

Yoga for psychiatrists

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Disclosure

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Being a psychiatrist today often entails long hours immersed in charts or on computers, a lack of fresh air, and eating meals in a hurry. Being on call, facing deadline pressures, and juggling multiple responsibilities can lead to fatigue, frustration, and a lack of adequate socialization. These circumstances can take their toll on us in unpleasant and unhealthy ways, resulting in exhaustion, illness, and isolation. After spending many hours caring for our patients, yoga can help restore and revitalize our own bodies and minds. Preliminary research indicates that yoga can have beneficial effects on one's mental state, and may help treat depression, anxiety, and other conditions, although many studies of yoga have been small or poorly designed.^{1,2}

What is yoga?

Yoga is an ancient practice that originated in India thousands of years ago. It was introduced to the West in the 19th century. Yoga is a holistic lifestyle of well-being that includes physical and meditative practices. Today, the most popular forms of yoga typically incorporate a combination of physical postures, controlled breathing, deep relaxation, and/or meditation.²

How to begin yoga practice

Start slow and simple. Watching a beginner's video at home or taking a beginner's class in a yoga studio can be extremely helpful. Take time to learn how to mindfully move in and out of postures to avoid injury or strain. Yoga postures often represent animals, nature, and heroes that suggest unity with life, evolution, and universality. These

postures can be done in any quiet setting; practicing out in nature may be particularly enjoyable for some. Practicing yoga postures can help you:

- develop balance, endurance, strength, flexibility, and coordination
- release chronic muscular tension
- rejuvenate the body.

Explore different schools. Over time, numerous schools of yoga have evolved. They vary from gentle to strenuous, with an emphasis on postures, breath work, meditation, singing, or a combination of these skills. Choose what feels good and safe based on your personal preference and physical ability.

Be mindful. Focusing solely on the present moment calms the mind and increases awareness. Meditative practice can sharpen clarity and focus. Meditation can involve focusing your attention on sounds, images, or inspirational words or phrases. Each of our movements can invite self-respect and further awareness of the daily toll that modern life places on our minds and bodies. Active breath work is believed to cultivate

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vitality. Calm breath work and meditative practices help still the mind and decrease physiologic overarousal.

Stay consistent. Regardless of your physical ability or level of mobility, consistent yoga practice is necessary to realize its benefits. Therefore, a weekly class may be a good way to start. Eventually, a good goal is to practice twice a day, at dawn and dusk.

Appreciate the experience. Immerse yourself in each moment of yoga practice. There is no need to rush. Enjoy your journey!

References

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2. Balasubramaniam M, Telles S, Doraiswamy PM. Yoga on our minds: a systematic review of yoga for neuropsychiatric disorders. *Front Psychiatry*. 2013;3:117. doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2012.00117.

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