

Reflections & Commentary

On Yoga, Body, and Mind

SAM DWORKIS

A complete collection of 50 essays on yoga, the body, and the mind.

Excerpts may be shared or reprinted with credit to
Sam Dworkis and www.extensionyoga.com

Intense Yoga Exercise as We Age

A Brief History of Yoga

by Sam Dworkis

Somewhere in India about 5,000 years ago, groups of deeply religious people wanted to intensify their disciplines by spending prolonged periods of time in prayer. Their minds were willing, but not their bodies. In order to learn more about controlling their bodies, the ancients observed that in nature, the bodies of animals were almost always living in perfect balance and harmony with their environment exhibiting balanced flexibility, strength and endurance. When hungry, animals ate. When tired, they rested. And when injured, animals sought refuge in a safe and quiet place until they either healed or died. Animals, they observed, showed little fear or anxiety; but when they did, it was brief because animals did not appear to worry about their past or future (as most of us do today).

From generation to generation, for thousands of years, and in concert with a deeply involved system of spiritual practices, a codified method of physical exercises, which emulated the perfection of nature, developed. Those religious ancients were Hindus and they called their methodology for balancing the body and mind: “yoga.”

They lived mostly in a tropical environment, were strict vegetarians, wore minimal clothing, and lived literally close to the earth. As such, they were extraordinarily supple and used their exercises to help them sit for prolonged periods in order to enhance their spiritual practices.

Fast forwarding now to the turn of the twentieth century, history records that several Hindu yoga-masters traveled to the west in order to share their religious and cultural beliefs. Along with their faith and thousands of years of yogic practices behind them, these yoga disciples, or Swamis as they were called, began to lecture and teach. The Swamis initiated a number of different approaches to yoga; most were Hindu based spiritual practices and many of them incorporated the physical components of yoga. In actuality, the physical components of yoga were but a small part of most of their overall

Yoga Is Not a Religion

by Sam Dworkis

The word, yoga, is derived from Sanskrit, one of the world's most ancient languages. In its simplicity, the word yoga means: "creating union or balance in a person's body, mind, and spirit."

Yoga originally developed in the tropical south of India many thousands of years ago, by ascetics living a strict and disciplined lifestyle. Through the millennia, the "yogis" as they were known, were vegetarians, wore minimal clothing, and lived literally close to the earth learning directly from nature.

They observed that the bodies of animals in nature were almost always perfectly balanced. They exhibited near perfect flexibility, strength and endurance and lived in equilibrium with their environment. When hungry, animals ate. When tired, they rested. And when injured, animals sought refuge in a quiet and protected environment until they healed or died. Animals, the yogis observed, showed little fear or anxiety; but when they did, it didn't last long because animals, they surmised, did not appear concerned about their past or future.

For thousands of years, the yogis among other things, developed and codified a system of exercises that emulated the perfection of nature. The ancient yoga texts described how their physical practices enhanced both their health and spirituality. Now, keep in mind that these ancient people lived in totally protected environments and spent virtually all of their time in devotional prayer, which included the exercises.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, yoga was practiced only in India and only by Hindus. That's why yoga had originally been associated with Hinduism. But to be sure; the physical and mental components of the yoga most of us practice today here in the West have nothing whatsoever to do with anyone's religion or belief system. "Yoga," simply means "the movement toward union or balance."

Through the centuries, many styles of yoga developed from the religious to the physical to the

etherial, but only a few became popular in the West. Here in the West, some yoga practices still are based upon religion while other popular approaches focus primarily upon physical exercises while other approaches focus only upon breath control.

However most yoga taught in the West today is a combination of varying degrees of physical exercises and breath control, and is commonly known as "Hatha Yoga." And within Hatha Yoga, there are many different styles; some based upon more athletic forms that generate enormous physical stamina, strength, and flexibility while others focus upon remedial exercises for recovery of illness, injury, or just growing older; and there are many styles of yoga in between.

Whatever the form, yoga helps the practitioner move toward enhanced physical and emotional balance. Whether approached remedially, athletically, or anywhere in between, its ultimate aim remains unchanged. Just as the ancient ascetics looked to the natural world thousands of years ago to find stillness and equilibrium, today's practitioner uses breath and movement to quiet the noise of modern life. Ultimately, yoga bridges the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary wellness, offering a timeless roadmap back to ourselves.

Yoga Means Different Things to Different People

by Sam Dworkis

When people think “yoga,” different concepts emerge. Some believe it is an Eastern religion while others believe it is only an exercise system. Some think yoga is passive meditation; others think it only consists of basic stretching exercises, while others believe it also promotes strength and endurance. Confused? Read on!

Yoga can improve physical conditioning, but it is not exactly exercise. Yoga develops concentration and quiets the mind, but it is not exactly meditation. Originally a part of the Hindu religion, contemporary yoga has absolutely nothing to do with religion.

So if yoga is NOT exercise, or meditation, or religion, then what is it? Well, that depends primarily on who’s teaching it. But first, a bit of history:

Derived from an ancient language, “yoga” simply means: “union or balance of body, mind, and spirit.” Yoga developed thousands of years ago in India by Hindu priests living a strict and disciplined lifestyle. Through the millennia, the “yogis” as they were known, were vegetarians, wore minimal clothing, and lived literally close to the earth learning directly from nature. They were more flexible than Gumby.

These ancients observed that in nature, the bodies of animals were nearly perfectly balanced exhibiting profound flexibility, strength and endurance. They were in balance with their environment. The ancient yogis observed that animals ate when hungry, rested when tired, stayed quiet when injured, and showed little fear or anxiety. But when they did, it was brief because animals did not appear to worry about their past or future. The ancient yogis developed yoga to imitate the effects of nature.

Through millennia, yogis developed and codified a system including both exercises and breath control, using it to enhance their health and spirituality. In our western youth-oriented society, the more popular forms of yoga range from the restorative and quiet, all the way to extreme forms of physically challenging aerobic yoga. Yet most are based upon an ancient system that tries to

enhance a person's flexibility. Unfortunately, people drop out because they are not flexible enough to "perform," or because they get hurt.

Personally, I rejected the older "classical" system many years ago because I believe appropriate yoga should create a balance between strength and endurance, as well as flexibility. When adapted to honor the variable nature of today's women and men of all ages and levels of capacity, I believe yoga can be a significant vehicle for both maintaining and improving health. It is also profoundly spiritual because when appropriately practiced, and when used in combination with gentle yoga breath control, the actual "balance and union" of nature can be experienced.

Through the years, I adapted yoga so that "normal" people could safely practice in a way that has absolutely nothing to do with flexibility, and especially with anyone's religion. In order to maximize yoga's potential and minimize its liability, the yoga I teach is based upon known physiological principles and laws, which are presented in my free yoga educational website, www.extensionyoga.com.

So, what is yoga? From a Western approach, it is a system that when appropriately practiced, promotes wellness of body, mind, and spirit. It promotes a physical and emotional balance between strength and flexibility, which builds functional endurance. In so doing, yoga quiets the mind and promotes a profound feeling of well-being.

It's at that point when yoga truly becomes: "Meditation in Action."

world-class athletes or those aging or managing chronic illness, or safe to honor their body's limits while expanding its potential.

Not All Yoga Is Alike

by Sam Dworkis

I always smile when people tell me, “I tried yoga, but I didn’t like it.” To me, that sounds a lot like saying, “I went on one date, but they weren’t my type, so I stopped dating altogether.”

I am less amused, however, when people say, “I stopped going because I wasn’t flexible enough.” But the response that concerns me most is: “Yoga hurt, so I quit.”

Historically, classical yoga was developed in India thousands of years ago by extraordinarily flexible practitioners. While those early pioneers could accomplish astounding physical feats, much of traditional classical yoga is simply inappropriate for modern Western bodies and lifestyles.

When yoga arrived in the West about a century ago, it began to evolve into many distinct approaches. Some forms remained strictly traditional, while others adapted to incorporate the tenets of modern exercise physiology. Today, yoga spans a vast spectrum:

Yoga Styles: Certain practices are purely physical, while others are entirely spiritual. Some styles are so aerobically intense that only the fittest survive, while others are so slow and meditative that students quit out of sheer boredom.

Teaching Styles: In “follow-the-leader” classes, instructors demonstrate poses while practicing alongside the class, leaving students to keep up as best they can. Other instructors demonstrate a pose first before guiding students into it, while some don’t demonstrate at all—relying solely on verbal cues to talk students through the movement.

Instructor Expertise: Some instructors teach strictly what they were taught, regardless of whether they can comfortably perform the exercises themselves. Others teach only what they personally can do. In these environments, students who thrive are those able to adapt to their teacher’s body; those who can’t often quit.

Training Backgrounds: While most instructors today complete a formal teacher-training program, these courses vary wildly—ranging from a single weekend to several months or even years of intensive study.

The core issue is that well-meaning instructors typically teach the single style they were trained in. When a style is designed for athletically supple individuals, it creates a major barrier for someone who is middle-aged, out of shape, naturally stiff, recovering from an illness, or dealing with a past injury. For these individuals, a standard class is often either far too demanding or completely ineffective.

Because yoga varies so wildly, prospective students must choose their instructors with care. I have made yoga my life’s work for fifty years. Throughout my journey, I have practiced as a fit athlete, but I have also practiced as a chronically ill and injured individual. To understand how yoga can be tailored to the full diversity of Western bodies, I studied kinesiology, anatomy, physiology, and numerous yoga disciplines across the United States, Europe, and India. It was through my time in India that I learned firsthand why classical yoga must adapt to fit our modern lives.

To bridge this gap, I developed

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

by Sam Dworkis

Cathy, my local post office clerk, excitedly asked me as I stepped up to the counter: "Did you see that yoga article in Monday's paper? I thought you said anyone can do yoga!"

Shipping books to readers around the world takes me to the post office several times a week. In a rapidly growing community, our local post office remains a welcome sanctuary of small-town warmth. Rich's corny humor and Cathy's upbeat nature consistently turn routine errands into pleasant visits. Over the years, we've shared light conversation about my work and what yoga actually is—and is not.

Which brings us back to that newspaper article.

Accompanying the text were prominent photographs of a young, extraordinarily flexible woman contorting her body into positions that Cathy—and most adults over thirty—would consider excruciatingly painful, if not outright impossible.

Even though the article itself accurately described five different approaches to yoga, ranging from gentle and accessible to highly athletic, those nuance-filled paragraphs didn't stand a chance against the imagery. Most readers took one look at the photos and declared "Forget it, I can't do that," and turned straight to the comics. A picture really is worth a thousand words.

Unfortunately, this highlights a systemic issue in how popular media portrays yoga. Time and again, outlets showcase nimble, hyper-flexible young people executing unattainable poses. On the rare occasion an older practitioner is featured, it is almost always someone who has practiced yoga for decades and possesses a body far outside the average norm.

Having studied exercise physiology and having taught movement for over thirty years, I know firsthand that yoga—when appropriately adapted—is arguably one of the finest exercise modalities available. It offers profound health benefits for individuals of every age and fitness level, not just the naturally flexible.

The biological reality is straightforward: younger bodies possess an immense capacity to handle extreme mechanical stress. In fact, evolutionary biology designed young adults to push physical limits, bounce back quickly, and thrive under stress. When a young person sees an extreme yoga photo, they feel challenged or inspired.

For older adults, or those navigating chronic illness and injury, that same photograph communicates a very different message: danger. Cathy's reaction was not an overreaction; it was a completely logical response to a visual narrative that systematically excludes average people.

This visual disconnect is further compounded in the studio. Many yoga instructors—whether young or old—are individuals who naturally excel at the specific style they teach. Naturally, they tend to teach what works for their own bodies, encouraging students to perform identical postures. Those whose bodies happen to fit the mold thrive, while the rest are left behind, assuming yoga simply isn't for them.

If there were an exercise system safer, more effective, or more transformative than properly adapted yoga, I would be practicing and teaching it today. But true accessibility requires looking past idealized books, photographs and rigid traditions. Real yoga isn't about forcing the body to mirror an extreme picture on a page; it is about adapting the principles of movement to serve the unique body that is you.

Yoga Is All About Balance

by Sam Dworkis

The term “yoga” is a process that simply means, “balance” or “union” and in its western and modern interpretation, has nothing to do with anyone’s religion, belief or lifestyle. In fact, when appropriately practiced, yoga can be done by anyone, at any age and in any physical condition. When appropriately practiced, the physical exercises of yoga are designed to enhance a person’s strength, flexibility, and endurance. Yet, yoga exercise goes well beyond the physical.

When appropriately practiced, yoga exercise is actually paradoxical: the harder you try, the less you get. That is to say; the harder you try to do yoga, the more apt you are to injure yourself. Or exacerbate previous injuries. Or create excessive and unnecessary body Soreness. Or even create emotional distress by being overly aggressive.

Any of these sets you up for failure and moves you away from the essence of yoga which is designed to help balance your body and quiet your mind. A strong argument can be made that an appropriate yoga practice is “meditation in action.”

When yoga is correctly practiced, you actually learn three things: 1) How to intelligently move your body in a way that reduces unneeded stress or strain; 2) how to minimize physical as well as emotional discomfort; and 3) how to integrate your breath with the movement of your body.

These are the primary mechanisms that eventually quiet your mind. Thus, as you learn how to practice yoga without forcing your body and as you learn how to control your breathing, your body adapts and accepts yoga exercise rather quickly.

Through a regular non-forceful practice, you begin to create a balance of flexibility, strength, and endurance, which enhances a feeling of well being. Because the body and mind are intricately connected; as you do yoga to balance your body, your mind will follow.

Conversely, when you are feeling “uptight”, is it any wonder that your body literally follows? How many times have you heard it said, “You are really uptight... take a deep breath and relax.” An appropriate yoga practice, which integrates body and breath, quiets and relaxes the body and the mind. Finally, through learning breath control and how to move your body to “get more by doing less,” you create an environment where you begin to pay attention to choices and

how you want to feel; both physically and emotionally.

By learning not to force your body during yoga, you are training your mind to become more “peaceful” and “observant” versus “noisy” and “agitated. The result is an emotional balance that many find elusive given today’s extraordinarily busy and hectic lifestyle.

Yoga: How Doing Less Gets You More

by Sam Dworkis

Today's culture is obsessed with winning and success. It is about working hard, playing hard, and constantly trying to accumulate more: more money, a bigger house, a newer car, the latest technology, and hopefully, better health.

However, as we navigate our complex lives, there is a steep price to pay for this relentless drive. Despite our best intentions, many of us find ourselves overworked, overstressed, out of shape, or all three. Those who actively try to stay fit often feel like they are fighting an uphill battle, while others find themselves trapped in a cycle of recurring injuries.

Have you noticed that with each passing year, keeping in shape feels a little harder? Have you noticed how old, long-forgotten injuries suddenly rear their heads again? Both physical and emotional stress play a massive role in creating these roadblocks.

Because stress runs 24/7, wouldn't it be nice to have a reliable way to access a quiet, centered space within yourself—a place where you can simply let go of tension and feel both body and mind instantly relax?

When appropriately practiced, yoga teaches you exactly how to do that.

Yoga when appropriately practiced consists of a series of non-competitive physical movements and breathing exercises designed to help you cultivate balance across body, mind, and breath. When correctly approached, yoga is accessible to anyone, regardless of current flexibility, strength, or physical condition.

Through practice, you learn to move your body toward structural balance while gaining control over your breath. You also learn specific relaxation techniques that allow you to access an alpha state—a state of meditation, mental stillness, heightened awareness, and clearer intuition.

In this environment, yoga becomes delightfully paradoxical: the harder you try, the less you get.

This doesn't mean doing less in life should be your ultimate goal—that might only cause trouble! Rather, given the constant stress surrounding us, yoga offers a rare haven where pushing hard is not the objective. You don't have to conquer it; you simply have to do it.

Yoga is not inherently difficult. By pairing gentle physical work with conscious breath control, it builds strength, flexibility, and endurance while quieting a noisy mind. Ultimately, an appropriate yoga practice acts as a grounding anchor—allowing you to stay calm, focused, and personally effective, even when everything around you is in perpetual turmoil.

The Paradox of Yoga

by Sam Dworkis

Merriam-Webster defines a paradox as "a tenet contrary to perceived opinion or expectation... a statement that is seemingly contradictory in nature."

The world of yoga is full of these apparent contradictions. Today, there are countless styles and teaching philosophies. Some strictly follow the teachings of a single guru, while others combine the insights of many. Some practices are purely physical, while others mix movement with spiritual philosophy. Some approaches are so aerobically intense that only the fittest survive, while others are so physically undemanding that their most vigorous moment is simply lying down on the floor.

The style of exercise-based yoga I teach is inherently paradoxical:

It is universal: World-class athletes and individuals with severe physical limitations can practice and benefit from it side by side. I enjoy training fit, high-performing individuals, yet I am equally committed to working with people recovering from chronic illness or injury.

It blends Eastern and Western thought: Although I studied yoga extensively in India and support alternative healing, I have rejected any esoteric or religious teaching and base my approach to yoga in Western anatomy, kinesiology, and physical medicine.

It ignores conventional markers of progress: Traditional yoga often focuses heavily on extreme flexibility, but I don't care if you ever touch your toes.

Regardless of physical ability, everyone starts my approach the same way: by slowly learning to control the breath and sync it with simple, easy-to-learn body movements. Paradoxically, by eliminating strain and refusing to force the body, you safely build far greater strength, flexibility, and endurance than you ever thought possible by using brute effort.

Even the breath itself is a paradox. Most people ignore breathing because it happens automatically. Yet when you consciously slow your breath while moving through yoga postures, something surprising happens: you feel deeply relaxed, yet your physical energy noticeably increases.

In fact, learning this approach is often slightly harder for naturally flexible people than for those who are stiff. Flexible practitioners tend to rely on their joint laxity rather than building controlled stability. While my students certainly improve their flexibility, strength, and endurance, achieving those physical traits is actually not the main goal.

So, what is the goal?

Beyond simply feeling better, there isn't one—because having a rigid goal causes you to "try," and trying gets in the way. The word yoga literally means "balance" or "union," yet even that definition holds a paradox. Because of how the human body is constructed, perfect physical balance is impossible to achieve.

That is why "trying" works against you. Trying implies aggressiveness, pushing, and forcing—all of which usually leads to tightness, strain, and injury. In this practice, doing less correctly gets you more.

If absolute balance is unachievable, why practice at all? Because non-forceful yoga quietens the mind, lowers stress, and encourages self-awareness, while simultaneously refreshing your outlook and conditioning your physical body. It makes you feel significantly better than when you don't practice—yet if you push too hard, you end up feeling worse.

The way I teach yoga is paradoxical, contradictory, and completely counterintuitive to modern fitness culture. But once you step on the mat and stop forcing, it simply works.

The Distinction Between Trying and Doing

by Sam Dworkis

Everyone knows exercise promotes good health. Right?

Not necessarily. When forced, any form of exercise—including yoga—carries real risks. These risks grow significantly higher for anyone who is chronically ill, managing an injury, or navigating the natural changes of aging. When appropriately practiced, yoga can be a powerful tool to help you rebuild your conditioning. Practiced aggressively, however, it can leave you worse off than when you started.

Yoga encompasses a vast spectrum of approaches. Some styles are aerobically intense, with instructors turning up the heat (both literally and figuratively). Others demand extreme flexibility or sheer physical stamina, with teachers pushing students to "work through the pain." On the opposite end of the spectrum are styles that emphasize sitting cross-legged, deep breathing, and chanting in a low-intensity, stress-free environment.

Yet across all of these approaches, one rule holds true: the harder you try to do yoga, the higher your risk of strain and injury. It makes no difference whether you are trying hard to achieve a difficult posture or trying hard to force yourself to relax—aggression in either direction can aggravate old injuries or create new ones.

Here is why:

When you are recovering from an injury, managing a chronic condition, or simply growing older, your body's soft tissue naturally contracts. Muscles, tendons, ligaments, and fascia all make up this soft-tissue network. When these tissues tighten, the nerves passing through them become irritated and stimulated. That irritation triggers a reflex action: the surrounding soft tissue contracts even further. Your body stiffens, tension builds, and pain increases.

To break this vicious cycle, we must stop trying to exercise and instead learn how to do exercise.

This is not merely a matter of semantics:

Trying is competitive, aggressive, and goal-focused. It pushes against your body's current limits, irritating an already stressed system and tightening soft tissue.

Doing is non-forceful, observational, and adaptive. It meets your body where it is, creating the safe environment necessary for true physical change.

By shifting from trying to doing, yoga becomes an invaluable method for overall conditioning, pain management, and aging gracefully—all without further stressing an already overtaxed body. Ultimately, progress in yoga does not come from pushing harder or forcing your body into submission. When you stop trying to accomplish a posture and simply focus on doing the movement correctly and without strain, your nervous system calms down, your soft tissue relaxes, and your natural mobility returns. Giving up the aggressive pursuit of results is precisely what allows real strength, flexibility, and well-being to take root.

Yoga as the Universal Body Conditioner

by Sam Dworkis

A foundational principle of exercise science is that physical adaptation occurs only in the specific body systems that are directly stressed during exercise.

For example, running produces favorable adaptations in the legs, heart, and chest wall, which directly improve running capacity. This response is known as the training effect. Systems that are not stressed show no adaptation; even heroic amounts of running will produce virtually no structural or functional changes in your arms. While the adaptations from running may transfer slightly to other leg-centric activities, such as cycling, that crossover remains surprisingly limited.

Understanding the training effect raises a crucial question for athletes and active individuals: how do specialized workouts or sports actually translate to overall, whole-body health?

The Limits of Specialized and Traditional Training

Many people turn to specific sports, conventional weight lifting, or gym machines to stay in shape. However, traditional strength and athletic training are extremely movement-specific.

For instance, performing isometric biceps exercises at a fixed 90-degree angle transfers surprisingly poorly to strength when the elbow is bent at 60 degrees. Executing arm curls at a slow, deliberate pace yields minimal improvement when you suddenly need to move quickly.

Even simple grip strength exhibits remarkable specificity based on wrist and elbow position, hand placement, and whether your hands are working above or below your head. Consequently, simple repetitive habits—like squeezing a rubber donut while driving—provide virtually no functional benefit for varied physical demands.

Traditional athletic conditioning and bodybuilding programs rely heavily on repeating the exact same isolated, symmetrical movements over and over in a single plane of motion. But real life—and dynamic sport—rarely happens in straight, predictable lines. Reaching, twisting, bending, and reacting require your muscles, tendons, and fascia to produce force at unpredictable angles and in asymmetrical positions that are almost never practiced on standard gym machines.

The Need for Movement Variation

When you train using rigid, repetitive movements—or—focus exclusively on a single sport, you condition your body to be strong only within those narrow lanes. To build functional resilience, movement patterns must be intentionally varied.

It is also important to recognize the difference between functional capability and unnecessary mass. Building excessive, bulky muscle mass in isolated areas often creates joint strain and chronic tightness. When athletes experience stiffness or hit a physical plateau, they often assume the problem stems from a lack of strength. Far more often, the real barriers are inflexibility, poor coordination, and a lack of systemic balance.

Conclusion: Yoga as the Universal Body Conditioner

Ultimately, the training effect reveals a fundamental truth: your body adapts precisely—and strictly—to how you use it.

Because most athletic pursuits stress only specific muscles through repetitive ranges of motion, they inevitably leave other parts of the body undertrained, overtightened, or structurally imbalanced. Running tightens the hamstrings and ignores the upper body; weightlifting often shortens muscle fibers and stiffens the joints; racket sports create one-sided muscular asymmetries.

This is precisely why yoga, when appropriately practiced, serves as the ultimate all-around body conditioner.

Unlike linear gym workouts or specialized sports, yoga works the body as an integrated whole. It moves every joint through its complete, natural range of motion, hydrates the fascial network, and balances opposing muscle groups. By pairing non-forceful movement with conscious breath control, yoga restores the flexibility, joint stability, and micro-circulation that specialized athletics drain away.

In the final analysis, athletes of every discipline—whether runners, cyclists, lifters, or weekend warriors—will profoundly benefit from incorporating yoga into their regimen. It does not replace your primary sport; rather, it undoes the rigid repetitive strain your sport creates. By bridging the gaps left by the training effect, an appropriate yoga practice creates a resilient, balanced, and fluid body that performs better, avoids injury, and lasts a lifetime.

Get More by Doing Less with Yoga

by Sam Dworkis

For decades, I have been advancing a fundamental premise: in exercise, you can "get more by intelligently doing less."

I did not reach this conclusion overnight. It evolved over a decade of practicing and teaching what was

conditioning that it initially feels counterintuitive.

By letting go of aggressive "trying" and instead learning how to intelligently "do" your exercises without force or strain, you stimulate your body to operate far more efficiently. Without pushing into pain, your soft tissue relaxes, your nervous system settles, and your physical system naturally yields—improving strength, flexibility, endurance, and overall vitality.

Ultimately, mature health is not achieved by battling your body or forcing it into submission. When you stop striving for superficial markers of flexibility and focus on intelligent, non-forceful movement, your body rewards you with lasting resilience. By learning to do less on the mat, you unlock the ability to get far more out of life.

Small Is Beautiful

by Sam Dworkis

When I was in graduate school, just a few years before I began practicing yoga, I studied the work of the visionary economist E. F. Schumacher^{1/3} authored the landmark book *Small Is Beautiful*. His central thesis was elegant and simple: in economics and business^{0Dgger} Hinoantlwayars ttchers angrowicintoohe rge orntoois

Subtle Changes Accumulate: As strength, flexibility, and endurance steadily improve, your overall physical function and energy follow suit—without irritating an already overtaxed system.

In *ExTension* and *Recovery Yoga* as in so many areas of life, small truly is beautiful. You do not need heroic efforts or grueling workouts to reclaim your physical well-being. A modest, thoughtful practice performed consistently and correctly bypasses the body's defenses, restoring your mobility and strength from the inside out. By embracing the power of the small step, you discover the profound reality that doing less intelligently will always yield far more.

Cats and Dogs Do It: What Animals Teach Us About Yoga

by Sam Dworkis

Have you ever noticed what happens when a dog or cat gets up from a nap? Almost without fail, she takes a long, luxurious stretch before moving away from her resting spot. Have you ever wondered what is really happening during that stretch, or why that simple animal habit has direct relevance to your daily life?

If you live with a pet, try a simple experiment. Reach down and gently pinch and lift the skin near her shoulder. Notice how pliable it is and how easily it slides over the muscle structures underneath. Now, gently pull the skin on the back of your neck, your own shoulder or upper arm with the same amount of pressure. If you are like most people, you will notice a significant difference in elasticity.

If you have ever suffered an injury to an arm, neck, shoulder or back, the skin over that specific area will feel even tighter and less forgiving than the uninjured side. Try that out on yourself or a friend who has had an injury and test that yourself.

Setting evolutionary differences aside, a fundamental question remains: Why are animals, on average, so much more flexible than humans? And why does human tissue stay so tight in areas of past injury? The answer lies in the underlying "fabric" positioned directly beneath your skin and above your muscle structures: fascia.

Fascia is a profuse, continuous network of connective tissue covering your body from head to toe. It sits just below the surface of the skin and tightly wraps every muscle, organ, blood vessel, and gland in your body. Understanding the nature of fascia reveals why your pet's post-nap ritual is so important. Those frequent "cat and dog stretches" are not intended as a workout for muscles or to stretch skin—they are designed to maintain the elasticity of the fascia. Because it is a soft tissue, fascia responds to physical strain, emotional stress, and trauma by contracting.

Humans routinely bombard themselves with stress day after day, month after month, and year after year. Without a regular release, our cumulative physical and emotional tension causes the fascial network to tighten like a drumhead. Animals, by contrast, instinctively stretch throughout the day to clear out the accumulated tension of daily living. Thousands of years ago, the founders of yoga developed many of their foundational postures by observing animals in nature and mimicking their natural movements to relieve physical stress.

When practiced mindfully and without forcing, yoga acts as a powerful system to unwind contracted fascia—helping to restore balance, flexibility, and functional strength while bringing quietness to the body and mind. By taking a cue from our four-legged companions and integrating simple, non-forcing stretches throughout our day, we interrupt the cumulative cycle of chronic stress. Just as animals use instinctual movement to clear daily tension, a gentle yoga practice offers us a deliberate way to reset our nervous system. Rather than carrying the weight of past injuries and everyday stress in tight, guarded tissue, brief and conscious movements allow our fascia to soften, unlocking greater physical vitality and restoring the natural elasticity and ease of movement we were always meant to have.

How to Pick a Yoga Teacher

by Sam Dworkis

Yoga is one of the fastest-growing segments of the fitness and wellness industry. Today, there are dozens of different approaches and styles of yoga targeted toward a broad diversity of people—from athletes in their 20s and 30s who care more about fitness than spirituality, to gentle, meditation-focused practices appropriate for people of all ages and physical conditions. There are also restorative yoga classes designed specifically for the chronically ill, injured, or aging. Yoga is hardly a “one-size-fits-all” program.

Currently, most yoga styles are taught by young, athletic instructors conducting wildly popular and physically demanding classes. While it might be a bit more difficult to locate classes designed for older adults—and even harder to find classes tailored for the chronically injured or ill—they are definitely available.

If you are under 35 and healthy, you can walk into just about any yoga class and give it a try. If you don't like what's being taught, don't think for a second that you've “tried yoga” and it's not for you. You owe it to yourself to take several different classes with different teachers at various studios. You are practically guaranteed to find an approach that resonates with you.

However, if you are older, out of shape, injured, or living with a chronic condition, finding an appropriate class requires a bit more care. Although most yoga instructors have completed some form of teacher training, the majority continue to teach strictly within one narrow style. If you don't fit the profile of their average student, you may quickly feel left out—or worse, pushed too far.

Younger teachers are generally not well-equipped to teach middle-aged or older students, especially those who are significantly out of shape, chronically ill, or dealing with long-term injuries. A younger teacher might slow the pace down for you, but they rarely possess the depth of knowledge, practical experience, empathy, or personal understanding of what it actually feels like to live in an aging or compromised body.

On the flip side, you might assume that older—and presumably wiser—yoga teachers automatically understand how to guide mature students or those dealing with chronic pain. Unfortunately, that is rarely the case. Just because an instructor is older or has been teaching for decades does not mean they know how to adapt their practice, especially if they have never been seriously injured or ill themselves. Many older teachers simply teach what they themselves have been practicing for years.

In fact, aging yoga teachers who have practiced for decades without experiencing significant illness or physical setbacks often have a hard time truly relating to people their own age, let alone to those with chronic pain. To teach yoga effectively to chronically ill or injured students, it generally “takes one to know one.”

So, how do you choose the right yoga teacher?

Start by calling a few instructors and asking them directly who their classes are specifically designed for. Even if their answer sounds promising, you may still need to try several classes with different teachers until you find someone you feel completely comfortable with—a teacher who approaches the practice with intelligence, sensitivity, and, above all, the flexibility to adapt their teaching for your particular body.

Recovery Yoga

Now well into my own recovery, I am able to share a uniquely grounded perspective on using yoga not only for healing and physical renewal, but also for teaching yoga to physically fit people, but from a different perspective. This particular approach improves strength, endurance, and flexibility without promoting injury or otherwise irritating an already stressed or injured body.

Ultimately, yoga is not about performing perfect poses when life is going smoothly; it is about giving you the resilience and tools to navigate life when things fall apart. Whether you are confronting fear, recovering from illness, or simply trying to get your body moving again, an appropriate practice meets you exactly where you are. It reminds us that no matter how far off track our health or circumstances may seem, we always have the capacity to adapt, rebuild, and reclaim our vitality.

Without Force: What Yoga Teaches Us About Relationships

by Sam Dworkis

An appropriate yoga practice teaches us to take charge of our physical well-being by listening closely to the subtle cues our body sends us. When we move without aggression or force, our soft tissue relaxes, our nervous system calms down, and our strength, flexibility, and endurance improve naturally. By refusing to push or strain, we guide the physical frame toward structural harmony—and in doing so, we quiet the mind and foster emotional balance.

The way we treat our bodies on the mat closely reflects how we interact with the people in our lives.

Success, trust, and genuine joy in relationships do not come through force, control, manipulation, or emotional aggression. Demanding that a partner, child, friend, or parent change to fit our expectations is no different than forcing an inflexible joint to yield before it is ready. In both cases, pressure and forcing creates resistance, tension, and eventual breakdown.

True interpersonal connection springs from a very different place: the simple, attentive delight of paying attention to the people we care about and appreciating them as they are.

Just as in a thoughtful yoga practice, we can still offer guidance, set healthy boundaries, and direct the course of our relationships. But we do so without trying to manipulate or force outcomes.

As our yoga practice matures, we cultivate a heightened sensitivity to subtle details—the quality of a single breath, a slight release in a shoulder, or a shift in focus. Learning to appreciate those quiet, subtle moments trains us to pay attention to the subtle dynamics of our human connections:

Attentive Listening: Noticing the unspoken feelings, worries, or needs of loved ones without immediately jumping in to fix or judge them.

Non-Aggressive Communication: Expressing ourselves clearly and calmly without using guilt, anger, forcing or pressure to get our way.

Respecting Boundaries: Honoring another person's emotional and physical limits just as we honor our own physical boundaries during yoga movement.

A healthy relationship operates on the very same principles as an intelligent yoga practice. It is fundamentally about balance, respect, and careful attention to detail. It thrives when we stop forcing, stop demanding, and start listening.

Ultimately, yoga is far more than a set of physical exercises—it is a practical discipline for living. By letting go of aggression on the mat, we train our minds to become more observant, patient, and peaceful. When we bring that same non-forceful awareness into our daily interactions, we create the safe space necessary for deeper trust, genuine harmony, and lasting, balanced relationships.

Yoga Is Like a New Year's Resolution

by Sam Dworkis

Ring in the New Year is much more than a night for celebration; it is an ideal opportunity for reflection and renewal. Looking back at where we have been, gives us a stepping stone for changing where we are going. By examining past habits with an eye toward the future, we can break recurring, unhelpful patterns and create fundamentally different outcomes. In this light, making and implementing a New Year's resolution serves as a powerful, positive vehicle for personal transformation and that is in effect what yoga offers.

However, making a resolution is virtually useless unless you first take the time to understand precisely what you want to change.

Making a resolution without that thoughtful follow-through is like telling everyone how much you want to travel—packing your bags, buying the guidebooks, talking about the itinerary—and then never actually leaving the house.

So, how does making a New Year's resolution compare to practicing yoga?

When a beginner asks me, "What can yoga do for me?" my answer is usually simple and startling: "Nothing."

Yoga cannot do anything for you, nor can it do anything to you. It is not magic. Yoga is simply a practical tool you can use to guide yourself toward physical, mental, and emotional balance.

Yoga is not about straining to achieve a dramatic result; it is about learning to pay quiet attention to your "current reality" and then doing whatever is appropriate at your current level of ability. In that sense, starting a yoga practice is just like making a resolution: you don't "try" to make one—you either commit to the process or you don't. Success is strictly a matter of intelligent implementation.

Just as there is no magic in a New Year's resolution, there is no secret trick in yoga. Both are structured frameworks that teach us to:

Pay attention to what needs attention.

Develop realistic strategies for positive change.

Move forward steadily, step by step, without strain or self-deception.

Sustaining a yoga practice is remarkably similar to keeping a New Year's resolution. Both require ongoing discipline, and both are extraordinarily easy to abandon when life gets busy or when initial enthusiasm fades.

Ultimately, neither resolutions nor yoga work through wishful thinking or aggressive effort. Real progress happens in the quiet, unglamorous consistency of showing up, observing where you are today without judgment, and taking the small, appropriate steps needed to move forward. By honoring your current reality and maintaining steady follow-through, both a resolution and a yoga practice become deeply rewarding, life-enhancing experiences.

intelligently without force, you clear out internal tension—leaving you with the clarity, stability, and quiet strength needed to navigate whatever comes your way.

ExTension Recovery Yoga

ExTension Recovery Yoga

around you.

Yoga Breathing Counters Stress and Anxiety

by Sam Dworkis

The rapid pace, demands, and unpredictability of modern life constantly vie for our attention, disrupting the quiet balance of everyday living. Even while surrounded by modern conveniences and technology, many of us experience an underlying sense of stress and anxiety that feels both elemental and pervasive—a subtle background noise that simply does not seem to go away.

Yet anxiety and fear are not inherently evil; they are natural, physiological responses to perceived threats. They are nature's way of stimulating our nervous system to ensure we can respond to real danger. However, when stress becomes chronic and unexamined, it quickly escalates to the point of compromising our health and paralyzing our ability to make clear, effective decisions.

During periods of intense stress or extraordinary challenge, people almost universally fall into dysfunctional breathing habits—either holding their breath or shallowly hyperventilating.

From a physiological standpoint, this is the single worst response to stress. Inappropriate breathing triggers the fight-or-flight branch of the autonomic nervous system, escalating blood pressure, heart rate, metabolic strain, and muscle tension. Over time, this chronic stress cascade floods the body with corrosive stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, wearing down tissues, dampening immune function, and clouding our mental clarity.

While we cannot always control external stressors, we hold complete authority over our internal reaction to them. Your single most effective, accessible tool for managing that stress response is learning to govern your breath.

Breathing occupies a unique place in human physiology. It is autonomic—meaning it continues automatically without any conscious thought—yet it is also under our direct voluntary control. Because of this dual nature, conscious breathing serves as a direct bridge between the mind and the nervous system.

For thousands of years, yoga traditions have utilized breath control to quiet the mind—a principle that modern neuroscience and cardiovascular physiology now fully validate. Conscious, slow, and rhythmic diaphragmatic breathing directly stimulates the vagus nerve, triggering the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the body's natural "rest-and-digest" response. At the same time, proper, unhurried breathing optimizes blood chemistry and gas exchange in the lungs, reducing unnecessary cardiovascular strain and lowering elevated blood pressure. By anchoring your attention on the physical rhythm of inhalation and exhalation, you systematically quiet the mental chatter that feeds chronic anxiety.

You do not need to learn esoteric, complicated pranayama routines, nor do you need to contort your body into a pretzel to receive these benefits. Simple, non-forceful breath awareness is scientifically proven to create immediate, positive shifts in brain chemistry and systemic health.

When you practice gentle breath control, blood pressure drops, oxygen utilization improves, and metabolic strain cools down—allowing you to think, act, and communicate with clarity, even under pressure.

A simple, basic breath practice yields immediate physical relaxation and mental calm. Over time, sustaining a regular practice builds a deep reservoir of emotional stability, physical resilience, and lasting health. People often say there are no magic solutions in wellness; but when it comes to regulating your nervous system and reclaiming peace of mind, simple, intelligent breath control is about as close as it gets.

Breath as the Bridge Between Mind and Body

by Sam Dworkis

“Come on,” I heard a friend say to someone who was clearly rattled. “You’re so uptight... why don’t you just take a deep breath and relax?”

Whether she understood the underlying physiology or not, she instinctively knew a fundamental human truth: controlled, deep breathing calms the mind, settles the emotions, and releases physical tension.

Around three to four thousand years ago, practitioners in India developed a systematic methodology combining physical movement with controlled breathing to counter stress and improve the quality of daily life. Designed to help individuals live in greater harmony with their bodies and environments, they called this system yoga.

Those early practitioners recognized what modern medicine took millennia to confirm. They understood that the core purpose of controlled breathing was to forge a direct body-mind connection, reduce stress, promote deep relaxation, and optimize overall vitality.

Despite thousands of years of empirical success, modern science has only recently begun to fully validate these benefits. Today, neurobiology and cardiovascular research clearly document the intimate link between breath, brain function, and blood chemistry.

Anyone who has experienced sustained, unrelenting tension knows the toll it takes on health and happiness. During periods of prolonged physical or emotional stress—whether triggered by real danger or mental worry—the body floods the bloodstream with stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. This triggers the classic “fight-or-flight” response, driving up heart rate, blood pressure, respiration rate, and muscular tension. Left unchecked, this chronic state of alarm leads to physical exhaustion, systemic inflammation, and long-term health breakdown.

Fortunately, nature provides an automatic physiological counterbalance. In the 1970s, Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School documented this mechanism, coining the term the relaxation response.

The relaxation response is a state of deep physical and mental quietude that directly counters the fight-or-flight mechanism. When activated, it slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, relaxes soft tissues, and cools down metabolic strain. Benson demonstrated that regularly evoking this state produces lasting improvements in immune function, cardiovascular health, and emotional stability.

Controlled breathing is the primary key that unlocks this state, but an intelligent yoga practice takes it further. During a research study I participated in at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base examined the effects of yoga on brain function and we confirmed Dr. Benson’s findings: easy, quiet, yoga-based activities slow brainwave patterns and significantly reduce stress markers. More remarkably, we also documented that even dynamic and complex movements, when practiced thoughtfully without force or strain, suppress the hyperactive brainwave patterns associated with anxiety.

It was not long ago that Western medicine viewed the mind and body as completely separate entities. Today, science acknowledges what yoga has taught for thousands of years: the breath, mind, and body form a single, interconnected system. By using the breath to regulate your nervous system, you take active control of your physical health, clearing away stress and restoring lasting balance from the inside out.

ExTension

Frortgressive Willpower to Intelligent Awareness

and depression.

Furthermore, as you learn to listen closely to the subtle messages your body sends you, your capacity for attentive listening increases across the board. Tuning in to your own physical signals fosters deep self-compassion, which naturally expands your capacity for patience, empathy, and care toward others.

Ultimately, while yoga holds no magical power of its own, practicing it consistently feels remarkably transformative. It offers a rare approach to complete wellbeing: an exercise system grounded in sound science that delivers profound physical, mental, and emotional benefits with maximum efficiency and minimal effort.

by Sam Dworkis

metabolic strain my body and restored my vitality.⁴⁸

My Life as a Movie: Rewriting the Script

Long Hours at the Computer May Be Hazardous to Your Health

by Sam Dworkis

Even after many decades as both a neuromuscular therapist and a yoga teacher, I am as guilty as anyone when it comes to sitting at a computer for far too long without taking a break. When I get deep into writing an article or developing new material, my focus locks in, and I can easily remain glued to my chair for hours on end without a break.

kj Ta .1Flutionary st, apop i,to sittinmotionlescks front ofng screwwhensto mpsilnotne s at thhur mas dy wakis

fatigue and strain.

Whenever you stand up to stretch, you give yourself a two-for-one benefit: as your body moves, looking around the room or out a window forces your eye muscles to shift focal length. This quick change in focus relaxes the ocular muscles, relieving eyestrain at the same time your body lets go of postural tension.

Prolonged desk work doesn't have to dictate how your body feels at the end of the day. By wearing supportive gear while seated, stepping away from your desk regularly, and letting your vision reset, you interrupt the cycle of chronic tension before it takes hold. By integrating a non-forcing yoga practice into these brief breaks can transform how you feel—using these simple, gentle table stretches help to: restore spinal length, quiet muscle guarding, and help to keep both body and mind feel better throughout your workday.

Practicing Yoga Saves Time

by Sam Dworkis

Media reports frequently highlight the wide-ranging benefits of yoga, emphasizing how it reduces stress, builds strength, and increases flexibility. While you might be intrigued, your initial reaction is likely a practical one: "I barely have enough time to sleep, let alone add another activity to my day." If you regularly awaken feeling unrefreshed, adding one more item to your to-do list can seem overwhelming.

Consider a perspective you may not have explored: practiced appropriately, a 30-minute daily yoga session can actually reduce the amount of sleep your body requires each night by up to twice the time spent practicing.

This is not magic; it comes down to energy efficiency. Both physical trauma and day-to-day emotional stress cause soft tissues to contract defensively. When these tissues remain tight and guarded, your vascular system must work significantly harder to transport oxygen and nutrients throughout your body. By the end of the day, your system is exhausted—not just from daily activities, but from the continuous strain of forcing circulation through contracted, resistant tissues.

Much of the sleep you require each night is spent attempting to recover from this constant, high-effort state. When you awaken feeling tired despite spending seven or eight hours in bed, it is often because your body spent the entire night working overtime just to overcome soft-tissue resistance and maintain your basic physiological balance.

An intelligent, non-forcing yoga practice systematically releases this chronic soft-tissue tension and restores natural, unrestrained circulation. As your body begins to operate with greater mechanical and vascular efficiency, it stops burning through precious energy reserves just to get you through your normal routine.

By investing just 30 minutes in releasing held tension through an appropriate yoga practice, you dramatically reduce cumulative fatigue, elevate the restorative quality of your sleep, and wake up genuinely refreshed—effectively gaining back more time, alertness, and vitality than the practice itself required.

For anyone managing chronic illness or physical trauma, appropriate yoga begins not with complex postures, but with basic breathing techniques that speak directly to your nervous system. Conscious breathing sends an immediate signal that it is safe to let go. Downshifting out of that constant fight-or-flight state eases chronic muscle tension, quiets a racing heart, and lowers stress levels—creating the quiet baseline that helps you move toward better physical function and increased peace of mind.

By focusing exclusively on what is possible right now rather than grieving what used to be, you establish a reliable foundation for future progress. Each small, non-forceful movement performed within your pain-free range restores neural pathways and helps you rebuild trust in your body. Ultimately, intelligent yoga is not about athletic performance, speed, or extraordinary flexibility; it is a systematic method for maximizing your current physical potential while minimizing unnecessary strain.

Linda's Story: Yoga and Recovery

by Sam Dworkis

Three years ago, Linda was in a severe automobile accident. She wanted to take whatever time was necessary to recover fully, but life's pressing realities could not wait. With a husband, two active children, dogs, horses, and a new house under construction, Linda was forced back into her routine almost immediately. She was up and running—except for one major obstacle: she kept falling down.

Along with her other injuries, Linda suffered damage to her vestibular nerve, compromising her brain's ability to process balance and head orientation. Whenever she stood up, she lost her equilibrium. When she closed her eyes, she lost all sense of which way was up. Constantly dizzy and nauseated, her entire perception of spatial awareness had been disrupted.

Before the accident, Linda and her family were exceptionally active, sharing a love for horseback riding, rollerblading, cycling, and motorcycle trips with her husband. After the injury, none of this was possible. She was literally out of balance. Linda desperately wanted to exercise and rejoin her family's active life, but every attempt exacerbated her symptoms, leaving her frustrated and disheartened.

After more than two years of conventional therapy with little meaningful progress, Linda decided to try a different path. She was drawn to yoga because she intuitively sensed it would not carry the rushed pace of her standard physical therapy sessions, and she was intrigued by the idea that yoga could serve as both exercise and a system for injury recovery.

She scheduled her first yoga lesson. After just six months of a regular, adaptive yoga practice, Linda's balance issues were all but resolved, allowing her to comfortably return to the family activities she had feared were gone forever. While her results were dramatic, they were far from unusual.

An appropriate yoga practice moves you systematically toward balance—a integration of body, breath, and mind. What distinguishes intelligent yoga from standard exercise programs is that you do not try to do yoga; instead, you begin by establishing a fundamental awareness of the breath. From that quiet baseline, you learn to move incrementally with your breathing, working strictly within what your body can do, rather than forcing what it currently cannot.

At first glance, this approach might sound slow or repetitive, but the reality is quite the opposite. Working this way becomes deeply engaging and challenging, regardless of your starting physical condition or flexibility. Appropriate yoga works deep within the nervous system by reconditioning and reeducating your proprioceptive pathways—much like the way you originally learned to coordinate your movement as a child.

Through this non-forced practice, you enhance not only your physical balance, but also your strength, flexibility, and endurance. There is no magic to yoga, nor do you need to be strong, flexible, or even healthy to begin. By meeting your body where it is, yoga provides a practical foundation for restoring balance to your movement and your life.

Intelligent Yoga Reduces Physical Distress

found in fighting through the pain with sheer willpower. It begins when we drop the struggle, honor our current limits, and let progressive movement become a source of relief rather than another battle to win.

Yoga and Fibromyalgia

by Sam Dworkis

As a yoga teacher and former neuromuscular therapist, I frequently work with individuals living with chronic pain. Many experience a cluster of symptoms collectively known as fibromyalgia or myofascial pain syndrome (MPS). For some, it presents as a minor, persistent annoyance; for others, the discomfort and pain are so severe that normal daily life grinds to a screeching halt.

To understand how this happens, it helps to understand fascia. Visualize preparing chicken for dinner: as you remove the skin, you notice a thin, nearly transparent membrane wrapping the meat. That is fascia. You have fascia, too—a vast, continuous network running directly beneath your skin, surrounding you from the top of your head to the tips of your toes.

Fascia wraps each individual muscle fiber, separates adjacent muscle groups, and encapsulates every organ, gland, and structure in your body. It is literally the continuous web holding your body together. And when fascia stops functioning properly, there is a heavy physical price to pay.

In its natural state, fascia provides a slippery, Teflon-like surface that allows muscles to slide effortlessly over one another as you move. However, when you experience physical injury, chronic illness, severe emotional stress, or simply the wear and tear of aging, fascia responds by contracting.

In the short term, this contraction serves a protective purpose: it restricts movement to guard against further injury. But when fascia remains chronically tight—or contracts without an obvious trigger—it can leave you feeling as though you were hit by a truck.

Soft-tissue contraction is not strictly physical; emotional trauma triggers the exact same reflexive tightening. Chronically contracted fascia leaves you feeling exhausted, irritable, and depleted. It disrupts sleep, impairs concentration, and can make even the gentlest touch feel uncomfortable or painful.

The most challenging aspect of fibromyalgia and MPS is how quickly it becomes a self-reinforcing cycle of pain. The worse you feel physical discomfort, the more your psychological stress elevates. As stress increases, your fascia responds by tightening further, escalating both your physical pain and your emotional strain.

Conventional treatments often rely heavily on pain medications, and because some clinicians view myofascial pain as largely psychosomatic, it is occasionally treated primarily as a psychiatric issue. Psychosomatic or not, the physical reality is undeniable: when fascia is chronically contracted you will feel very uncomfortable in your body.

Just as "fibromyalgia" serves as a broad diagnostic label, "yoga" encompasses many different modalities. My approach centers on a simple principle: As goes the fascia, so goes the body; and as goes the body, so goes the mind.

Rather than trying to forcefully stretch tight muscles, intelligent adaptive yoga focuses on releasing contracted fascia and restoring its natural elasticity. Because of the deep interconnectedness of our physical and mental systems, releasing restricted fascia has a profound, soothing effect on the entire body-mind connection.

Living with MS for decades has given me an intimate understanding of this terrain from both perspectives—as an athlete and yoga teacher, and as someone navigating a chronic condition alongside aging. Combining this personal experience with formal studies of the human body, I know firsthand how targeted, non-forced yoga can interrupt the cycle of chronic pain and help to move with greater ease.

Bridging the Gap: Where Yoga Meets Modern Medicine

by Sam Dworkis

For years, a debate has raged over holistic and alternative approaches to health and healing versus conventional Western, or allopathic, medicine. While many hold strong opinions on either side, many others remain confused about what holistic and alternative medicine actually entails.

Currently, holistic and alternative medicine is defined as systems of healthcare outside traditional Western practice, including acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic care, herbal medicine, yoga and others. Rather than focusing solely on symptoms, holistic care centers on a cooperative relationship between an individual and a practitioner to foster optimal physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. It considers the whole person—evaluating physical health, nutrition, environment, emotional state, lifestyle, and values. Holistic practitioners, including yoga teachers, emphasize education and personal responsibility to help individuals achieve balance.

In contrast, conventional Western medicine has traditionally operated on a doctor-driven model centered around accepted science, differential diagnosis, prescription medications, routine checkups, and, when necessary, surgical intervention. In this framework, patients are often encouraged to follow physician directives without question.

Having practiced and taught yoga for decades, I am deeply invested in the discipline. At the same time, I strongly value conventional Western medicine. I believe in regular medical checkups, taking prescribed medications, and undergoing surgery when required. Living with multiple sclerosis for the past nine years has given me a profound appreciation for everything Western medicine offers.

Simultaneously, my yoga practice has taught me the vital importance of personal responsibility. For me, yoga is not a religion; it is a system of exercises designed to adapt to my body's ever-changing flexibility, strength, and endurance in any given moment. What I value most about this approach—both as a practitioner and as a teacher—is that it adapts to meet individual needs without competition or pressure to perform.

Yoga teaches proactivity. It trains me to listen to my body's subtle signals and adjust when something feels off. If a movement causes discomfort or risks injury, I modify it. In this way, yoga provides a framework for making thoughtful adjustments in life to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

Ultimately, this approach to yoga serves as a microcosm for daily life. When my body feels out of balance, I am prompted to adjust my lifestyle habits or take a more active role alongside my physicians. It motivates me to research options, explore alternatives, and participate directly in managing my healthcare.

Fortunately, the traditional dynamic between Western physicians and patients is evolving. Practices like yoga—which foster self-awareness, proactivity, and personal accountability—are increasingly recognized as valuable complements to conventional medical care.

Beyond "No Pain, No Gain": A Smarter Approach to Yoga

by Sam Dworkis

Most of us have experienced—or will eventually experience—a physical injury, largely because we were raised on a single cultural axiom: "No pain, no gain." From childhood, family, teachers, coaches, and peers encouraged—and sometimes demanded—that we give every pursuit our absolute maximum effort, even when hurt.

We carry this mindset directly into adulthood, regardless of whether we consider ourselves athletic. The most visible consequence of this philosophy is the deep ache felt the day after working or playing too hard. Worse yet, as the years go by, that "day-after" discomfort intensifies, and recovery takes significantly longer.

When we exercise, a degree of soreness over the following day or two is entirely normal. It is simply the natural process of muscle tissue breaking down and rebuilding—a cycle that enhances strength and flexibility, particularly in our younger years.

As we age, however, pushing past physical boundaries stops building strength and begins causing chronic damage, both physically and emotionally. There is a critical difference between routine post-exercise soreness and acute injury pain. Normal soreness subsides within a day or two. Persistent pain, on the other hand, signals a longer-lasting injury where traumatized tissue is replaced by inflexible scar tissue. As mobility decreases and pain escalates, rehabilitative yoga becomes an invaluable resource.

Injuries hurt for a clear reason: pain is an explicit signal from the body that an area needs rest to heal. Ignoring that signal leads to chronic conditions that worsen over time. Trying to "work through the pain" exacerbates minor injuries, creating additional scarring and muscle atrophy.

Furthermore, an injury rarely stays isolated. Soft-tissue structures surrounding the injury site—muscles, tendons, ligaments, joint capsules, and especially fascia—contract defensively. When fascia remains chronically tight, it becomes a primary driver of ongoing pain, weakness, and loss of flexibility.

Non-painful yoga therapy offers a highly effective pathway to rehabilitation. Practiced mindfully, yoga targets the fascia directly by helping to release tightness, thus improving flexibility, and encouraging better circulation throughout the recovery process.

Additionally, yoga therapy provides a major advantage over traditional clinic-based therapies: once you learn the fundamental movements, you can easily practice them at home. This empowers you to take control of your own recovery on your own schedule.

Brian experienced relief in that one past class not because pushing through the pose healed him, but because the extreme intensity most likely temporarily stunned or anesthetized his nerve endings. It was similar to a deep pressure-point massage that momentarily overrides pain signals—a temporary mask, but one where the pain almost always returns once the nervous system resets.

Real rehabilitative yoga operates differently. There is a way to practice that systematically calms physical and mental stress while safely building strength, endurance, and flexibility. This was the breakthrough Brian experienced during the workshop: learning to work with his body's reflexive guarding mechanisms rather than fighting against them.

Because this gentle, non-forcing approach runs counter to almost everything we are taught in modern athletics and fitness, it can be difficult to grasp at first. Yet, as Brian discovered, when we stop forcing movement and start guiding the nervous system, the body finally receives the permission it needs to release tension, rebuild, and to begin the healing process.

Yoga Can Be an Effective Post-Surgery Treatment for Back Pain

by Sam Dworkis

ExTension

Why Old Injuries Resurface—and How Yoga Can Ease the Pain

by Sam Dworkis

Why do old athletic injuries seem to resurface as we age—the very ones we assumed had fully healed decades ago?

You might have been in your twenties or thirties when you badly sprained an ankle, pulled a groin muscle, or injured a shoulder. You were eager to get back in the game, so as soon as the acute pain subsided, you returned to your sport. Before long, you barely noticed the discomfort and were competing at full speed again.

Fast forward a few decades. Setting aside the ordinary stiffness that comes with growing older, pain from those long-forgotten injuries starts creeping back. It begins interfering with your favorite activity or sport—if you can even play at all anymore.

To understand why old injuries re-emerge, it helps to explore how different soft tissues heal and how the body adapts to past trauma.

Most people understand that athletic injuries damage muscles, tendons, and ligaments—collectively known as soft tissue. Muscle tissue generally heals the fastest because it is deeply infused with rich blood circulation. Tendon injuries heal more slowly due to reduced blood supply. Ligaments, having minimal direct blood flow, heal the slowest of all and sometimes require surgical intervention.

However, there is another critical, highly responsive soft tissue that plays an overlooked role: fascia.

Fascia is a continuous, web-like sheet of connective tissue lying directly beneath the skin, enveloping the body from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet. It encapsulates every muscle, surrounds individual muscle fibers, and merges directly into tendons, ligaments, and joint capsules.

A foundational principle of human physiology is that whenever a nerve is stimulated, the associated soft tissue contracts in response. Furthermore, the fascia surrounding a joint is governed by the exact same nerve roots that supply the muscles and tendons attaching to that joint. When an injury occurs, the corresponding nerve root fires, triggering a protective contraction across all associated soft tissue—including the surrounding fascia.

In the short term, this reflexive contraction serves a vital purpose: it is nature's splint, slowing you down and guarding the injured area against further damage. However, when contraction becomes chronic, it restricts joint mobility, alters movement patterns, and sets the stage for persistent stiffness and soreness.

Here is where the mechanics become particularly interesting: when a severe injury persists, the affected nerve and root can become a facilitated pathway. Think of it like a deeply worn groove in a dirt road. Years or even decades after you believe the injury has resolved, even mild physical strain or emotional stress can cause those hyper-sensitive nerves to re-fire along that established pathway, triggering old patterns of contraction and pain.

Compounding this issue is the natural aging process. As we age, fascia undergoes a natural, gradual tightening. Under normal circumstances, this age-related contraction is simply why we become naturally less flexible over

time.

However, if your nerves and soft tissues are already facilitated from old injuries, that age-related fascial tightening acts like a spark on dry tinder. As fascia compresses around a previously injured area, it stimulates hyper-sensitive nerve roots, awakening old pain signals and making long-healed areas hurt just as they did years ago.

Over-the-counter painkillers or anti-inflammatories may temporarily quiet the noise of pain, but they act merely as a mute button—they hardly resolve the underlying mechanical and neurological loop. Finding long-term relief as we age means shifting our strategy—focusing on releasing fascial tightness without triggering the protective nerve reflexes around past injuries.

When you force a stretch or push through resistance, the nervous system interprets that aggression as a threat. In response, it fires a defensive contraction, signaling the fascia and surrounding muscles to grip tighter. Unlocking these long-held patterns requires a gentle, non-forcing approach to movement.

By staying within a comfortable, pain-free range of motion and coordinating movement with deep, steady breath, you communicate safety directly to the nervous system. Reflexive muscle guarding begins to melt away, allowing fascial fibers to lengthen smoothly and circulation to flow more freely through long-restricted areas.

As defensive tension eases, joint mobility naturally expands and strain on surrounding tissues reduces. By showing the body that it no longer needs to brace against old movement patterns, you begin to alleviate long-held tightness in joints and tissues that help to restore comfort, fluidity, and ease in everyday movement.

Beyond the Quick Fix: Why One Yoga Pose Can't Cure Everything

by Sam Dworkis

I frequently receive a flood of questions from yoga practitioners and dedicated students around the world asking variations

No single exercise, no matter how restorative or brilliantly designed, can independently move the entire complex system of the human body into lasting equilibrium. The best response to any specific injury, illness, or structural imbalance is not to search for a single magic pose or quick fix. Rather, the most effective path toward long-term health and genuine recovery is to maintain a consistent, intelligent, and well-balanced overall yoga practice—one that honors your body's daily fluctuations and restores true union to the entire system.

Beyond Buns of Steel

by Sam Dworkis

Imagine a weightlifter who trains only the left side of his body. Picture huge, bulging muscles defining the left half of his chest, arm, and leg, contrasted with a weak, puny, and flaccid right side.

It is an absurd image, isn't it? Yet, focusing exclusively on firming your body or building muscle while ignoring appropriate stretching is functionally no different than training one half of your frame while abandoning the other. It creates a severe physiological imbalance—one that modern fitness culture often encourages under the guise of hard work.

To make matters worse, human bodies undergo predictable "ages and stages" shifts. Beginning around ages 28 to 32, and recurring roughly every decade thereafter, our tissues undergo a natural contractive phase. Soft tissue—comprising both skeletal muscle and the intricate web of connective tissue known as fascia—gradually loses its natural hydration and with that, elasticity.

When you layer high-intensity strength training on top of a body that is already naturally tightening with age, the muscle fibers do not just grow; they shorten. Over time, chronically shortened muscles pull constantly on their tendons, misaligning joints, compressing spinal discs, and restricting healthy range of motion.

Furthermore, this systemic tightness extends far beyond simple stiffness in your hamstrings or shoulders. When fascia and muscle remain in a state of permanent chronic tension, they act like a tourniquet on the rest of the body. Fundamental internal processes—including micro-circulation, lymphatic drainage, deep diaphragmatic respiration, and digestive motility—become physically constricted and impaired.

While a tight, hyper-toned physique in youth or bulging muscles in manhood may appear aesthetically desirable on the surface, that unyielding rigidity inevitably catches up with you. The very muscles built to protect and strengthen the body end up trapping it in a cage of its own making. True, long-term health does not require spending endless hours in the gym grinding toward a rock-hard "six-pack" or "buns of steel."

Ultimately, true physical well-being isn't measured by bulking up or forcing your body into a tight mold; it's measured by resilience, ease of movement, and internal harmony. A healthy body certainly needs to be strong, but it must also learn when and how to yield. When you pair intelligent strength with deliberate, non-forceful stretching, you allow your body to age gracefully instead of defensively.

When appropriately practiced, yoga provides the essential counterweight to modern exercise. By creating a sensible balance between strength and flexibility—which naturally improves overall endurance—you can create a fluid, fully integrated body that carries you comfortably through whatever life brings.

Ballet on Horseback: What Dressage Teaches Us About Effortless Movement

by Sam Dworkis

One of my longest-attending students was a professional dressage instructor. For those unfamiliar with the discipline, dressage is often described as ballet on horseback. The rider, dressed in traditional formal attire, sits atop a powerful horse that executes intricate, highly disciplined movements, all while the rider appears to be doing almost nothing at all.

Having taken dressage lessons myself, I can attest that it is a remarkably demanding sport. Maintaining that illusion of effortless control requires exceptional coordination, core stability, subtle body awareness, and physical endurance. Even at the entry levels—let alone competitive higher tiers—it demands complete harmony between rider and horse.

Because of the physical demands of this sport, this student became one of my most ardent supporters, frequently encouraging her own dressage students to take up yoga to improve their posture, seat, and balance. Recently, however, one of her riders resisted the idea, explaining that she had tried a yoga class in the past and quit because "it hurt too much."

Hearing that always frustrates me, because yoga should never hurt.

In our culture, pain is often glorified as proof of hard work—a badge of honor indicating that a workout is "working." But in yoga, pain is not progress; it is a vital warning signal. It is your body's nervous system communicating that a specific movement, depth, or technique is inappropriate for your unique anatomy at that given moment.

Unfortunately, many modern yoga environments encourage students to force their bodies into standardized shapes, striving to imitate a teacher's flexibility or match the person on the mat next to them. When we push through sharp discomfort or mechanical strain, the body's natural defense mechanism kicks in: muscles contract defensively to protect the joints, soft tissue inflames, and the risk of chronic injury increases dramatically. Pushing through pain actively defeats the entire purpose of the practice.

The correct, intelligent response to discomfort is to never force—it is to adapt.

When a posture creates strain, the exercise must be modified to suit the individual, not the other way around. By adjusting a pose's angle, or by reducing its range of motion, or utilizing supportive props, a student can learn to move mindfully, breathe freely, and steadily build functional strength and endurance without triggering defensive tension.

When yoga is tailored to meet the individual where they are, it ceases to be a source of stress or physical damage. Instead, it becomes a safe, sustainable, lifelong tool for recovery, movement, and overall well-being.

Yoga Firms Your Body: Beyond A Cosmetic Quick Fix

by Sam Dworkis

Approaching middle age and beyond, many of us complain about losing our youth, vitality, and firm physical appearance. As we age, skin loses its natural resilience and begins to wrinkle and sag. Before we fully register the change, excess skin gathers around our midsection, face, and the backsides of our arms—a constant physical reminder that time is moving forward.

While cosmetic surgery can alter our external appearance, it cannot reverse the aging process. Cosmetic procedures might adjust how we look in a mirror, but looking healthy is ultimately an illusion if systemic health is neglected. There is simply no substitute for genuine, deep-tissue health.

Loss of body tone is a natural phenomenon of aging that extends far beyond aesthetics; it impedes circulation and contributes to cumulative health decline. While activities such as running, racquet sports, swimming, and weightlifting effectively build muscle and stimulate circulation, they present practical hurdles as we age. Bad weather, gym access, time constraints, and the sheer physical resistance of an aging body make maintaining rigorous workout schedules increasingly difficult.

Furthermore, when time is tight, people frequently jump straight into intense activity without adequate warm-up or cool-down sequences. At best, this "just do it" approach leads to boredom and burnout; at worst, it causes chronic injury. While cross-training across multiple disciplines is ideal, few people have the time or energy to manage several sports while properly caring for their joints and muscles.

This is where an intelligent yoga practice becomes uniquely advantageous. Yoga is not only an exceptional cross-training tool for traditional sports, but it is also a complete, standalone fitness system. Depending on your abilities and/or needs, appropriate yoga can provide a vast array of exercises— aerobic and/or non-aerobic—yoga combines precise breath regulation with targeted movements that can enhance strength, endurance, and flexibility. Beyond muscle tone, yoga specifically acts upon “fascia”—the continuous connective web that holds your physical body together.

Fascia encapsulates everything: muscles, organs, glands, and nerves. Crucially, it is also the foundational "fabric" lying directly beneath your skin. When fascia loses its resilience and contracts due to age, stress, or inactivity, it directly contributes to sagging skin and poor underlying circulation. By practicing yoga mindfully and without forcing, you stimulate deep circulation and restore essential elasticity to the fascial network. As the connective tissue directly under your skin regains its resilience and tone, your overlying skin responds in kind—appearing firmer yet more supple, healthier, and backed by genuine vitality rather than a cosmetic illusion.

The Yoga Paradox: From Healing to High Performance

When practiced appropriately and without forcing, yoga promotes balance throughout the entire body—not just in the skeletal muscles. It works internally to help balance the endocrine system, which exerts a profound influence on metabolism and, ultimately, body weight. In fact, under an appropriate practice, those who are overweight tend to lose weight, while those who are underweight generally gain it.

Appropriately practiced, yoga offers far more than weight management alone. You will sleep better, enjoy enhanced concentration, and handle stress with greater ease. When your time is limited, an appropriate yoga practice simply gives you a whole lot more bang for your buck than conventional exercise.

Yoga Is for Men

by Sam Dworkis

Why is it that men think yoga is only for women?

Is it because men assume you have to be flexible to do yoga because everyone knows women are inherently more flexible than men? Or is it because men think that doing yoga requires sitting quietly in some awful cross-legged position to contemplate their navel? Or is it because men think they would have to adopt someone else's religion?

Well, if that is what yoga is, forget about it! No way! Guys wouldn't want any part of it. They want to do things—they want to run, play ball, work on the car, or watch sports on TV. Heck, men would rather go shopping than practice yoga. You would naturally think that yoga isn't active enough for guys, right?

Wrong.

I am here to tell you that yoga, when practiced appropriately, is one of the most demanding and physically challenging activities there is. Let's take a closer look at what "yoga" really means. The word literally translates to "balance" or "union." First of all, a man absolutely does not need to be flexible when he begins. When men become proficient with yoga, they move toward a balance between their strength and flexibility. In other words, yoga is about creating physiological balance, which is far more challenging than one might think.

I am also here to tell you that once the initial learning curve is behind you, an appropriate yoga class can challenge a man in ways he never thought possible. Yet even when demanding, yoga is practiced in a way that minimizes the propensity for injury. In fact, an appropriate practice actually helps the body to heal older injuries and correct chronic imbalances.

What most guys don't realize is that yoga was developed thousands of years ago by men, and for centuries, only men were allowed to practice it. It wasn't until relatively recently—perhaps the last hundred years or so—that women were even permitted to practice. When yoga was brought to the West, because women are inherently flexible and could do the classical yoga exercises, they became the predominant practitioners. (Here's why, guys: a woman's pelvic and ligament structure is genetically designed for childbirth, giving women a natural flexibility that men inherently lack.)

In any event, through its balancing effect on soft-tissue structures, men who practice yoga find that their athletic performance dramatically improves. There is no magic to it: a well-balanced body, that is; a balance of strength with balanced flexibility simply allows the body to operate with greater control and lower risk of injury.

In addition, beyond physical balance, a regular practice cultivates mental balance—giving you greater self-control and a far more effective way to manage daily stress.

Lastly, guys, here is the honest truth: building a disciplined practice isn't easy. Yoga is very much the opposite of falling in love—it's tough to get into, but exceptionally easy to get out of it.

Lower Your Golf Score Through Yoga

by Sam Dworkis

I've played a lot of sports through the years, but without a doubt, golf is the most demanding. It is not as purely physically demanding as basketball, tennis, or racquetball, but it is demanding in significantly different ways. If you play golf, you know exactly what I mean.

You would think that once you purchased your first set of clubs and took a few lessons, you'd be set for years of play. Wrong. Once you start playing, it doesn't take long to realize just how inadequate everything feels. For instance, no matter what you spent on your clubs, you soon realize you didn't spend enough. Then there are the lessons: as soon as you think you've mastered one basic fundamental, you discover that 1) you haven't mastered it at all, and 2) there is so much more to learn.

And let's not forget the thousands of dollars spent on clinics, magazines, books, videos, and gadgets—all in the quest to improve your game. Yet most of us completely overlook the single most important piece of golfing equipment. When appropriately maintained, this piece of equipment will improve your game far more than anything else you can buy, making it one of the least expensive and best investments you will ever make.

Of course, I am talking about your body—and maintaining it through yoga.

What makes golf (and life) so demanding is that it is as much mental as it is physical. Quite frankly, I don't understand why more serious golfers don't practice yoga; because both golf and yoga are ultimately about balance—the balance of body and mind. Have you ever posted a good score when you were agitated or preoccupied? You obviously play better when you can focus completely on the fundamentals, and heightened concentration is one of the very first benefits you experience through yoga.

If you've ever played on a day when the air was heavy or smoky and you couldn't quite catch your breath, think back to how you played. Breathing is another crucial area that improves with yoga. Breath is the gateway to the mind and affects virtually everything in your life—not just your golf game. Through yoga, you learn to regulate your breath and control your emotions under pressure.

It is a remarkably powerful tool. By learning an appropriate yoga practice, you will increase your range of motion while improving your flexibility, strength, and endurance—both physically and emotionally. You can obsess over your golf mechanics until the cows come home, but learning to manage your emotional and mental reactions will usually have a far greater impact on your game.

The bottom line? By learning how to coordinate and integrate body, breath, and mind, you will be able to lock in your focus and concentration when standing over that crucial drive or high-stakes putt.

Adaptation: Making Yoga Work for Your Sport

by Sam Dworkis

To master your favorite sport, your body must adapt to it. In sports science, this process is governed by the SAID principle (Specific Adaptations to Imposed Demands). The body adapts specifically to the exact nature of the stress applied. If your passion is running, for example, regular training produces favorable physical adaptations in your legs, heart, and chest muscles.

Adaptation for runners promotes deeper breathing and improves leg stamina, which enhances your capacity for future runs. However, muscles not primarily used for running—such as those in your arms—do not undergo the same adaptation.

Similarly, if softball is your passion, consistent batting practice helps adapt the specific muscles needed to become a better hitter. Yet batting practice does not enhance base-running, just as base-running does not improve batting.

While adaptation can transfer to other sports that rely on similar muscle groups and physiological systems, that transfer is rarely as significant as you might expect. Running does not necessarily make you a better cyclist, nor does swinging a softball bat translate to becoming a better golfer.

Weight training offers another clear example. Repetitive, weight-bearing exercise certainly builds strength, but building strength without maintaining flexibility actually impedes skill transfer to other sports—such as using weightlifting alone to improve your golf game. While your arms and legs may grow stronger, prioritizing raw strength can compromise the fine-motor coordination required for a smooth golf swing. Furthermore, the forceful exhaling required in heavy lifting is completely counterproductive to the fine, slow, quiet, and relaxed breathing required for accurate putting.

Focusing exclusively on adaptation to a single sport creates two major problems: the repetitive overuse of specific body systems, and the under-use of systems not directly involved in your sport. Both conditions invite injury. You will always perform better in your favorite sport when your entire body is well-balanced—when you are both strong and flexible, and when you have precise control over your breath.

Exercise physiologists have long known that cross-training allows the body to work more efficiently while reducing the risk of injury. Cross-training develops your entire body by distributing the overall training load across various physiological systems. Appropriate cross-training also keeps you active during recovery. If one part of your body is impaired, you can continue training using other parts. Finally, cross-training adds much-needed variety to your routine, helping to prevent mental and physical burnout.

Because most people assume yoga is primarily about stretching, you might think it serves as the a good cross-training tool. Usually, it does not. Although stretching is an important component of any athletic regimen, yoga stretching by itself can actually lead to neuromuscular imbalances and frequent muscle, tendon, or joint injuries.

ExTension Recovery Yoga

Weekend Athletes Think This Class Is Too Easy

by Sam Dworkis

“OK, you weekend athletes, listen up. Look at the person to your left. Now look at the person to your right. By the time of your next yoga class, some of you will have quit. By the time of your class after that, more of you will have dropped out.”

I know that my yoga class is not law school or an extreme fitness regimen, but many of you will quit because in spite of everything I say or do. You dropouts will still think this course was too easy—not challenging enough. Too much talk and not enough action. But mostly, you will think what I’m teaching is counterintuitive to everything you’ve ever learned in sports.

Most of you have been injured as a result of your sport—by not properly warming up, or by pushing yourself too hard. You want to just get out there and do it! And that’s just the kind of old-school thinking that got you into trouble in the first place. It’s why you can’t seem to shake those nagging old injuries. That’s why you run out of breath far too soon. Or that’s why playing hard on Sunday makes it painful to roll out of bed on Monday—that is, assuming you can even play anymore.

You know who you are. You’re the guy or gal who thought you’d stay physically active and at the top of your game forever. Sure, you were able to maintain your athletic skills even after landing a full-time job, getting married, and starting a family. It wasn’t that long ago that you were working out or playing sports several times a week.

But now that life is more hectic and complicated, you’re lucky if you can get out there once over the weekend. Even so, you still want to compete. Yet things are changing. Your legs get tired way sooner than they used to. Your breath can’t keep up with your determination. You don’t bounce back from minor injuries as quickly as you used to. Worse yet, you might hurt all the time and have given up sports altogether.

Maybe it’s time for something different.

If you stick this course out, you’ll discover that this yoga-based exercise system is both physically challenging and an extraordinarily intelligent exercise modality. During this course, I won’t ask you to blindly believe anything I say, even though everything I teach is directly rooted in human anatomy and physiology.

Instead, I am going to ask you to experience this duality of exercise for yourself: the traditional way you have exercised (and how it felt) as compared to the yoga method you are about to learn now.

As confusing as it may first seem, I am going to show you how to do less in order to gain more. In fact, I’m going to ask you not to try to exercise—because “trying” is precisely what got you into trouble in the first place. That’s why so many of you will drop out of yoga. You’ll feel like you aren’t working hard enough because you aren’t gritting your teeth or sweating. But stick around long enough, and you can sweat plenty.

This work is subtle. It’s not about forcing yourself to get flexible; it’s about learning how to guide your body toward true balance—a balance of strength and flexibility that naturally promotes reliable endurance.

Stick with it, and this just might end up being one of the hardest—and most rewarding—exercise classes you have ever taken.



ExTension

Yoga for Both Injured and Aging Athletes

by Sam Dworkis

It wasn't that long ago that you could move your body however you wanted. Maybe you weren't the greatest athlete in the world, but you were competitive and thoroughly enjoyed your workouts and your sports.

But things are different now. Maybe you suffered an injury that never completely healed, or maybe age has finally caught up with you. Either way, exercising isn't fun anymore. Now your body hurts all the time—or at least for days following a workout or a game.

You don't want to be a quitter, so you allow work and family responsibilities to provide a convenient excuse to give your body a break. But when you try to get back in the groove, it feels impossible. You don't have the time, you're constantly exhausted, and every session leaves you sore.

It's completely frustrating. With less time, you try harder. But trying is insidious: the harder you try, the worse you ultimately feel. You become stuck in a vicious cycle—you feel worse, so you push harder, and after a while, nothing seems to help.

That's exactly what happened to me. I was considered an expert yoga practitioner and teacher, yet my body reached a point where traditional exertion simply backfired.

It took me years to adapt my practice into a methodology that could rebuild my strength, endurance, and flexibility—all without increasing my pain. It became a way to restore my body without “trying.” No, it is not a magic pill. It is a specialized approach to yoga-based exercise that is so simple, it is extraordinarily difficult for most athletes to grasp.

It is counterintuitive to everything you've ever learned in sports. In this program, the harder you try to force it, the slower it works. In fact, gritting your teeth and pushing through only increases your chance of re-injuring yourself.

This approach, doing less to get you more, requires that you learn how your body is actually constructed. This demanding approach requires that you understand how your body works—from your muscles down to the all-important fascia. With this foundation, you will learn to exercise with intelligence rather than by sheer effort, restoring strength and endurance by doing less, not more.

Stop trying so hard. Start moving intelligently. That's how you can get your body back.