

How Yoga Can Help Your Mental Health

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With mental health being a vital part of a person's life, it is important to know and remember how to take care of it. One popular solution is the practice of yoga. It increases body awareness and relieves all of the stress and tension you might be feeling in your body. AZFoothills had the opportunity to speak with Natalie Harden, the lead instructor from a local yoga studio, [YogaSix](#) in regard to the topic, and she touched on advice for beginners, and how beneficial it can be for your mental health.

How long have you been teaching yoga?

I have been teaching for six and a half years now.

How does yoga help those struggling with their mental health?

Yoga is a wonderful tool for managing mental health because of the adaptability of the practice. Strong physical practices can help you feel more empowered and grateful for your body. Restorative practices provide rest and relief. A key aspect of yoga is practicing non-attachment, which can be challenging for everyone—even experienced students—but is truly one of the greatest gifts of yoga. Through this practice, we learn to acknowledge and respect our feelings without letting them define ourselves.

Do you recommend yoga as a form of aid to help those struggling with mental health?

In one word, yes! We know that the mind and body are deeply connected and that the state of one often heavily influences the state of the other. A yoga practice is a valuable tool for those looking to build a strong mental health regimen and should be used in conjunction with other tools such as therapy, social connection, and proper nutrition.

What steps should someone take to start their yoga journey?

Research studios in your area or ask friends for a recommendation. Attend a beginner-friendly class where the teacher takes more care to really explain things. At YogaSix, we offer a class called 101, where there is time built-in for questions and discussion before and after class. Know that the first few classes will be challenging in the way anything new usually is, but that with time you'll build familiarity and confidence. Another helpful action is to get to know your yoga teacher and others in the studio where you practice. Yoga is all about connection- within yourself and with others! You'll find a supportive and warm community in your yoga studio.

How often should a participant do yoga to help better themselves?

I generally recommend that new students commit to 3 times per week, but it is important to set yourself up for success and make realistic goals. Decide what you can manage in your current schedule and try it out. Remember that any time on your mat is better than none. Don't feel guilty for taking a day off, or going for a more mellow practice when you need it.

How does yoga make the body stronger?

Yoga is a low-impact physical practice that optimizes nearly every system in the body. It increases bone density and muscle tone through body-weight bearing movements. The emphasis on steady and managed breathing strengthens the lungs and can increase lung capacity and oxygenation of the body. Moving the body is important for increasing blood and lymphatic circulation which can support the immune system by flushing out toxins and improving digestion.

Do you have any advice for those who are wanting to start yoga?

Just start! Regardless of your age or physical ability, there is a yoga practice for you. Don't be intimidated by those who seem to know everything- remember they were once beginners, too!