

## Common Mistakes and Misunderstandings About Yoga?

Yoga is a very popular form of exercising and spiritual balancing, but it is also very often understood by a lot of people. This is almost inevitable when you consider the incredible popularity of Yoga as a discipline and the many different strands that Yoga has. Quite often people have experience with one type of Yoga but not another, and as such they will base their overall impression of Yoga on what they have seen. It is like people basing their impression on Germans on the most famous German they know - Adolf Hitler, or more recently the portrayal of George Bush internationally as the only example of an American anyone knows. The truth is that Yoga can be very different depending on who you learn it from and how they perceive Yoga. This article looks at some of the common misconceptions.

Misconception Number One: Yoga is a form of exercise.

Well yes it is, but so is walking. I can walk from my couch to my table and I can hardly claim to have done my exercise for the day. The truth is that exercise is just the beginning of what yoga is. It's closer to a combination of exercise, physiotherapy, psychology and spirituality all rolled into one. As you come to master Yoga you will need to become more and more mentally strong, and most importantly disciplined. If you can discipline yourself to do regular Yoga sessions, and maintain your discipline to do each pose for the prescribed time, and do it properly, then you will naturally become a very disciplined and organised person. For some people this transcends to a spiritual level because they are so efficient and clearing their thoughts while meditating.

Misconception Number Two: Yoga is for Hippies.

As previously mentioned Yoga can be a very spiritual experience if you become good enough at clearing your thoughts and concentrating whilst performing the exercises. But you certainly do not have to begin with any spiritual belief. Yoga believes in aligning the body and the mind and the spirit through achieving inner balance. What that means to you is probably going to depend entirely on what your beliefs already are. For some people it will be a spiritually freeing experience, for others it will be an effective way of distressing and achieving a level of calmness of thought. Still others will claim that these things are one and the same.

Misconception Number Three: Yoga is a fad.

Recently there have been some very hyped up Yoga courses making big claims about what Yoga can achieve. These are easy to associate with other 'fad'

exercise crazes. However Yoga is not something new and is based in documents that are hundreds of years old which describe exercises and poses that were probably being performed for generations before that. An individual style of Yoga may come and go, but as long as people are still stretching before a game of football then Yoga will still be being used.

Misconception Number Four: Yoga is too slow to help me lose weight/gain tone etc.

This one is way off the mark, but we have been somewhat trained by the weight loss industry that weight loss, and toning our body is all about hours in the gym and fast high impact exercise. That's simply not true. Yoga can help with weight loss and in particular toning for a number of reasons. Firstly the exercises, while low impact and performed either statically or slowly - are still exercises. While you use them you are using your muscles, and in many cases you are using muscles and muscle groups that regular exercise programs ignore. The second way that Yoga can be of benefit in a weight loss program is that it will increase your mental strength and allow you to be more disciplined with your food consumption. When it comes down to it excess weight is a result of excess eating and not enough physical exercise to burn off those calories. Have you ever noticed how some people can eat donut after donut and not put on any weight at all? It seems unfair, but it's a natural result of the state of their body. Usually these people will be quite 'sinewy' and this muscle allows them to metabolise food faster. That's the third benefit of Yoga in weight loss, as your muscles develop your body will actually become more efficient at consuming foods and processing them into nutrients and waste.

Hopefully we have now gone some way to explaining away the various myths associated with Yoga. It is such a broad topic that it is very much a case of Yoga being what you make of it.

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