

# Yoga: Healing for ALL!

By Paola Feher

Many people come to yoga with the understanding that it helps in the healing process for joints, muscle injuries, and postural issues. But how many of you know the benefits that yoga has not just for the musculoskeletal system (muscles, bones, ligaments, tendons) but for the other systems of the body as well?

The cardiovascular system (which includes the heart), respiratory system (lungs, trachea, and all things related to breathing), digestive system (need we elaborate here?), nervous system, endocrine system (hormones), lymphatic system (responsible for the drainage of waste materials as well as functioning of the immune, cardiovascular and digestive systems), urinary and reproductive systems all are affected by the practice of yoga.

So for those of you that think of yoga as a glorified stretching routine, a workout, or a strange spiritual cult, let me see if I can shed some light on its benefits besides the obvious.

What sorts of conditions can yoga actually help cure, or mitigate the effects of? According to texts\*, there is very little it cannot cure: sciatica, carpal tunnel, scoliosis, muscle cramps, back aches, arthritis, inflammation, fibromyalgia, asthma, migraines, depression, varicose veins, high blood pressure, breathlessness, sinusitis, indigestion, acidity, irritable bowel, constipation, obesity, low immune system, fatigue, memory issues, insomnia, anxiety, and menstrual pain just to name a few. As a matter of fact, all of the above are complaints that I have heard in my office and have, at one time or another, successfully treated.

But HOW? As a yoga professional, my priority when a student comes in for evaluation is to be clear on what the individual is trying to achieve. It is my job to design a yoga routine that specifically addresses each student's needs. Let's take an example. Judy comes to me with migraines. We will likely do

some simple stretches for her neck and shoulders to increase the blood flow to the head. Depending on whether the migraines are hormone-related or stress-related, we'd then pursue additions to her practice. Gentle twisting motions will activate and tone the organs (and glands) in the core of the body: the liver, spleen, intestines, kidneys, adrenal glands

(responsible for much hormone manufacturing). Twisting the torso is like wringing out a sponge. It pulsates fresh blood and nutrients into the core of the body and takes the wastes away. The organs, made of smooth muscle, become healthier as we use and tone them. By toning and using the adrenals we effectively give our hormone-machine a

tune-up! If the migraines are stress-related, we could add a forward bend practice, which stimulates the relaxation (parasympathetic) response in the nervous system, and combine it with some meditation.

Ok. Judy is now taken care of. But John needs help. He suffers from depression. We prescribe backbends and inversions. Backbending postures do wonders for depression. They emphasize the inhale portion of the breath, and have an invigorating effect. Any of you who have suffered from depression, or been close to someone who is depressed, may have noted that the breath becomes short and superficial. But it is impossible to do a backbend without inhaling big! We also include inversion postures in John's practice. Inversion poses, where the head is below the heart, flush the brain with fresh blood. Such poses are invigorating, and they decrease the effects of fatigue, so commonly associated with depression.

The local doctor has referred Harry to our office for management of his high blood pressure. A stronger, faster practice that increases the heart rate will be beneficial to tone the heart. Inversions, with the feet above the heart, relax the stress on the heart primarily by aiding venous return with the effect of gravity.

The stories go on and on. For every person there is a unique story. And for every story there is a unique yoga practice that will not only mitigate symptoms, but oftentimes make them disappear completely. In this article, we have only begun to touch on the huge positive effects that yoga can have on our system as a whole. Yoga truly can heal, and it can heal ALL of your system. From your heart, to your breath, to your nervous system and beyond. So here's to health for all!

\*Iyengar, BKS, Light on Yoga, Schocken Books, New York, 1966.

\*Raman, Dr. Krishna, A Matter of Health, Eastwest Books, Chennai India, 1998

*Paola Feher founded Bozeman Center for the Healing Arts in 1997 after receiving her master's degree in biomechanics. Her training emphasizes observation of human bodies in motion, focusing on performance, injury prevention and rehabilitation. Paola is currently certified by the Yoga Alliance (E-RYT 500). Paola specializes in the treatment of chronic pain and injury rehabilitation. She can be contacted at [www.bozemanhealingarts.com](http://www.bozemanhealingarts.com).*

