestion.
- It is useful for relieving cramps and pains during menstruation.
- By calming the brain, it provides relief for stress and anxiety, and is useful in treating depression.
- It has been found helpful for reducing, fatigue, insomnia and headache.
- It has also been effective for treating high blood pressure, asthma, sinusitis, osteoporosis and infertility.

## Benefits of Yoga

You've probably heard that Yoga is good for you. Maybe you have even tried Yoga and discovered that it makes you feel better. But what are the specific health benefits can you expect to enjoy from doing Yoga regularly?

Hatha Yoga is an ancient science designed to rejuvenate every part of the body and calm the mind; it involves a series of physical exercises and breathing techniques that develop flexibility, endurance and well-being. While most people realise that Yoga is generally good for you, they probably don't know just how numerous the benefits of practicing it really are. One of the beautiful things about doing Yoga is that its impact on the mind is perhaps as impressive as its impact on the body. Here are some of the benefits one might expect to receive through regular Yoga practice.

- **Increasing Flexibility** – Yoga has positions that act upon the various joints of the body including those joints that are never really on the 'radar screen' let alone exercised. Stretching your tight body in new ways will help it to become more flexible, bringing greater range of motion to muscles and joints. Over time, you

can expect to gain flexibility in your hamstrings, back, shoulders, and hips. Yoga not only stretches the muscles, but the tendons, ligaments and other soft tissues as well. It also helps with lubrication of the joints and increases their range of motion. As a result, one can expect to have less pain, stiffness and tension.

- **Increasing lubrication of the joints, ligaments and tendons** – likewise, the well-researched Yoga positions exercise the different tendons and ligaments of



# Complete Approach to Health

the body. Surprisingly it has been found that the body which may have been quite rigid starts experiencing a remarkable flexibility in even those parts which have not been consciously work upon. Why? It is here that the remarkable research behind Yoga positions proves its mettle. Seemingly unrelated “non strenuous” Yoga positions act upon certain parts of the body in an interrelated manner. When done together, they work in harmony to create a situation where flexibility is attained relatively easily.

- **Massaging of ALL Organs of the Body** – Yoga is perhaps the only form of activity which massages all the internal glands and organs of the body in a thorough manner, including those – such as the prostate - that hardly get externally stimulated during our entire lifetime. Yoga acts in a wholesome manner on the various body parts. This stimulation and massage of the organs in turn benefits us by keeping away disease and providing a forewarning at the first possible instance of a likely onset of disease or disorder. One of the far-reaching benefits of Yoga is the uncanny sense of awareness that it develops in the practitioner of an impending health disorder or infection. This in turn enables the person to take pre-emptive corrective action
- **Complete Detoxification** – By gently stretching muscles and joints as well as massaging the various organs, Yoga ensures the optimum blood supply to various parts of the body. This helps in the flushing out of toxins from every nook and cranny as well as providing nourishment up to the last point. This leads to benefits such as delayed ageing, energy and a remarkable zest for life.
- **Excellent toning of the muscles** – Muscles that have become flaccid, weak or slothy are stimulated repeatedly to shed excess flab and flaccidity. Yoga helps shape long, lean muscles.
- **Strength** - Many Yoga poses require you to support the weight of your own body in new ways, including balancing on one leg (such as in Tree Pose) or supporting yourself with your arms (such as in Downward Facing Dog). Some exercises require you to move slowly in and out of poses, which also increases strength.
- **Pain Prevention** - Increased flexibility and strength can help prevent the causes of some types of back pain. Many people who suffer from back pain spend a lot of time sitting at a computer or driving a car. That can cause tightness and spinal compression, which you can begin to address with Yoga. Yoga also improves your alignment, both in and out of class, which helps prevent many other types of pain.
- **Better Posture** - Good posture requires strong core abdominal muscles, and as stated before, one of the benefits of Yoga is improved core strength. Another benefit is increased body awareness, thus you’ll be much quicker to notice when your posture is poor and you can easily correct it.



# Complete Approach to Health

- **Better Breathing** - Most of us breathe very shallowly into the lungs and don't give much thought to how we breathe. Yoga breathing exercises, called Pranayama, focus the attention on the breath and teach us how to better use our lungs, which benefits the entire body. Yoga teaches us to focus on the breath and encourages long, deep breaths. The result is that the lung capacity increases, and we take in more oxygen which benefits the overall body and the mind as well. Certain types of breath can also help clear the nasal passages and even calm the central nervous system, which has both physical and mental benefits.
- **Mental Calmness** - Yoga asana practice is intensely physical. Concentrating so intently on what your body is doing has the effect of bringing a calmness to the mind. Yoga also introduces you to meditation techniques, such as watching how you breathe and disengagement from your thoughts, which help calm the mind.
- **Stress Reduction** - Practicing Yoga can seem to have an almost magical effect on stress levels. For one thing it has the effect of helping to quieten the mind. It also is reported to lower stress hormones that the adrenal glands release. Physical activity is good for relieving stress, and this is particularly true of Yoga. Because of the concentration required, your daily troubles, both large and small, seem to melt away during the time you are doing Yoga. This provides a much-needed break from your stressors, as well as helping put things into perspective. The emphasis Yoga places on being in the moment can also help relieve stress, as you learn not to dwell on past events or anticipate the future. You will leave a Yoga class feeling less stressed than when you started.
- **Body Awareness:** Doing Yoga will give you an increased awareness of your own body. You are often called upon to make small, subtle movements to improve your alignment. Over time, this will increase your level of comfort in your own body. This can lead to improved posture and greater self-confidence.
- **Remain Young Forever!** - According to Yoga philosophy, it's the flexibility of the spine, not the number of years, that determines a person's age. Yoga slows down the aging process by giving elasticity to the spine, firming up the skin, removing tension from the body, strengthening the abdominal muscles, eliminating the possibility of a double chin, improving the tone of arm muscles, correcting poor posture, preventing roundness of the upper back and so on. Yoga lets you trade in characteristics of old age for characteristics of youth. Swami Nikhilananda wrote: "The result of Hatha Yoga is simply to make the Yogi live long. Health is the chief idea, the one goal of Hatha Yoga. The Yogi is determined not to fall sick.... and he never does. He lives long. A hundred years is nothing for him; he is quite young and fresh when he is one hundred and fifty, without one hair turned grey." Yoga will take years from your face and add years to your life. As you get older, you will take on an ageless appearance.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **Life with a Little Twist**

To improve digestion, add flexibility to the spine and lessen back pain key postures, or asanas, are spinal twists. While you twist envision wringing out a wet towel, and just imagine all of the toxins that will wash away with the rush of blood flow and energy that let loose upon releasing the twist in the spine.

Within the world of Yoga, a lot of teachings and practices go toward digestion. A key piece of a yogic life is to cleanse the body of impurities. The theory is that once the body is cleansed and healthy, then the energy that would normally go toward dealing with disease or discomfort can then go toward higher endeavours, such as deepening the inner life. Therefore, a sluggish digestive system is incompatible with good health, and twists are a great way to stimulate the digestive system and nudge the intestines.

You can do twists from all kinds of positions: seated, standing, lying with legs bent, lying with legs straight, squatting and kneeling. The integrity that you want to remember regardless from where you start the twist is yogic alignment, which can be reached with a deep inhale that lengthens the spine, and then an exhalation that takes you into the twist. The breath creates space within the vertebra keeping the twist safer. The safest place for your back is lying on the ground and drawing the knees upward. You can exhale them to the side for a gentle twist. In terms of back pain, tight muscles are often the culprits. The muscles knot up, compress the vertebrae and trigger discomfort.

Be mindful of your own body. Never do anything that causes a sharp, destructive pain, especially in the back. This is Yoga. The integrity is self-observation and learning from that observation, not pushing your body into greater pain. Conscious breathing is far more important than how deep the twist goes. Feel the breath in the front of the body as well as the back. This too can help the back muscles relax.

## **The Main Groups of Yoga Postures**

The main groups of Yoga postures are: standing, seated, reclining (prone & supine), forward bends, back bends, side bends, twists, inverted and balancing postures.

### **Standing Postures**

These poses invigorate the mind and body by eliminating tension, aches, and pains. Internally, these postures stimulate digestion, regulate the kidneys, and alleviate constipation, as well as improve circulation and breathing by developing the strength of the legs and the flexibility of the pelvis and lower back. Through regular practice, standing poses lend strength and mobility to the hips, knees, neck, and shoulders. On a psychological level, standing poses create confidence, enhance willpower, and strengthen character.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **Seated Postures**

Generally, these poses are considered calming, as they soothe the nerves, eliminate fatigue, and refresh the brain. They also help regulate blood pressure and assist in recuperation from illness, as well as promote restful sleep. Some poses are beneficial in that they increase flexibility in the lower back, hips and hamstrings.

## **Reclining Postures**

These poses fall into two categories: prone and supine poses. The prone poses are done facing the floor, either on the hands and knees or lying on the stomach. They rejuvenate and energize the body and can be especially strengthening for the arms and back. Supine poses are done while lying on the back. For the most part, these poses are more relaxing and restful. Reclining poses serve mainly to stretch the abdomen and increase the mobility of the spine and hips, thus opening the groin and strengthening the back, arms, and legs. The less strenuous of these poses traditionally are done at the end of a practice session to cool down the body and restore energy.

## **Forward Bends**

Forward bends improve the blood circulation, aid digestion and calm the emotions. They stretch the lower back and lengthen the hamstrings

## **Back Bends**

Back bends invigorate and encourage deep breathing. They open and energize the body and mind; they develop courage and lift depression. They open the chest, stimulate the nervous system, strengthen the arms and shoulders and increase flexibility of the spine.

## **Side Bends**

Side bends stimulate the main organs, for example the liver, kidneys, stomach, and spleen.

## **Twists**

These postures free, energize and balance the body. Sitting twists are the most intensive, as they increase the range of motion of the spine. They promote flexibility in the spine, hips and upper back, thus relieving backaches, headaches, and stiffness in the neck and shoulders. This group of postures also tones and stimulates the abdominal organs, thus aiding digestion and relieving constipation. Ideally, twisting postures are done after a series of sitting poses or forward bends, which gives the hips and spine a proper warm-up. When done after backbends, they tend to relieve any lower back discomfort.



# *Complete Approach to Health*

## **Inverted Postures**

Inverted postures reverse gravity, bringing fresh blood to the head and heart, thus revitalizing the mind and the whole body. These poses tone the internal organs and glandular system, stimulate brain function, improve circulation and refresh tired legs.

## **Balancing Postures**

Balancing postures develop lightness, strength and agility. They also help develop body control, muscle tone, coordination, and concentration.

In Yoga, the body is gently and skilfully manoeuvred in all directions. Consequently every muscle is stretched and toned. The internal organs are massaged, squeezed, and expanded, improving their general function. The skeletal system is flexed, extended, rotated, and twisted, creating greater joint mobility. The spine is encouraged to maintain a healthy, upright, and pain-free condition. The circulation is improved. The breathing capacity and elasticity of the lungs is enhanced.

*"Words fail to convey the total value of Yoga. It has to be experienced." - B.K.S. Iyengar*

