

Understanding the Power of Yoga

By Bridgette Springer

listings@hippopress.com

Back in the early 80s, my mom took up yoga. She tuned into a public broadcasting channel, where a woman in a white leotard with capped sleeves and tights sat cross legged and performed astounding stretches. Between deep breaths and what looked like banana splits, the instructor would move into different poses that my mom tried to imitate. Fast forward to the present and more stylish yoga attire and I have taken up the practice myself, grasping the escape it granted my mom each time she laid a beach towel down on the living room floor and did her down dogs. Yoga is an evolving practice for anyone who tries it. One day you may be able to touch your toes, the next, it hurts to bend over. Unlike other forms of exercise, you are not striving for a better performance; instead you are seeking a mind body connection. The effort you spend on your inner being is what helps to bring you emotional and physical balance.

Terri Kennedy, Yoga Alliance board member and teacher who has been featured in Oprah Magazine, said “In life, we are not taught how to relax and yoga teaches us in a systematic way, how to get there.”

So much can be said about yoga, from its Sanskrit language, to its physical and spiritual teachings. However, with the help of Kate Dube, Manager and teacher at Yoga Balance in Manchester, and Dr. Kennedy, here are six core styles which include Ashtanga, Vinyasa, Iyengar, Bikram, Kundalini, and Hatha. Each is distinct, and involves many different forms of practice within each one. Finding the one that is right for you is important. So if you take a class and it didn't work for you, try a different one, “Yoga is for everyone,” Kennedy said.

Core Yoga Practices

- **Ashtanga** A classical style that consist of 6 series of set sequences, each more difficult than the previous. The sequences are fast-moving and focus on deep breathing.
- **Bikram** Includes 26 postures and 2 breathing exercises practiced in a heated room. There is no music, incense, or chanting of any kind. Be prepared to get sweaty.
- **Hatha** – Can include a combination of various styles – depends on the teacher and studio. Types of Hatha include Integral and Kripalu.
- **Kundalini**: A dynamic form of yoga focusing on awakening the energy said to reside at the base of the spine and drawing it upward through the chakras. Participants should be opening minded, since it is more of a spiritual practice with lots of chanting, rapid breathing and movements.
- **Vinyasa** Used for strength building and it can be arranged into different sequences and focuses on movement and breath.
- **Iyengar** Known for its use of props such as blocks, straps, chairs to work on strength.

Where Did Yoga Originate and Why is it Practiced?

The word "yoga" means union...union of body, mind, and spirit. Terry Gupta, co-owner of Yoga Caps (www.yogacaps.com) in Merrimack, explained its' history. "In 1880, there was a world congress conference in Chicago. A person named Vivekananda (a Swami Master from India) lectured and paved the way for waves of yoga here in the United States." Gupta said when yoga was practiced in India; it was for the spiritual aspect. By the time it came full circle in the 1960's, the United States was hooked on the physical realm as well.

Gupta described her studio as a non-profit focused on bringing yoga to people in an affordable way, and to current or past cancer patients. "We believe in yoga, because we know its' benefits, such as resiliency, good life skills, physical improvements, and wellness benefits, breathing improvements and cholesterol rates."

Gupta and her partner teach in corporations, share it with cancer patients, senior centers, individuals with fixed incomes and adults with disabilities.

Dube at Yoga Balance, said, "Yoga provides a sense of well-being and balance, so we are better prepared to deal with daily life, live happier and calmer." She talked about the spiritual side of yoga, and cautioned that it is not a religion; rather it focuses on "What is within us. You can practice yoga as a religious person or even if you are not spiritual at all. There are multiple elements that comprise spiritual yoga, all of which can be found at

Getting Started

Dube recommends starting with gentle yoga and working your way toward more powerful practices. Dr. Kennedy said regardless of your physical state, there is a yoga practice for everyone. If you try one, and didn't find it was right for you, move on and try another class. "It meets you where you are," she said.

Yoga requires very little extra cost, other than the class itself. Wear comfortable clothing such as leggings and something that you can move in freely and feel confident in. You can always borrow mats, straps and blocks from most studios. "All you really need is an open mind and an open heart," said Dube.

Visit the yoga listings section for a full offering of yoga classes in the area. You can also check with companies, fitness centers and look to the Yoga Alliance YouTube channel for free mini sessions at www.youtube.com/user/YogaDayUSA.

The Benefits of Yoga Gupta's partner and husband is a pharmacist from India and said they provide yoga capsules to clients. They are not a tangible pill but rather a set of practices that can be done for 5 or 10 minutes to alleviate stress, sinus issues, blood pressure, insomnia, weight loss, and general well being topics. "We don't ever tell people to come off of medicine. But have had people reduce or eliminate medicines with these capsules." Gupta explained they helped a girl sick with sinus issues, and after practicing different breathing capsules, her immune system improved and school attendance came up.

“Yoga helps cleanse the body of excess mucus, air, heat. – it’s all about balance,” said Gupta.

Dr. Kennedy talked about studies that show yoga has been proven to lower blood pressure, alleviate pain, helps with weight control. There are three ways it is known to help with weight management; physical, mindfulness, and breathing. The physical focuses on fitness, the mindfulness helps you focus on control and breathing helps circulate your lymphatic system.

Dr. Kennedy talked about a success story, where a client was prescribed yoga and better nutrition by her doctor, before they tried medicine. She was told to watch her nutrition as well. Within three months, her blood pressure had improved and medication was not needed.

Yoga Moves You Can Try

“Most people only use 20 percent of their breathing capacity. Most of us breathe shallow and without mindfulness, said Dube. She suggested deep yoga breaths, by letting your belly puff out, fill up your lungs and draw in your navel. You can also try the hummingbird breath in which you inhale through the nose and exhale with the mouth closed humming. The vibration calms the mind.

Dr. Kennedy said there were so many by decided on a spinal twist which is a part of chair yoga, since so many people are sitting at their desks during the day. “Twisting negative spots out of your mind,” explained Kennedy. For more information on yoga, Dube suggested the Yoga Journal website at <http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/165>, where they dedicate a section to beginners.