

The Serene Heart



Americans looking for a calming workout are hitting the mat in ever-increasing numbers, making yoga an incredibly popular form of exercise in the U.S. Once the territory of spiritualists, yoga isn't just a fun way to de-stress or lose weight; it may actually reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Though yoga is credited with wide-ranging health benefits, including easing chronic back pain, depression, diabetes, menopause, obesity, and even fatigue in cancer patients, perhaps its most important

contribution is its powerful boost to your heart health.

Research suggests that yoga's interconnected combination of stretching and muscle activity used to achieve physical poses, deep controlled breathing, and focusing and clearing the mind through meditation may provide special heart-health benefits and offer distinct advantages to those with cardiovascular disease.

How can yoga improve your cardiovascular health?

- Yoga gently works your muscles, which is good for your blood vessels and heart.
- Physical activity like yoga helps to control your blood sugar by helping your muscles increase their sensitivity to insulin.
- Slower, deeper breathing temporarily lowers your blood pressure.
- Yoga has been shown to lower other cardiovascular risk factors, including cholesterol, stress hormones, resting heart rates, and the progression of atherosclerosis – hardening of arteries.
- The meditative component of yoga helps to stabilize the endothelium, or blood vessel lining, which contributes to cardiovascular disease when irritated.

There are many different kinds of yoga, from gentle to very active forms. Although research suggests that most people can benefit from any style of yoga, the more peaceful hatha yoga, with its slower, easier movements, is great for beginners.



Here are a few tips for finding the right yoga class for you:

- Look for a yoga class that offers the complete package: poses, breathing and meditation. The three are interconnected and work together to give you – and your heart – a total workout.
- Look for a class that matches your level of ability and experience. If it is your first time, ask if it is appropriate for beginners and if it will be easy for you to follow along.
- Decide what your expectations from the class are, and then find out if the class is aimed toward your needs or if it is geared more for people looking for other benefits.
- Ask about the instructor's qualifications, and find out if he or she has experience working with students with your specific needs or health concerns. A good instructor should create a safe, positive environment for all of his or her students by helping them to modify poses to meet individual abilities and limitations.
- No matter which style of yoga you choose, you do not have to do every pose. A good instructor will understand if a pose is too uncomfortable or if you are unable to hold it as long as requested. You should be encouraged to explore rather than exceed your limits.

Though yoga is not a cure for heart disease, it is a valuable tool for helping to manage cardiovascular disease and keeping your heart healthy. Work with your physician to develop a plan that is right for you and your family.



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