



## **Do the Holidays Leave You Feeling Anxious, Worn Out and Wondering How You Will Ever Take Off the Extra Pounds Gained from Holiday Fare (starting with the “left-over” Halloween Candy)?**

Although many of us will set our New Year’s resolutions to lose weight, be more active, get healthy, etc., very few of us will actually set realistic goals, continue on a lifelong path of health and wellness and get into a routine that makes us feel so great that we long for more every day.

This article will challenge you to not only set a resolution to be more healthy this year, but to also learn more about your physical and emotional needs so that you can work towards a routine that makes you feel renewed, energized and always striving for more. By adding (and continuing) a simple yoga practice, you can obtain that knowledge and balance and you will never look back or have regrets about failing to keep your resolution!

### **What is Yoga?**

Yoga is peaceful yet challenging; beneficial for your physical and mental health; positive energy producing; and will teach you how to get in tune with your physical and emotional needs so that you can work towards balance in your body and your life. So what is this “Yoga cure” taking the Western World by storm? In Sanskrit, the word yoga means, “to yoke or unite”. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, yoga is defined as “a system of exercises for attaining bodily or mental control and well-being”. In our modern society, most people practice Hatha yoga, which focuses on balancing and uniting energies through combining physical postures (asanas) with deep breathing techniques (pranayama) and meditation (dhyana). That combination creates a very effective means of obtaining physical fitness while gaining flexibility, focus, relaxation and general overall wellness.

### **Physical Benefits:**

Many have started to include yoga as a component of their regular exercise routine for its physical benefits including weight loss from burning calories and for its non-impact and non-repetitive means of lengthening, strengthening and toning muscles. Perhaps even more importantly, yoga can increase bone density and enhance functional strength and flexibility in a very balanced way. Many find yoga to be therapeutic for healing tension they have in their muscles, joints and tendons while increasing their strength, mobility

and range of motion. Yoga also teaches control and effective use of different muscles, which carries through to everyday activities, including reversing the effects of poor posture and injury prevention.

In addition to the benefits to the muscular and skeletal systems, yoga postures combined with the deep breathing techniques stimulate the digestive, reproductive, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine and nervous systems. In general, different postures massage, tone, stretch and exercise body organs to improve vital functions. Many postures even change the direction of blood flow by using balance and gravity, thereby increasing blood flow to different parts of the body without causing undue strain.

### **Emotional and Spiritual Benefits:**

A good yoga class will create an inward focus and clear the mind of the yoga practitioner from everything except for the present moment. This amazing, and almost-automatic phenomenon, will allow a person to establish a strong body-mind connection, and act as a great stress reliever. Yoga students also learn how to use this focus, control and breath to move energies throughout the body to increase mental and physical stability. These learned skills will carry through to everything that you do, and greatly enhance your ability to gain control over your mind and body in a very positive way.

This all translates into feeling better, looking better and being able to have greater self control when that second serving of stuffing or pumpkin pie comes around! Sound Good? Get started today, and be able to get control, enjoy the holidays and get into a routine that will not become a fad or short-term disappointment!

### **Try It Out:**

Sit comfortably (but with good posture) by yourself in a quiet room (no kids, dogs, **cell phone** etc.). As you sit there, think about all parts of your body starting from your feet and working your way up through the crown of your head. Develop a sense of whether you have any tension in your body and ask the muscles in that region to relax. As you do that, do not compromise your posture or lose touch with your body. Now start taking very deep and audible breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. Try to inhale for six seconds, hold the breath for two more seconds and exhale for six seconds. As you breathe, feel yourself getting taller and stronger with each inhale and let your tension go with each exhale. Continue this for at least one minute (more time will bring greater benefits) and enjoy the mental clarity you obtain with even this simple exercise!

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