

KUNDALINI RISING

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Heart to heart on World Heart Day!



How yoga can help your heart

It is more than just a tireless muscle that governs our flow of blood to the rest of the body; the heart is also an energy centre that governs our ability to give and receive love, and our ability to heal from loss and grief.

Yoga — which includes physical asanas, breath work and meditation — keeps our hearts healthy.

Exercise

Yoga improves the heart's ability to draw oxygen from the circulating blood. This reduces the need for the heart to work harder to pump more blood to the muscles, whatever our age. Yoga includes three types of exercise.

Cardiovascular or aerobic exercise improves circulation, lowers blood pressure and heart rate. Some forms of yoga focus on meditation, while others, like the form I practice – ashtanga – are more rigorous. Heart-pumping aerobic exercise is recommended at least 30 minutes a day, at least five days a week.

Strength training helps reduce fat and create lean muscles, including core muscles. Yoga includes body-resistance exercises such as chaturanga (push-ups), utkatasana (squats) and virabhadrasana (lunges) and causes fewer injuries than weight training.

Stretching benefits the musculoskeletal health so we can stay flexible, rather than tight and rigid, in mind, body and spirit.

Relaxation

One of yoga's clearest benefits to the heart is its ability to relax the body and mind. Stress can cause a cascade of physical effects, including the release of hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, which narrow our arteries and increase blood pressure.

Cortisol prevents us from losing weight or warding off high cholesterol and raises blood sugar and blood pressure, which can lead to heart attacks or strokes. In the urban chaos of our lives in Dhaka, it is important to find ways to exist in a state of relaxation. As yoga guru Iyengar said, yoga helps us "be like a cat, master of stretch and relaxation."

Good sleep

Sleep, at least 6-8 hours, at one go, is important because during this stage of sleep, we empty our stress bucket. That means, all the stress and worries we accumulated during the day, are slowly released, so we can start the next day fresh.

Without proper sleep (and sleeping pill induced sleep does not take us to the required stage - REM), the heart is over-worked and under pressure. Yoga helps improve sleep hygiene by tiring us out (physical asanas), keeping us well-oxygenated (breath work) and allowing us to relax (meditation).

Attitude of gratitude

Depression, anger, guilt, shame, can damage the heart physically. These feelings accumulate in the stress bucket and lead to nervous breakdowns and heart attacks. Meditation, breathing and heart opening asanas such as back bends help release emotional and psychological blocks in the heart space. With these postures, we can slowly let go of grief,

regret, guilt, anger and find space to forgive others and ourselves.

Worry and depression are common side-effects of a cardiac event, such as a heart attack, bypass surgery or diagnosis of heart disease. Yoga as part of an overall treatment plan can help us manage this stress. Yoga as a philosophy reminds us that to value compassion, enjoy a simple life, spend time in nature, not take ourselves too seriously and remember we are divine!

Many scientific studies have shown the benefits of yoga. Rather than running for prescription pills and beta-blockers, you can heal yourself with yoga. Three weeks of yoga and you will know the benefits from within.

For heart-opening exercises, check out my video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5S3UxNEa4dA.

Shazia Omar is a yogini, an author and an activist. For free yoga classes, subscribe to her channel: [YouTube.com/ShazzyOm](https://www.youtube.com/ShazzyOm).

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