

The Difference Between Yoga and Exercise

Like regular exercise, **yoga strengthens and tones** the body. Regular exercise typically makes a body stronger and less flexible. Weight training for example, builds strength by breaking down and rebuilding muscle tissue. That bulky, muscle bound look and tighter muscle mass is a result of this breaking down and rebuilding of muscle. Yoga strengthens the body by toning the muscles and **creates longer, leaner muscles** due to the stretching. Yoga creates a body that is stronger and more flexible. Often the goal of regular exercise is to increase the heart rate.

While yoga can be practiced vigorously to increase heart rate, it can also be practiced in a way that **reduces the heart rate and lowers blood pressure**. Typically one exercises to a point of fatigue. At the end of a yoga practice, you feel as though you have had a workout, but are more relaxed and energized. Hatha yoga is not just a series of exercises, but a principle of exercise that involves **concentration, breathing and movement**.

Yoga offers many additional benefits as well. Bending, stretching and twisting the body **massages and soothes the internal organs** aiding digestion and elimination. Our hormones are brought into greater balance due to the toning of the endocrine system. The respiratory system is strengthened and the nervous system is soothed. **Stress relief** is also a major benefit of practicing yoga. In fact, all systems of the body are affected by a yoga practice. A yoga practice is appropriate for you, regardless of age, health issues and fitness level.

Whether practicing vigorously with challenging poses or practicing gently with soothing poses, yoga is **balanced action of the body, awareness of breath and steadiness of mind**. This is yoga in action, union of the body/mind.

Regular exercise and yoga both help us to lead active, healthy lives. Yet, yoga is a life support system...a way of life that helps us to maintain a healthier body, a calmer mind and a more balanced and peaceful life.