



A New Twist On Fitness – The Benefits Of Twisting

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Yoga is a psychophysical practice. It is fitness for the whole person, mind, body and spirit.

When practiced with proper technique, it enhances cardiovascular health through aerobic exercise and more effective breathing, strengthens the musculature through intense and prolonged weight bearing exercise, and fine tunes the organ systems through total body core strength. Even with all these physical benefits, yoga provides more. A yoga prac-

tice at its core is about enhancing psychological and spiritual growth. It improves focus, concentration and mood.

All yoga postures have targeted beneficial effects. The postures are intentionally used, through sequencing, to focus on specific effects in the body and mind. Twisting postures will help increase your spine's range of motion, cleanse your internal organs, and stimulate circulation. These postures are a great way to supercharge your abdominal work, releasing tension and toning the musculature of your back, waist and side body. Most of all, when performed properly, they feel great.

Any well-rounded yoga practice includes twisting. Yogis twist while sitting, squatting, standing, balancing on our arms and standing on our heads. Twists have many benefits. B.K.S. Iyengar describes twists as having a "squeeze-and-soak" action: During a twist the organs are compressed,

pushing out blood filled with metabolic by-products and toxins. When the twist is released, fresh blood flows in, carrying oxygen and the blood-borne nutrients necessary for tissue healing.

Yoga twists also positively affect the physical structure of the body. Twists involve increasing range of motion and functionality of the spine, as well as several major joints, including the hips and shoulders. Not only do you maintain the normal length and resilience of the soft tissues if you practice yoga twists regularly, but you also help to maintain the health of the discs and facet joints along with preserving the spine's natural curves. You are only as young as your spine, so rejuvenate it. As the Russian proverb advises, "you can't drive straight on a twisting lane".

The twisting postures also act to improve the emotional health and well being of those who practice them. Twisting has a constricting effect on the

lungs, where the lower lungs are rendered unusable, thereby forcing the upper and middle lungs to get activated. This improves the overall functioning of the lungs and makes breathing fuller and more efficient. The quality of our breathing directly affects our emotional and psychological state. As the Irish proverb contends "when a twig grows hard, it is difficult to twist."

A twist may be thought of as an upward spiraling motion like a tornado or the coiling and stretching of a spring. One must stabilize the hips and lower back before lengthening the spine right through the crown of the head. The upward motion is accompanied by gradual increased torsion in the thoracic spine (rib cage) and then cervical spine (neck). The upward motion ensures that space is created between each vertebra before it is rotated. Rotation increases as we move up the spine to smaller, more delicate vertebrae in the

neck, so care must also be taken to avoid over twisting the neck or using effort in the neck or head to turn. Technique in twisting is everything; "the difference between a 'helping hand' and an 'outstretched palm' is but a twist of the wrist" (Lawrence Lerner).

In short, twists stimulate circulation and have a cleansing and refreshing effect on the organs improving circulation, breathing and digestion. Twisting supercharges your metabolism and strengthens and lengthens core muscles while keeping the spine supple and strong. Twists are prescribed in yoga therapy for instance in treatments of depression, anxiety, diabetes as well as asthma, and a twist almost always serves to wrap up any yoga class before final relaxation. Realign your priorities; stay flexible. Twists are the perfect antidote to a stale fitness regimen. So "let's twist again" as spring begins.

Why wait until summer?



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