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Strike A Pose For Stress Relief

Research has shown that with yoga, people can learn to control blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing. This can help reduce stress and anxiety. But that's not all yoga can do. It may help relieve some symptoms associated with heart disease and cancer. It's also an effective complementary therapy for asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome, neck and back pain, and arthritis.

Yoga differs from other types of exercise because it engages both mind and body. You can work out on a treadmill while watching TV or listening to music, but yoga requires a level of awareness that provides its own set of benefits. While there are many types of yoga, most combine breathing exercises, meditation, and postures (sometimes called asana or poses) that stretch and flex various muscle groups.

Here are some simple poses you can try at home to get a sense of what yoga can do for you:

Tree pose: While standing, lift your chest and tighten your stomach muscles. Slide your left foot up the inside of your right leg. Bend your left knee to form a triangle out to the side. Keep your hips level and press your left foot against your right ankle (beginner) or side of your right knee (more advanced). Hands can be in prayer position in front of your chest. Or you can hold on to a chair or touch a wall for support. Hold the pose for 10 breaths. Repeat with your right foot.

What it's good for: Improving balance by building strength in the ankles, knees and hips.

Warrior pose: While standing, step your right foot out in front of you and bend your right knee so that your leg forms a right angle. Your left foot should be in line with your right knee and hip. Both hips should face forward like the headlights of a car. Lift your chest and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hands can be in prayer position in front of your chest, or holding on to a chair or stability ball for support. Hold for 5 to 10 breaths. Repeat, this time stepping left foot out in front.

What it's good for: Strengthens back and legs; improves balance.

Cat and cow poses: Get on all fours, placing a towel under your knees for comfort, if needed. Hands should be directly under your shoulders and knees directly under your hips. As you inhale, lift your chest and chin and bow your back so that your stomach drops slightly toward the floor. As you exhale, slowly round your back toward the ceiling. Repeat for 10 rounds of inhaling and exhaling.

What it's good for: Puts the spine through a full range of motion.

If you enjoy doing these simple poses, try sampling a yoga class at your local community gym or even online. You may find that one of the world's oldest forms of exercise is a great option as a new form of exercise for you.



Sources: American Osteopathic Society, National Institutes of Health