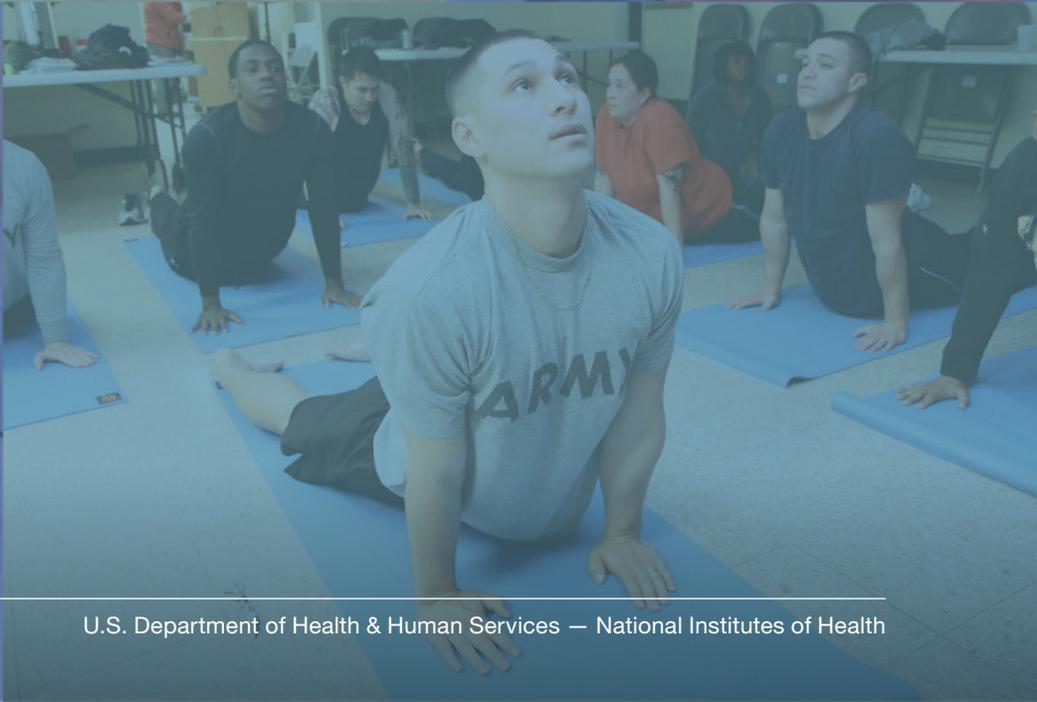




Yoga for Health



National Center for
Complementary and
Integrative Health



What's in This eBook

This eBook provides an overview of yoga for health. It comes from the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), which is part of the Federal Government's National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Many people practice yoga for health-related reasons, such as for well-being and fitness, to help control stress, or to help manage or prevent a health problem. Researchers are looking at yoga and its effects on health. They're finding out that yoga may be more helpful for some health conditions than for others. They're also learning about the effects of yoga on children's health.

This eBook covers the following topics:

Chapter 1: What Is Yoga? gives you some basic facts about yoga, including safety information, and the use of yoga for well-being and health conditions.

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss what national survey findings show about the number of people who practice yoga and the reasons why they do it. You may want to read:

- **Chapter 2: Who Practices Yoga?**
- **Chapter 3: Why Do Americans Practice Yoga?**

Chapter 4: How Safe Is Yoga? addresses yoga safety and tips to reduce your risk of sprains and strains.

Chapter 5: Yoga for Children gives you some basic facts about the health effects of yoga for children.

Chapter 6: Yoga for Older Adults gives you some basic facts about the health effects of yoga for older adults.

Chapter 7: Yoga in Pregnancy addresses the practice of yoga and its safety during pregnancy.

Chapter 8: Yoga for Health and Well-Being discusses the use of yoga for reasons related to well-being, such as reducing stress.

Chapter 9: Yoga for People With Health Conditions gives you general information about the use of yoga by people with health conditions.

Chapters 10 through 12 discuss additional information on yoga for specific health conditions. Each chapter briefly summarizes the scientific research on yoga for the specific conditions. You may want to read:

– **Chapter 10: Yoga for Pain Conditions**

– **Chapter 11: Yoga for People With Chronic Diseases**

– **Chapter 12: Yoga for Other Conditions**

Chapter 13: Be an Informed Consumer discusses topics that you might want to think about if you're considering yoga or another complementary health approach for your health.

The eBook ends with Chapter 14: Frequently Asked Questions, which reviews the most important information from earlier chapters and gives you links to resources where you can find out more.

This eBook shouldn't substitute for the medical expertise and advice of your health care providers. We encourage you to discuss any decisions about your health care with your providers.

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Chapter 1 What Is Yoga?

Yoga is an ancient and complex practice, rooted in Indian philosophy.

Yoga began as a spiritual practice, but it has become popular as a way of promoting physical and mental well-being.

Yoga is sometimes called a meditative movement practice, and that's a good description of it. Yoga, as practiced in the United States, typically emphasizes physical postures (*asanas*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), relaxation, and meditation (*dyana*). The various types of yoga include Iyengar, Bikram, Yin, vinyasa, ashtanga, kundalini, viniyoga, Sivananda, restorative, hatha, and hot yoga.

To Find Out More

— **Yoga: What You Need To Know**

(<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>)



Want to see people doing yoga? Watch NCCIH's yoga video (<https://nccih.nih.gov/video/yoga>).



Chapter 2 Who Practices Yoga?

Bryan Ewsichuk

In recent years, more Americans of all ages have been rolling out their yoga mats, according to national surveys.



Every 5 years starting in 2002, the National Health Interview Survey—one of the largest and most comprehensive health surveys in the United States—has included questions about adults’ use of yoga. Questions about children’s use of yoga were added to the survey in 2007. The survey results show how much yoga’s popularity has grown.

- Among adults age 18 or older, 5.1 percent practiced yoga in 2002, 6.1 percent in 2007, 9.5 percent in 2012, and 14.3 percent in 2017.
- Among children age 4 to 17, 2.3 percent practiced yoga in 2007, 3.1 percent in 2012, and 8.4 percent in 2017.



The 2017 survey showed that some groups of adults are more likely than others to practice yoga. Women were more than twice as likely to practice yoga as men. Non-Hispanic white adults were more likely than Hispanic or non-Hispanic black adults to practice yoga, and the use of yoga was higher among people aged 18 to 44 than in older age groups.

Why Is the Use of Yoga Increasing?

One piece of the answer may be the growing body of research (including NCCIH-supported studies) showing that some mind and body practices, such as yoga, can help people manage pain and reduce stress.

Another piece may be that yoga has become easier to access—for example, the number of yoga studios in the United States has grown substantially, according to industry reports.

And, as you'll see in the next chapter, many people who practice yoga feel that it's beneficial to their general well-being in a variety of ways.

To Find Out More

— National Health Interview Survey 2017
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2017>)



Chapter 3 Why Do Americans Practice Yoga?

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jennifer Spradlin, 19th Public Affairs Detachment

Why do Americans practice yoga? And how do they feel it affects their health? In 2012, the National Health Interview Survey asked adults aged 18 and older questions on these topics. Here's what the survey showed:

Most people who practice yoga do it for wellness; only 18 percent of those who practiced yoga did it to help treat a medical condition.

The survey asked about five wellness-related reasons why people might practice yoga. The participants were allowed to choose more than one answer. Here's what they said:



- 80 percent said that one of their reasons for practicing yoga was general wellness or disease prevention.
- 72 percent said one reason was that yoga focuses on the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.
- 67 percent said they practiced yoga to improve energy.
- 31 percent said they practiced yoga to improve memory or concentration.
- 30 percent said they practiced yoga to improve immune function.



The survey also asked about effects that yoga might have had on participants' well-being, and again, they were allowed to give more than one answer.

- 86 percent said yoga helped them reduce stress.
- 82 percent said yoga improved their overall health and made them feel better.
- 67 percent said yoga helped them feel better emotionally.
- 59 percent said yoga improved their sleep.
- 39 percent said yoga helped them cope with health problems.



The participants also answered questions about the effect of yoga on behaviors that are linked to good health.

- 63 percent said yoga motivated them to exercise more regularly.
- 43 percent said yoga motivated them to eat healthier.
- Among those who smoked cigarettes, 25 percent said that yoga motivated them to cut back or stop smoking.
- Among those who drank alcoholic beverages, 12 percent said yoga motivated them to cut back or stop drinking alcohol.

Overall, the survey showed that most people who practice yoga are interested in doing it for general health reasons. It also showed that they're finding yoga to be a positive experience in terms of their general well-being.

To Find Out More

- **Wellness-Related Use of Natural Product Supplements, Yoga, and Spinal Manipulation Among Adults**
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2012/wellness>)



Chapter 4 How Safe Is Yoga?

Yoga is generally considered a safe form of physical activity for healthy people when it's done properly, under the guidance of a qualified instructor. But it's possible to get hurt practicing yoga—just as when participating in other physical activities.

The most common injuries associated with yoga are sprains and strains. Serious injuries are rare. The risk of injury associated with yoga is lower than that for higher impact sports activities.

Here are some tips on how to reduce your risk of injury when practicing yoga:

- Start slowly and learn the basics.
- Choose a class that's appropriate for your level. If you're not sure, ask the yoga teacher.
- As a beginner, you may want to avoid challenging practices such as headstands, shoulder stands, the lotus position, and forceful breathing. Or, if you do try them, engage in them gently, gradually, and with great care.
- Learn about the precautions you need to take if you try a “hot yoga” practice (e.g., Bikram yoga). This form of yoga has special risks related to overheating and dehydration.
- Don't push yourself beyond your comfort level. If you can't do a pose, ask your teacher to help you modify it. If you feel pain or fatigue, stop and rest.

- If you have a health condition, if you’re an older person, or if you’re pregnant, discuss your needs with your health care providers and your yoga instructor. You may need to modify or avoid some yoga poses and practices. For example, if you have a condition that weakens your bones, you’ll need to avoid forceful forms of yoga. If you have glaucoma, you’ll need to avoid upside-down positions.

It’s important to remember that you should never use yoga—or any other complementary health approach—to avoid or postpone seeing a health care provider about a medical problem.

To Find Out More

- **Yoga: What You Need To Know**
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>)



Chapter 5 Yoga for Children and Adolescents

Bryan Ewsichuk



Non-Hispanic white children were much more likely than Hispanic or non-Hispanic black children to practice yoga.

About 1 out of 12 U.S. children age 4 to 17 practiced yoga in the previous year, according to a 2017 national survey. Girls were almost twice as likely as boys to practice yoga. Similar numbers of children in younger (4 to 11) and older (12 to 17) age groups practiced yoga.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends yoga as a safe and potentially effective therapy for children and adolescents coping with emotional, mental, physical, and behavioral health conditions.

Because some yoga poses are harder than others, the AAP cautions that even children who are flexible and in good shape should start slowly.

Yoga for Young Children

In a 2019 study, 5-year-old kindergartners doing yoga twice a week in school in place of standard physical education showed less inattention and hyperactivity and completed a task faster than 5-year-olds doing physical education or no exercise.

Yoga can help children learn to self-regulate, focus on the task at hand, and handle problems peacefully. Yoga may also improve balance, relieve tension, and increase strength when practiced regularly.

Yoga for Adolescents

Today's adolescents often face many expectations, stimulation through media and communication technologies, and increased pressure to succeed in school. These exposures and demands can result in stress and anxiety. The AAP lists yoga as a beneficial intervention for reducing stress and anxiety and improving mental health among adolescents. A 2016 review found that school-based yoga programs seem to help improve adolescents' health. Adolescent student-athletes can also benefit from yoga for both cross-training and preventing overuse injuries.

To Find Out More

- [Permission To Unplug: The Health Benefits of Yoga for Kids \(AAP\)](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Permission-to-Unplug-The-Health-Benefits-of-Yoga-for-Kids.aspx)
(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Permission-to-Unplug-The-Health-Benefits-of-Yoga-for-Kids.aspx>)



Chapter 6 Yoga for Older Adults

Yoga's popularity among older Americans is growing. National survey data show that 6.7 percent of U.S. adults age 65 and over practiced yoga in 2017, as compared to 3.3 percent in 2012, 2.0 percent in 2007, and 1.3 percent in 2002.

Yoga might protect the brain against the decrease in the amount of gray matter that usually occurs as people grow older. A 2015 study funded by NCCIH compared 14 experienced yoga practitioners to 14 physically active control participants of similar ages. In the control group, the amount of gray matter was lower in older participants than younger ones. In the yoga practitioners, there was no relationship between gray matter and age. Among the yoga practitioners, the volume of certain brain regions increased with the number of years of yoga experience and weekly amount of yoga practice.

Older adults who practice yoga should put safety first. It's a good idea to start with an appropriate yoga class—such as one called gentle yoga or seniors yoga—to get individualized advice and learn correct form. Chair yoga is an even gentler option for seniors with limited mobility. And it's important for older people with medical issues to talk to both their health care providers and the yoga teacher before starting yoga.

Older people are at increased risk of developing strains and sprains when doing yoga, so they may need to modify or avoid some poses and movements to prevent injury.

Researchers have been looking at the effects of yoga on the body in older people. One study funded by NCCIH measured the physical demands associated with seven commonly practiced yoga poses in older adults. The results of this research may help with the design of evidence-based yoga programs for older people.

To Find Out More

– [Go4Life: Yoga and Older Adults](https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise/yoga-and-older-adults/) (National Institute on Aging)
(<https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise/yoga-and-older-adults/>)



If you want to see how the research was done and what people looked like when hooked up to all the equipment, watch this NCCIH video on yoga (<https://youtu.be/z16-HV5bnw8>) on YouTube.



Chapter 7 Yoga in Pregnancy

Bryan Ewischek



According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, healthy pregnant women should ideally work up to at least 20 to 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per day on most or all days of the week.

Regular physical activity during uncomplicated pregnancies can have many benefits. It can increase or maintain overall fitness, promote healthy weight gain, reduce the risk of gestational diabetes, and improve psychologic well-being.

Modified yoga is an example of a safe exercise that most pregnant women can do as part of their regular physical activity. It's important, however, that a pregnant woman first be evaluated by her obstetrician or other health care team member to ensure that exercise and modified yoga are safe for her. Certain conditions and complications make exercise unsafe during pregnancy. So it's essential that pregnant women be carefully evaluated before exercise recommendations are made.

In addition to yoga's benefits as general physical activity, yoga during pregnancy can help reduce stress, improve flexibility, and encourage focused breathing. Research shows that yoga may also help pregnant women who suffer from anxiety, depression, stress, low-back pain, or sleep disturbances.

Whether a pregnant woman is interested in yoga as part of her regular physical activity or for a specific condition, certain modifications are important to consider.

- Yoga classes designed for pregnant women—called prenatal yoga classes—will often teach modified poses that accommodate a pregnant woman’s shifting balance and increased joint mobility. Similar modifications can be made by pregnant women who are doing yoga on their own or in other types of yoga classes.
- Certain positions should be avoided, including ones that require standing still or lying on one’s back for long periods of time. (These positions may cause a temporary drop in blood pressure.)
- It’s important to not become overheated, especially in the first trimester of pregnancy. This is because increasing body core temperature is associated with an increased risk for birth defects. This means that Bikram yoga and hot yoga should be avoided during pregnancy. Exercising and doing yoga at room temperature is safe.

If you have any of the following warning signs when exercising or doing yoga, stop and call your health care provider:

- Bleeding from the vagina
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Shortness of breath before starting exercise
- Chest pain
- Headache
- Muscle weakness
- Calf pain or swelling
- Regular, painful contractions of the uterus
- Fluid leaking from the vagina.

To Find Out More

- **Exercise During Pregnancy**
(American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
<https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Exercise-During-Pregnancy?>)
- **Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition**
(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
https://health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition/pdf/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf)



Chapter 8 Yoga for Health and Well-Being

Getty Images

In Chapter 3, we talked about survey data showing that people who practice yoga believe it has benefits for their general well-being—such as improving sleep and reducing stress. But does it actually do these things? Only a small amount of research has looked at this, and the findings have not been completely consistent. Nevertheless, some preliminary research results suggest that yoga may have several different types of benefits for well-being.



Studies have suggested possible benefits of yoga for several aspects of well-being, including stress management, mental/emotional health, promoting healthy eating/activity habits, sleep, and balance.

- **Stress Management.** Some research indicates that practicing yoga can lead to improvements in physical or psychological aspects of stress.
- **Balance.** Several studies that looked at the effect of yoga on balance in healthy people found evidence of improvements.
- **Positive Mental Health.** Some but not all studies that looked at the effects of yoga on positive aspects of mental health found evidence of benefits, such as better resilience (mental toughness) or general mental well-being.

- **Health Habits.** A survey of young adults showed that practicing yoga regularly was associated with better eating and physical activity habits, such as more servings of fruits and vegetables, fewer servings of sugar-sweetened beverages, and more hours of moderate-to-vigorous activity. But it wasn't clear from this study whether yoga motivates people to practice better health habits or whether people with healthier habits are more likely to do yoga. In another study, however, in which previously inactive people were randomly assigned to participate or not participate in 10 weeks of yoga classes, those who participated in yoga increased their total physical activity.
- **Quitting Smoking.** Programs that include yoga have been evaluated to see whether they help people quit smoking. In most studies of this type, yoga reduced cigarette cravings and the number of cigarettes smoked. So, yoga may be a helpful addition to smoking cessation programs.
- **Weight Control.** In studies of yoga in people who were overweight or obese, practicing yoga has been associated with a reduction in body mass index (BMI; a measure of body fat based on height and weight). An NCCIH-supported comparison of different yoga-based programs for weight control showed that the most helpful programs had longer and more frequent yoga sessions, a longer duration of the overall program, a yoga-based dietary component, a residential component (such as a full weekend to start the program), inclusion of a larger number of elements of yoga, and home practice.

To Find Out More

- **Yoga: What You Need To Know**
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>)



Chapter 9 Yoga for People With Health Conditions

If you have a health condition, you may be wondering whether yoga is a good idea for you. Would it help you manage your problem? Is it safe for you?

The next sections of this book will look at these questions for several common medical conditions. But before we look at specific conditions, there are a few general points to consider.

Communication Is Crucial

If you're hoping that yoga might improve your health problem—or even if you simply want to know whether it's okay for you to sign up for a yoga class—it's important to talk with your health care provider. He or she can help you make an informed decision about whether yoga is right for you.

It's also important to talk to the yoga instructor. The instructor can help you choose a class that's suitable for you and explain how to modify yoga to meet your individual needs and limitations.

Complementary, Integrative, and Alternative Health Approaches



If a non-mainstream practice is used **together with** conventional medicine, it's considered “complementary.”

If you're using yoga to help manage a health problem, you're using a *complementary health approach*.

- A *complementary* health approach is one that was developed outside of mainstream Western medicine and is used along with conventional medical care.
- You may hear people talk about *integrative* health approaches. Integrative health care often brings conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way. It emphasizes a holistic, patient-focused approach to health care and well-being—often including mental, emotional, functional, spiritual, social, and community aspects—and treating the whole person rather than, for example, one organ system. It aims for well-coordinated care between different providers and institutions.
- Another term you may hear is *alternative medicine*. Alternative means using an unconventional approach in place of conventional health care. This is actually uncommon in the United States. Most people who use health approaches that were developed outside of mainstream Western medicine also see conventional health care providers.



If a non-mainstream practice is used **in place of** conventional medicine, it's considered “alternative.”

The use of complementary and integrative approaches to health and well-being, such as yoga, has increased within health care settings across the United States. Researchers are currently exploring the potential benefits of these approaches in a variety of situations—such as pain management for military personnel and veterans, relief of symptoms in cancer patients and survivors, and programs to promote healthy behaviors.

If you feel better when you're using a complementary approach for a health problem, you might wonder whether it's OK to decrease or stop your conventional treatment. The answer depends on the health problem, the type of treatment, and your individual situation. It's very important to talk with your health care provider if you're thinking about making any changes in the treatment that's been prescribed or recommended for your health condition.

To Find Out More

- **Be an Informed Consumer**
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/decisions>)

Chapter 10 Yoga for Pain Conditions



Yoga is among the options that the American College of Physicians recommends for first-line treatment of chronic low-back pain.

Research has been done on yoga for several conditions that involve pain, and the results for some of these conditions have been promising.

- **Low-Back Pain.** Studies of yoga for low-back pain have shown that it may reduce the intensity of the pain and help people function better, although the effect may be small. Based on this research, the American College of Physicians suggests yoga as one of several options for first-line nondrug treatment of chronic low-back pain.
- **Neck Pain.** Only a small amount of research has been done on yoga for neck pain, but the results have been favorable. Yoga appears to have short-term benefits on both the intensity of neck pain and disability related to neck pain.
- **Headaches.** Just a few studies have been done on yoga for headaches. However, only one rigorously conducted study has shown improvement.
- **Arthritis and Fibromyalgia.** There hasn't been much research on yoga for osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or fibromyalgia, but the small amount of research that's available suggests that yoga may be helpful for symptoms of these conditions.

To Find Out More

- **Chronic Pain: In Depth**
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm>)



Chapter 11 Yoga for People With Chronic Diseases

There's promising evidence that yoga may help people with some chronic diseases manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life. Thus, yoga may be a helpful addition to their existing conventional treatment programs.

- **Cancer.** Quite a few studies have been done on yoga for people with cancer, especially on women with breast cancer. These studies have produced some evidence that yoga can help improve quality of life and reduce fatigue and sleep disturbances. Other forms of exercise may have similar benefits.
- **Multiple Sclerosis.** A small amount of research in people with multiple sclerosis found that yoga has short-term benefits on fatigue and mood, but it doesn't affect muscle function, reasoning ability, or quality of life. The effects of yoga on fatigue are similar to those of other kinds of exercise.
- **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).** Studies in people with COPD have shown that yoga may improve physical ability (such as the capacity to walk a certain distance in a specific length of time), lung function, and quality of life.
- **Asthma.** Studies of yoga in people with asthma have shown that it probably leads to small improvements in symptoms and quality of life.

To Find Out More

- **Cancer: In Depth** (<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/cancer/complementary-integrative-research>)
- **Multiple Sclerosis** (<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/multiple-sclerosis>)



Chapter 12 Yoga for Other Conditions

- **Anxiety or Depression.** Yoga may be helpful for anxiety or depressive symptoms associated with difficult life situations. However, the research on yoga for anxiety disorders, clinical depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although mildly positive, is still very preliminary.
- **Cardiovascular Risk Factors.** Stress and a sedentary lifestyle increase people’s risk of cardiovascular disease (heart disease). Because yoga involves physical activity and may help reduce stress, it might help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. However, not much research has been done on this topic. Some studies have suggested that yoga may improve some risk factors, such as blood pressure and cholesterol levels, but the findings aren’t definitive.
- **Diabetes.** Some research has suggested that participating in yoga programs is associated with better blood sugar control in people with type 2 diabetes, at least on a short-term basis.
- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).** IBS is a chronic disorder that causes symptoms such as abdominal pain, cramping, constipation, and diarrhea. The cause of IBS isn’t well understood, but stress, large meals, certain foods, and alcohol may trigger symptoms in people with this disorder. Some research has suggested that yoga may help to decrease IBS symptoms and severity, but the findings aren’t strong enough for definite conclusions to be reached.
- **Menopause Symptoms.** During the years around menopause, some women have hot flashes, night sweats, difficulty sleeping, or other troublesome symptoms. Growing research indicates that yoga may help to reduce these symptoms, and it’s at least as effective for menopause symptoms as other types of exercise.
- **Sleep Problems.** Some research has indicated that practicing yoga may improve sleep in a variety of groups of people, including people with cancer, older adults, people with arthritis, pregnant women, and women with menopause symptoms.



Chapter 13 Be an Informed Consumer

Decisions about your health care are important—including decisions about whether to use yoga or another complementary approach for a condition. Take charge of your health by being an informed consumer. The information in this chapter can help.

Topics discussed in this chapter include:

- Evaluating complementary health information on the Internet
- Finding reliable sources of health information
- Selecting a complementary health practitioner

Complementary Health Information on the Internet

Many people look for health information on the Internet. The number of websites, social media sites, and mobile apps offering information about complementary and integrative health grows every day. Some online sources are useful, but others are inaccurate or misleading.

If you're visiting an online health site for the first time or downloading a new app, these five questions may help you check it out:

- Who runs or created the site or app? Can you trust them?
- What is the site or app promising or offering? Do its claims seem too good to be true?
- When was the information written or reviewed? Is it up-to-date?
- Where does the information come from? Is it based on scientific research?
- Why does the site or app exist? Is it selling something?

Rather than searching the Internet, it's often easier to find reliable health information online by visiting U.S. Government health websites where all the information has been checked to make sure it's accurate. The following online Federal Government collections of high-quality, up-to-date resources may be particularly helpful:

Resources on Complementary Health Approaches

- NCCIH's website (<https://nccih.nih.gov/>)
- NIH's Office of Dietary Supplements website (<https://ods.od.nih.gov/>)

Resources on All Health Topics

- MedlinePlus (<https://medlineplus.gov/>), a collection of resources maintained by NIH's National Library of Medicine
- Healthfinder.gov (<https://healthfinder.gov/>), a collection of resources maintained by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Know the Science (<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/know-science>), NCCIH's collection of tools to help people better understand complex scientific topics related to health research.

Mobile Health Apps

There are thousands of mobile apps that provide health information you can read on your smartphone or tablet. Keep these things in mind when using a mobile health app:

- The content of most apps isn't written or reviewed by medical experts and may be inaccurate and unsafe. In addition, the information you enter when using an app may not be secure.
- There's little research on the benefits, risks, and impact of health apps, such as the many mindfulness meditation apps that are now available.
- It's not always easy to know what personal information an app will access or how it will store your data.
- Before you download an app, find out if the store you get the app from says who created it. Don't trust the app if contact or website information for the creator isn't available.

Some reliable health apps created by Government agencies can be found by visiting:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
(<https://www.cdc.gov/mobile/generalconsumerapps.html>)

If you're interested in herbs, you may want to consider downloading **HerbList™** (<https://nccih.nih.gov/Health/HerbListApp>), NCCIH's app for research-based information about the safety and effectiveness of herbal products.

Where To Find Reliable Information

The Internet, when used carefully, can be a good source of information about complementary health approaches, but other resources are also available.

Your health care providers and your pharmacist are good resources for learning about complementary health approaches. You can ask them about safety, effectiveness, and possible interactions with medicines, and they can help you understand scientific reports.

Another good information source is the NCCIH Clearinghouse. The information specialists at the Clearinghouse can respond to inquiries in English and Spanish, send you publications on complementary health approaches, and search Federal databases of scientific and medical literature for you. However, they cannot provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.

You can reach the Clearinghouse in three ways:

- **By phone.** Call 1-888-644-6226 (toll-free in the United States). Deaf or hard-of-hearing callers can call the TTY number, 1-866-464-3615. Both numbers are answered from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday. Voicemail messages can be left at any time, and an information specialist will call you back.
- **By email.** Send your questions to info@nccih.nih.gov.
- **By postal mail.** Write to NCCIH Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 7923, Gaithersburg, MD 20898.

Selecting a Complementary Health Practitioner

When you're looking for a complementary health practitioner to help treat a health problem, it's important to be as careful and thorough in your search as you are when looking for conventional medical care. Here are some tips:

- If you need names of practitioners in your area, first check with your doctor or other health care provider. A nearby hospital, professional organizations, or your health insurance provider may also be helpful. NCCIH cannot refer you to practitioners.
- Find out as much as you can about any potential practitioner, including education, training, licensing, and certifications. The credentials required for complementary health practitioners vary tremendously from state to state and from discipline to discipline.
- Find out whether the practitioner is willing to work together with your conventional health care providers. For safe, coordinated care, it's important for all of the professionals involved in your health to communicate and cooperate.
- Explain all of your health conditions to the practitioner and find out about the practitioner's training and experience in working with people who have your conditions. Choose a practitioner who understands how to work with people with your specific needs. And remember that health conditions can affect the safety of complementary approaches.
- Don't assume that your health insurance will cover the practitioner's services. Coverage varies for different approaches, and it may be partial rather than complete. It's wise to contact your insurance provider and ask what coverage you have.

To Find Out More

The NCCIH website has many resources on yoga.

You might especially like:

- Our fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm) (<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>)
- The video [Scientific Results of Yoga for Health and Well-Being](https://nccih.nih.gov/video/yoga) (<https://nccih.nih.gov/video/yoga>)
- Research results from NCCIH-funded studies of yoga (<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/279/research>)
- The latest statistics on the use of yoga by U.S. adults and children (<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2017>)



Chapter 14 Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is yoga?

A: Yoga is an ancient and complex practice that is rooted in Indian philosophy. Yoga began as a spiritual practice, but it has become popular as a way of promoting physical and mental well-being. The various types of yoga include Iyengar, Bikram, vinyasa, ashtanga, kundalini, viniyoga, Sivananda, restorative, hatha, and hot yoga.

To learn more about the nature of yoga, see NCCIH’s fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know \(https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm).

Q: Can I see what it looks like when people actually do yoga?

A: Yes. Watch NCCIH’s [yoga video \(https://nccih.nih.gov/video/yoga\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/video/yoga).

Q: How popular is yoga?

A: A 2017 national survey showed that 14.3 percent of U.S. adults practiced yoga. That’s one in every seven. Among children age 4 to 17, 8.4 percent practiced yoga.

For more statistics, see [National Health Interview Survey 2017 \(https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2017\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2017).

Q: Why do Americans practice yoga?

A: Many Americans practice yoga for general wellness or disease prevention. In a national survey, 80 percent of people who practiced yoga gave this as one of their reasons for doing it. Another popular reason, mentioned by 72 percent, was that yoga focuses on the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.

To learn more about yoga for wellness, see [Wellness-Related Use of Natural Product Supplements, Yoga, and Spinal Manipulation Among Adults \(https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2012/wellness\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2012/wellness).

Q: How safe is yoga?

A: Yoga is generally considered a safe form of physical activity for healthy people when it's done properly, under the guidance of a qualified instructor. But it's possible to get hurt practicing yoga—just as it's possible to get hurt when participating in other physical activities.

To learn more about the safety of yoga, see NCCIH's fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know \(https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm).

Q: Can children practice yoga?

A: Yes, and a growing number of children do. Yoga can have both mental and physical benefits for children.

To learn more about children and yoga, visit this webpage from the American Academy of Pediatrics: [Permission To Unplug: The Health Benefits of Yoga for Kids \(https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Permission-to-Unplug-The-Health-Benefits-of-Yoga-for-Kids.aspx\)](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Permission-to-Unplug-The-Health-Benefits-of-Yoga-for-Kids.aspx).

Q: Can older adults practice yoga?

A: Yes, but older people are at increased risk of developing strains and sprains when practicing yoga, so they may need to modify or avoid some poses or exercises to prevent injury. Older adults with medical issues should talk about their special needs with their health care providers and the yoga teacher before starting yoga.

Find out more about yoga for older adults from the National Institute on Aging's Go4Life program at [Go4Life: Yoga and Older Adults \(https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise/yoga-and-older-adults/\)](https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise/yoga-and-older-adults/).

Q: Can pregnant women practice yoga?

A: Yes, women with uncomplicated pregnancies usually can practice a modified form of yoga. It's important, however, for a pregnant woman to first be thoroughly evaluated by her obstetrician or other health care team member to ensure that exercise and modified yoga are safe for her.

To find out more about exercise and modified yoga for pregnant women, see the [Exercise During Pregnancy—Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Exercise-During-Pregnancy?) fact sheet from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (<https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Exercise-During-Pregnancy?>).

Q: Can practicing yoga promote well-being?

A: It may. Some preliminary research results suggest that yoga may help people manage stress, improve balance, improve positive aspects of mental health, and adopt healthy eating and exercise habits. Programs that include yoga may also be helpful for quitting smoking and losing weight.

To find out more, see NCCIH’s fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know \(https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm). You can also look up specific health conditions in our [Health Topics A to Z list \(https://nccih.nih.gov/health/atoz.htm\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/atoz.htm).

Q: Is it OK for people with health conditions to practice yoga?

A: In many cases, yes. It may even help you manage some conditions. But you need to talk with your health care provider about your specific situation. Your health care provider can help you make an informed decision about whether yoga is right for you. It’s also important to talk to the yoga instructor. The instructor can help you choose a class that’s suitable for you and explain how to modify yoga to meet your individual needs and limitations.

To find out more, see NCCIH’s fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know \(https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm\)](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm).

Q: Can yoga help people manage any health conditions?

A: Yes, for some conditions.

- Yoga may help relieve low-back pain and neck pain.
- Yoga may help people with some chronic diseases such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.
- Yoga may help people with diabetes control their blood sugar.
- Growing evidence indicates that yoga may help women manage both physical and psychological symptoms of menopause.
- Yoga may help people manage sleep problems.
- Yoga may be helpful for anxiety or depressive symptoms associated with difficult life situations. However, there is not yet enough research to confirm whether yoga can help in managing anxiety disorders, clinical depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



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Additional Resources

Chapter 1: What Is Yoga?

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>

Chapter 2: Who Practices Yoga

National Health Interview Survey 2017 (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2017>

Chapter 3: Why Do Americans Practice Yoga?

Wellness-Related Use of Natural Product Supplements, Yoga, and Spinal Manipulation Among Adults (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2012/wellness>

Chapter 4: How Safe Is Yoga?

Safe Use of Complementary Health Products and Practices (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/safety>

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>

Chapter 5: Yoga for Children

Permission To Unplug: The Health Benefits of Yoga for Kids (American Academy of Pediatrics)

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Permission-to-Unplug-The-Health-Benefits-of-Yoga-for-Kids.aspx>

Chapter 6: Yoga for Older Adults

Go4Life: Yoga and Older Adults (National Institute on Aging)
<https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise/yoga-and-older-adults>

Chapter 7: Yoga in Pregnancy

Exercise During Pregnancy (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
<https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Exercise-During-Pregnancy?>

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2nd edition (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
https://health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition/pdf/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf

Chapter 8: Yoga for Health and Well-Being

Wellness-Related Use of Natural Product Supplements, Yoga, and Spinal Manipulation Among Adults (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/NHIS/2012/wellness>

Chapter 9: Yoga for People With Health Conditions

Be an Informed Consumer (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/decisions>

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>

Chapter 10: Yoga for Pain Conditions

Chronic Pain: In Depth (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm>

Headaches: In Depth (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain/headachefacts.htm>

Osteoarthritis: In Depth (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/arthritis/osteoarthritis>

Chapter 11: Yoga for People With Chronic Diseases

Cancer: In Depth (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/cancer/complementary-integrative-research>

Multiple Sclerosis (NCCIH)
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/multiple-sclerosis>

Chapter 12: Yoga for Other Conditions

Anxiety at a Glance (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/anxiety/at-a-glance>

Irritable Bowel Syndrome: In Depth (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/digestive/IrritableBowelSyndrome.htm>

Menopausal Symptoms: In Depth (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/menopause/menopausesymptoms>

Sleep Disorders: In Depth (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/sleep/ataglance.htm>

Chapter 13: Be an Informed Consumer

Finding and Evaluating Online Resources (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/webresources>

NCCIH Clearinghouse (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/clearinghouse>

6 Things To Know When Selecting a Complementary Health Practitioner (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/selecting>



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