

# *Yoga for the Soul*

Katyites Discover the Health Benefits of Yoga

Written by Kelly Isenberger



*M*any Katy residents have discovered that the ancient practice of yoga can be beneficial to their minds and bodies in today's stressful world. Yoga is an ancient practice originally founded in India, and it's been transformed over thousands of years, taken on various forms, and now is being practiced in the Western world by those seeking a healthier lifestyle. Doctors are even recommending yoga to patients dealing with chronic health issues. The overall aim of yoga is to bring the body, mind, and spirit into a greater unity and balance, and the result is a healthier, happier person.

### *Increasing Flexibility and Strength*

Over the years, yogis have discovered the many healthy benefits to the body and mind. Through various asanas, or poses, your whole body is moved in new ways. As a result, the muscles, ligaments, and tendons are greatly strengthened and stretched, resulting in greater flexibility and balance. As the muscles are worked, lactic acid is released, which is what causes most pain and stiffness in muscles. The asanas increase your range of motion and improve the spine, and a greater fluidity in daily movement is found. By practicing yoga, one also gains body awareness, and because of this, you know when you are slouching. The core or trunk of your body is also much stronger, resulting in better posture.

Karen Narum is an instructor for Fitness Journey, which began offering yoga to CHRISTUS St. Catherine Hospital employees and is now open to the community. Among the other health benefits listed, Narum adds, "Yoga also improves immune function, lowers triglyceride levels, conditions the circulatory system, lowers blood pressure and heart rate, lowers blood sugar, and promotes weight loss."

### *Reaching Complete Relaxation*

Perhaps one of the greatest reasons yoga is so beneficial in today's world is the stress release it offers. The asana is partnered with a deep breathing technique, called pranayama, which calms the body and the nervous system. It teaches the body to focus, and it

*"Yoga helps me to be more patient, calm, and peaceful."*

-Susan Holland, Katy Resident

quiets the mind. By breathing properly, you will also get the most from your asanas because you will be able to achieve a deeper, more proper pose. Greater lung capacity can also result, and stress hormone levels in the body are lowered.

Susan Holland, a Katy resident and yogi for 10 years says, "Yoga gives me a break where I can temporarily escape life. Yoga helps me to be more patient, calm, and peaceful." Like most yogis, Susan's favorite part is the shavasana, or relaxation, at the end. This is a short period where every muscle in your body is relaxed. It is at this point that the body and mind reaches its full potential for stress release. Shavasana is the complete relaxation of the body, mind, and spirit.

### *Creating a Healthy Lifestyle*

A healthy diet and positive thinking is also promoted in the practice of yoga. Yogis strive to live a healthy life beginning with their body and mind. Narum has taught yoga for 10 years, but now practices it personally every day. She says, "Yoga changed my life. The more I practiced it, the more health conscious I became. I used to be a smoker, but once I started yoga, I had to put them down. I also approach life differently, and am not as high strung."

### *Who Can Practice Yoga?*

Anyone can benefit from yoga. You don't have to be a certain age or have a certain amount of flexibility. As a beginner, you should be careful to choose classes that are at your level, and always tell the instructor if you have certain injuries, high blood pressure, or any other limitation. Holland says, "Yoga is not just an exercise, it is a combining of mind, body and spirit, so whatever the pose, you can just do it to your edge. Just think about actually being in

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the pose, and eventually you'll get there." Just learn the basics, and don't feel intimidated by all the jargon and poses. Melissa Smith, a Katy yoga and Pilates instructor, adds, "It's important to let go of all judgment, competition and expectations." Be patient with yourself and allow your body to move to its own limit.

### *Finding the Right Style*

There are many places in Katy that offer yoga classes. Some of them are specialty yoga studios and other classes are found at your local gym. Melissa explains, "When looking for an instructor or facility to take classes from, don't be afraid to ask for the instructor's qualifications and years of experience. There is an internationally recognized Yoga Alliance that most gyms require teachers to carry a certification through. At a minimum, your teacher should have a 200 hour RYT (registered yoga teacher) certification."

There are also different types of yoga, so you'll want to ask about their specific classes. The most common is Hatha yoga. It includes all the basics and is a slower paced class. Vinyasa yoga is more vigorous and will perform many sun salutations to warm up the muscles. Power yoga, which stems from Ashtanga yoga, includes all of the basics, but there is no break between poses, making it an aerobic exercise. Also look for kid's yoga classes or family yoga where the whole family can participate. There are many other styles of yoga as well. Find the class that is the best fit for you.



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## Preparing for Class

Before attending a class, ask if you need your own mat. Most places provide one, but purchasing your own mat is a plus. You will also want to wear yoga pants, shorts, or any other comfortable clothing that you can move freely in. You don't want anything that will hinder movement, make you self-conscious, or get in the way of your asanas. Make sure you practice yoga on an empty stomach, and drink plenty of fluids after your class.

Get started by joining a class, and learn the basics. You will see many healthy results soon after beginning yoga. The key is to continue your practice and keep growing and learning, pushing your body and mind further and further.

*KELLY ISENBERGER enjoys running and cycling. She's found that yoga is a great way to restore her body after intense workouts.*

## YOGA TRAINING RESOURCES in Katy



Interested in taking a yoga class? Call these local studios for more information, and tell them Katy Magazine sent you!

**Yoga West**  
281-579-2287

**Dahn Yoga and Tai Chi**  
832-237-9642

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