

Healthy Habits From Around the World



Yoga Unites Body, Mind & Spirit

Yoga is a program of precise posture and breathing exercises. People of all ages in any physical condition can do it. The practice of yoga began 5,000 years ago in India, and it may be the oldest known mind-body health system. As a complementary therapy, it is a good way to relax and lower stress and anxiety. The word "yoga" means "union" in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit.

The goal of yoga is to unite mind, body, and spirit to reach the highest possible levels of consciousness. It has been defined as a system of personal development.

There are many types of yoga, including mantra, shiva, siddha, and bhakti. The exercises of the popular hatha yoga are most commonly practiced in the US. Although the various schools of yoga differ in technique, they all have the same fundamental goal of uniting mind and body.

How does yoga work?

Yoga, a non-aerobic exercise, uses a series of posture and breathing exercises to create a sense of union and harmony within the individual. When the body is controlled through yoga's careful positions and stretching movements, muscles relax and circulation improves, which in turn releases tension and stress.

Correct breathing is also a vital part of yoga. Deep breathing through the diaphragm and special breathing patterns contribute to its beneficial effects. Exhaling in time with certain phases of movements, and inhaling at other times, help maintain postures and promote relaxation. Proper breathing promotes relaxation and is useful in maintaining yoga's many postures.

Although some of the postures seem to be extremely difficult to achieve, a basic principle of yoga is not to push beyond one's limits. A qualified teacher is essential to the proper development of yoga skills.

Best results come with practice

Yoga exercises can be done alone or in groups and classes. The best results come with regular practice.

As a complementary therapy, yoga can create a sense of well-being and may improve the quality of life for some patients with cancer. However, it's not a treatment for any disease and will not slow the growth or spread of a cancer.

Tai Chi

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese form of martial arts. It is a mind-body, self-healing system that uses movement, meditation, and breathing to improve health and well being. Research has shown tai chi is useful as a form of exercise that may improve posture, balance, muscle mass and tone, flexibility, stamina, and strength in older adults. Tai chi is also recognized as a method to reduce stress that can provide the same cardiovascular benefits as moderate exercise, such as lowered heart rate and blood pressure.

How is it Promoted For Use?

People who practice the deep breathing and physical movements of tai chi report it makes them feel more relaxed, younger, agile, and helps their circulation. Its slow, graceful movements, accompanied by rhythmic breathing, relax the body as well as the mind. Research has found that tai chi can reduce stress, lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart disease. There is also evidence that tai chi is particularly suited for older adults, or for others who are not physically strong or healthy. Proponents claim tai chi balances the flow of vital energy or life force called qi (or chi), which serves to prevent illness, improve general health, and extend life. It is also based on the theory of yin and yang (interaction of opposite forces). Practitioners claim tai chi is designed to balance yin and yang forces to achieve inner harmony.

What Does it Involve?

Tai chi students begin by learning a series of gentle, deliberate movements called forms. Each form contains between 20 to 100 moves, and requires up to 20 minutes to complete. Each form derives its name from nature, for example, "Wave Hands Like Clouds," or "Grasping the Bird's Tail." In order to balance the yin and yang, the movements are practiced in pairs of opposites. For example, a turn to the right follows one to the left. While performing these exercises, the individual is urged to pay close attention to his or her breathing, which is centered in the diaphragm. Tai chi relies entirely on technique rather than strength or power. Meditative concentration is focused on a point just below the navel, from which it is believed qi radiates throughout the body. Tai chi is taught in many health clubs, schools, and recreational facilities. Practitioners believe that daily practice is necessary in order to get the most benefit. Once an individual has mastered a form, it can be practiced at home.

Salsa...it's not Just for Chips Anymore

Salsa has become the best-selling condiment in North America, surpassing even tomato ketchup. Salsa is typically low in fat, cholesterol, and calories and is a fun way to add vegetables and fruits to your diet.

Uses for salsa:

- A dip for vegetables such as zucchini, cucumbers, and carrot rounds
- A condiment for fish, chicken, or beef
- A topping for pasta or baked potatoes
- A flavor booster for scrambled eggs
- A base for cooked sauces

“Salsa” is the Spanish word for sauce. It is also used to describe the popular dance style that is a mixture of Latin and Afro-Caribbean influences. Salsa dancing provides a great way to burn calories and stay in shape.

A Foreign Affair

Going out to eat doesn't have to ruin your diet. Here are some low-fat options to consider when you visit your favorite Mexican and Italian places.

Mexican Food

Eating light at a Mexican restaurant can be done... with the right choices.

- Whole-wheat tortillas, corn tortillas, soft tacos.
- Marinated vegetables, grilled chicken, fish Vera Cruz style.
- Fish tacos (grilled fish, coleslaw light on mayonnaise, chopped tomato, salsa).
- Sour cream blended with non-fat yogurt, baked chips.
- And of course salsa – tastes great and contributes to your vegetable count.

Italian Food

This Mediterranean diet has been described as one way to avoid heart disease.

- Pasta E Fagioli (flavorful pasta with white beans)
- Minestrone soup
- Crusty bread, go light or skip the butter and olive oil
- Pasta with marinara (red sauce) and meatballs but skip the meat sauce, or try red clam sauce instead.
- Chicken cacciatore (tomato based sauce)
- Fruit for dessert.

Are You Living Smart?

Take this quiz and find out!

Yes No

- I eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- I eat at least 6 servings of bread, rice, pasta and cereal every day.
- I drink reduced-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt, and seldom eat high-fat cheeses.
- I rarely eat high-fat meat like bacon, hot dogs, sausage, steak or ground beef.
- I take it easy on high-fat baked goods such as pies, cakes, cookies, sweet rolls and doughnuts.
- I rarely add butter, margarine, oil, sour cream or mayonnaise to foods when I'm cooking or at the table.
- I try to maintain a healthy weight.
- I am physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- I usually take the stairs instead of waiting for an elevator.
- I try to spend most of my free time being active, instead of watching TV or sitting at the computer.
- I never, or only occasionally, drink alcohol.

You checked “Yes” on 9-12 of 12 questions.

Good for you!

You're living smart! Keep up the good habits and keep looking for ways to improve.

You checked “Yes” on 5-8 of 12 questions.

Not bad!

You're halfway there! You still have a way to go. Look at your “No” answers to help you decide which areas of your diet need to be improved or whether your physical activity level should be increased.

You checked “Yes” on 0-4 questions.

Diet alert!

Your diet is probably too high in fat and too low in plant foods like fruits, vegetables and grains. You may want to take a look at your eating habits and find ways to make some changes.