

Wellness: Achieve Sound Body & Mind with Gentle Yoga for Stress Management

Life is full of surprises. And with life comes stress. There is a growing awareness of the link between our state of mind and physical health. Studies show that chronic stress inhibits our capacity to heal and increases the likelihood of developing physical and emotional problems, such as high blood pressure, ulcers, immune dysfunction and depression. It's not always easy to slow down or even recognize what our bodies are telling us we need. Preventative care — yoga, acupuncture, meditation, massage and deep breathing — enhances our health and well-being, helping us live a more rejuvenated life every day. And, it helps us manage the stress of a high-speed, non-stop life.



Below are some gentle stress management techniques you can incorporate into your wellness regimen to help you find balance.

- ❖ Yoga is a physical and mental practice that involves the body, mind and spirit. The practice originated in India and is designed to enhance awareness; create a mind-body-spirit balance; cleanse; heal and strengthen the body; and improve fitness. Yoga includes specific movements or postures and various breathing techniques. Yoga's gentle, mindful and controlled movements aid in stress management and can provide a non- or low-impact workout for people in almost any physical condition. Yoga's benefits relate to stress reduction, flexibility and relaxation which affect your health and overall well being.
- ❖ Acupuncture works directly with the body's energy, or *qi*. Practitioners believe that all illnesses are a result of the natural flow of energy through the body becoming stuck, depleted or weakened, thus making the individual susceptible to illness. Acupuncture benefits the rebalance of *qi* through treatment of specific acupoints. Treatment is effective in removing these energy obstructions, allowing for greater health and overall well being through stronger immune system function, faster recovery, decreased stress and improved circulation.
- ❖ Meditation, like yoga, is a very effective stress-reducer. The physical act of meditation generally consists of simply sitting quietly, focusing on your breath, a word or phrase. Not only does meditation have a mental effect on the body, but researchers have found that it has a profound physiological effect. Studies have shown that, among other benefits, meditation can help reverse heart disease, reduce pain and enhance the body's immune system, enabling it to better fight disease.
- ❖ Massage offers a non-invasive approach based on the body's ability to heal itself and helps you manage stress. The Chinese have been using massage for all kinds of medical conditions for centuries. Having a massage does more than just relax your body and mind. The benefits are vast and include an increase in circulation; boost of the immune system; reduces hypertension; stimulates the flow of lymph, the body's natural defense system, against toxic invader; relaxes and softens injured and overused muscles; increases joint flexibility; releases endorphins; decreases anxiety; and enhances sleep quality.
- ❖ Deep breathing is the fastest way to relax. By changing the rhythm of your breathing, you expand the lung's air pockets, invoking the relaxation response and massaging the lymphatic system. This way of breathing also releases endorphins and relaxes muscles. To breathe correctly, take breathes that are long and slow to allow the body to absorb more of the inhaled oxygen. Breathe in through your nose, nice and slow; exhale through pursed lips just as slowly. As you breathe feel the motion of your stomach. If your rib cage is expanding, keep trying and focus on breathing with your diaphragm. Relax and repeat until you are comfortable.

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