

Yoga for Stress Relief

The top 3 causes of stress in the United States are:

- Job pressure (co-worker tension, bosses, work overload)
- Money (job loss, reduced retirement, medical expenses)
- Health (health crisis, terminal or chronic illness)

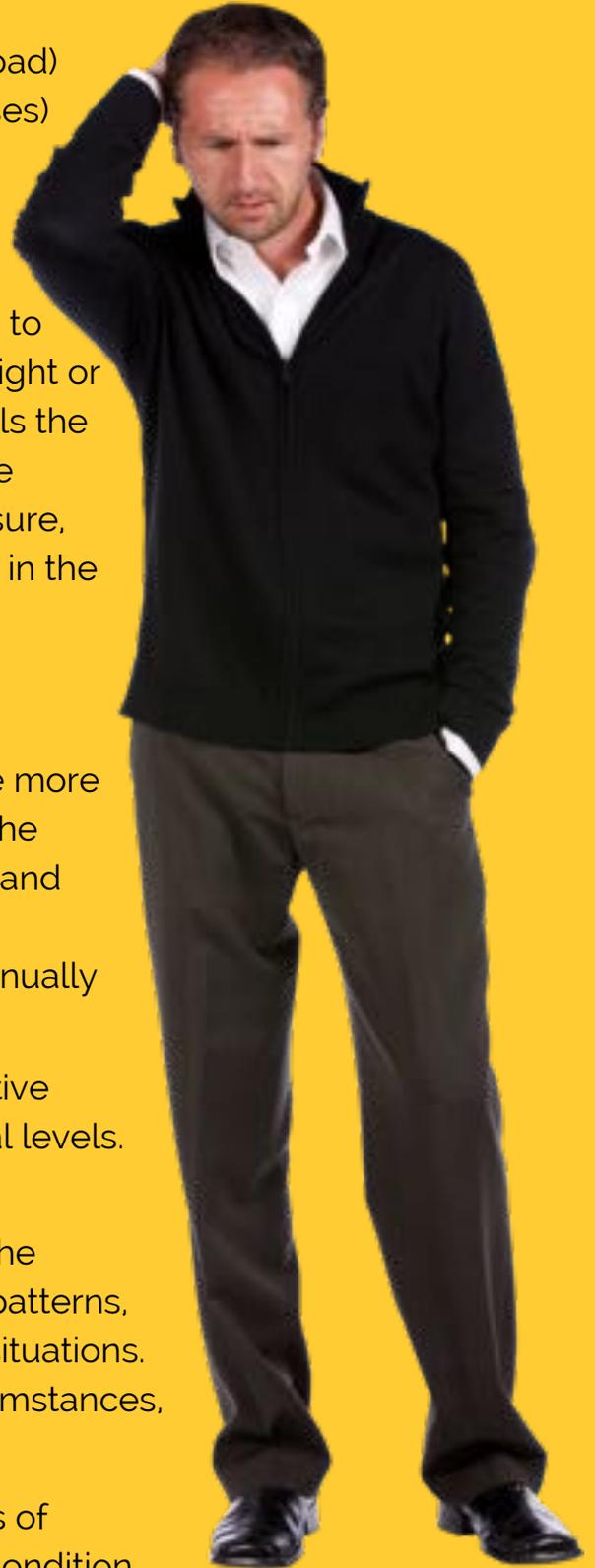
Nearly 3 out of 4 adults regularly experience physical and psychological symptoms caused by stress. When stressed, the body suddenly shifts its energy resources to fight off the perceived threat. In what is known as the "fight or flight" response, the sympathetic nervous system signals the adrenal glands to release adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones make the heart beat faster, raise blood pressure, change the digestive process and boost glucose levels in the bloodstream.

So besides experiencing impaired physical and mental function, it has consistently been demonstrated that individuals with stress and related disorders experience more work days lost and a high use of health care services. The annual costs to employers in stress related health care and missed work is estimated to be between \$150 billion (Spielberger, Vagg, & Wasala, 2003) and \$300 billion annually (American Institute of Stress) in the United States.

Through the practice of Yoga one can bring about positive changes on the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels. This happens without a conscious effort.

Since stress generally begins in the mind, we can use the discriminative part of the mind to analyze our thought patterns, emotions and reactions to what we consider stressful situations. Although we have very little control over external circumstances, we can definitely influence what happens in our mind.

Through Yoga, we have the tools to establish new ways of thinking, new patterns of behavior and consciously re-condition our own responses.



Practical Yoga Tips to Deal with Stress

- 1 Be aware of your response to "stressful situations"**

We all know the feeling of having our buttons pushed... We may react with evasiveness or anger even without giving a chance to acknowledge what has been said and done. By developing a conscious effort to remain calm and center the mind, we can maintain a more mindful relationship with those around.
- 2 Continuously relieve the physical and mental tension experienced when stressed**

A simple technique is to watch our breath and help it slow down. This stabilizes and relaxes the nervous system. A practice of relaxing asana (stretches) can bring us back to our balance and mindfulness.
- 3 Develop a foundation of balance**

Developing a strong, flexible body and clear, focused mind will better prepare us to deal with stress. It is important to see life as an adventure and choose to look at the positive side of every situation or change that happens in our lives. Daily meditation is very helpful.
- 4 Cope with stress as it arises**

At the first sign of stress, analyze the negative thoughts playing in the mind and direct the mind to positive, inspiring thoughts that affirm your qualities and abilities. Repeating affirmations can be a good way to begin to change negative thought patterns. Remember to be grateful for what you have now.

6 Easy Yoga Poses to Practice at Work



This sequence can be practiced anywhere but it is recommended that you choose a place where you will not be disturbed. Hold each position for 5-6 deep breaths and slowly come back to the first position in between stretches.

1. Start by sitting up straight, close your eyes and start observing your breath for a minute or two. **2.** Then slowly bring your ribs as close to your thighs as possible. You may relax your neck down and hold your ankles if that feels comfortable. Slowly return to the first position. **3.** Next, push your chest forward as you hold the chair behind you with straight arms. Back bends are great for energizing and opening the chest. **4.** For the following exercise, stretch your arms over your head and bring the palms of your hands together. **5.** Then, keeping the palms of your hands together, slowly stretch to each side and hold for a few breaths. **6.** Finally, return to the initial sitting position. Inhale slowly and deeply allowing first the abdomen then the chest to expand fully. The rest of the body should be relaxed. Now start to exhale by first emptying the chest then the abdomen. The entire movement should be harmonious and flowing.

Sources: Integral Yoga Institute of San Francisco. Stress Management Teacher Training Manual (2015); Chair Yoga pictures retrieved from www.liveyogalife.com

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