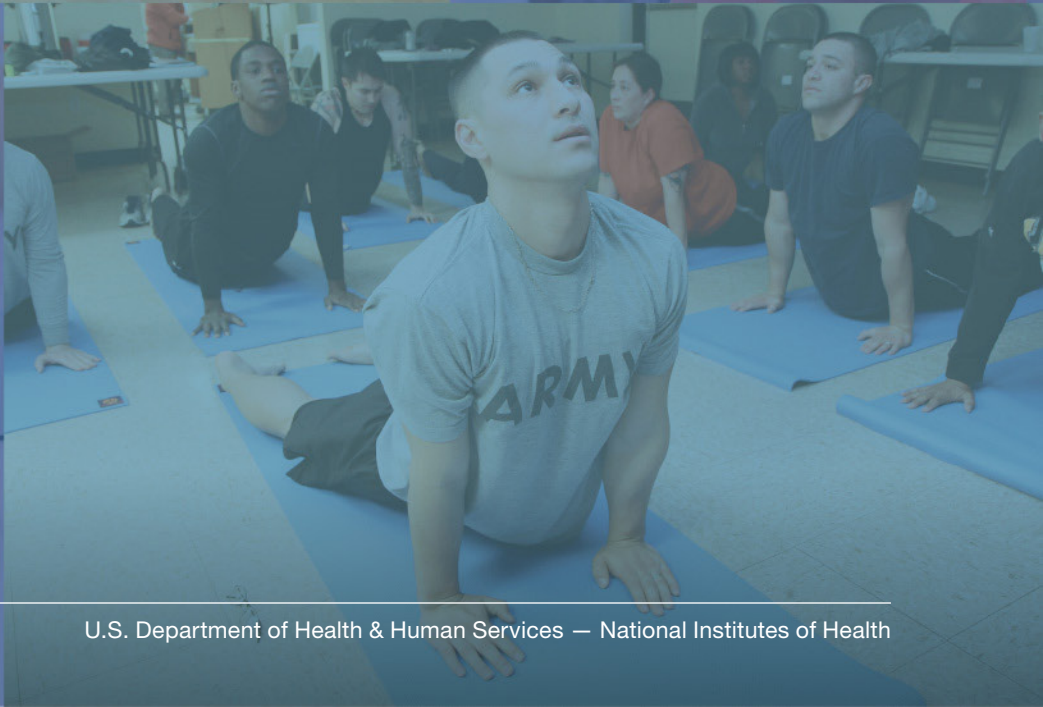




Yoga for Health



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 in children and adolescents, older adults, and people who are pregnant.

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 and Adolescents gives you some basic facts about the health effects of yoga for children and adolescents.

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 provide additional information on yoga for specific health 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.

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.

Acknowledgments

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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*), and meditation (*dyana*). The various types of yoga include Iyengar, Yin, vinyasa, ashtanga, kundalini, viniyoga, Sivananda, restorative, hatha, and hot yoga.

To Find Out More

— **Yoga: What You Need To Know**

(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)



Chapter 2 Who Practices Yoga?

14%

of American adults
practiced yoga in 2017

8%

of American children
practiced yoga in 2017

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 ages 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 ages 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 Has the Use of Yoga Increased?

One piece of the answer may be the growing body of research (including NCCIH-supported studies) showing that some complementary health approaches, 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://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/nhis/2017>)



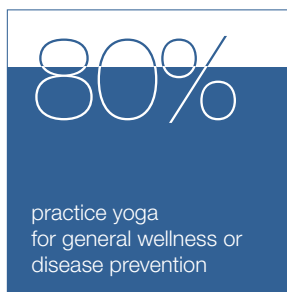
Chapter 3 Why Do Americans Practice Yoga?

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

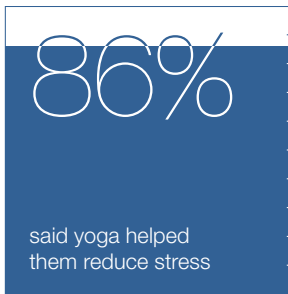
Why do Americans practice yoga? And how do they feel it affects their health? In 2012, the National Health Interview Survey asked adults ages 18 and older questions on these topics. Here's what the survey showed:

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.

Two smaller surveys—one of yoga practitioners and teachers and one of young adults—have provided additional insight into why people in the United States practice yoga. In both surveys, the respondents said they started yoga primarily for stress reduction and exercise or fitness.

To Find Out More

- **Wellness-Related Use of Common Complementary Health Approaches Among Adults: United States, 2012**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/wellness-related-use-of-common-complementary-health-approaches-among-adults-united-states-2012>)



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.
- Learn about the precautions you need to take if you try a “hot yoga” practice. 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 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.

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://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)



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 ages 4 to 17 practiced yoga in the previous year, according to a 2017 national survey. Girls were 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. Non-Hispanic White children were much more likely than Hispanic or non-Hispanic Black children to practice yoga.

Studies suggest that yoga may have benefits for children.

- There’s evidence that yoga programs may reduce symptoms of anxiety or depression in children and adolescents.
- A small amount of research suggests that group weight loss programs that include yoga may have beneficial effects on body weight and related behaviors in children or adolescents who are overweight or have obesity.
- There’s a growing body of evidence on yoga programs conducted in school settings. These programs have been shown to be feasible, and there’s preliminary evidence of possible benefits for both mental health and academic performance.
- Yoga may even have benefits for very young children. Studies in children aged 3 to 5 have found evidence that yoga programs may help to improve their social and emotional functioning in areas such as self-regulation (managing their thoughts, behavior, and emotions) and paying attention.

- Yoga is beginning to be studied as a possible way to help children with physical illnesses. For example, a few studies have looked at the possible benefits of yoga in children and adolescents who are being treated for cancer, and some of them have found improvements in anxiety, sleep, fatigue, or other aspects of well-being. But the amount of research is small, and no definite conclusions can be reached yet about the effects of yoga in children with cancer.

To Find Out More

- **Yoga: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)
- **National Survey Reveals Increased Use of Yoga and Meditation Among U.S. Children**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/research-results/national-survey-reveals-increased-use-of-yoga-and-meditation-among-us-children>)



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 ages 65 and older practiced yoga in 2017, as compared to 3.3 percent in 2012 and 2.0 percent in 2007.

Older people may have different reasons for practicing yoga than younger people do. A Canadian survey showed that people aged 55 or older were often motivated to practice yoga by age-related chronic health issues, while those aged 40 to 54 were more likely to do yoga to increase muscle strength or lose weight.

Research shows that yoga may have several benefits for older adults:

- Studies that compared yoga programs for older adults with programs that did not involve physical activity found that yoga improved depression, sleep quality, vitality, and participants' perceptions of their own physical and mental health.
- Studies that compared yoga with other physical activities found that yoga is more helpful for lower body flexibility and lower limb strength.
- Several studies of yoga in older adults indicate that it may improve balance.
- Some but not all studies that looked at the effects of yoga on cognitive function in healthy older adults found evidence that yoga is beneficial. If yoga does have an effect on cognitive function, it might be related to improved regulation of stress.

Older adults should be cautious when learning and practicing yoga. Data collected from U.S. emergency departments show that the rate of yoga-related injuries—particularly sprains and strains—is higher among people ages 65 and older than among younger adults. Age-associated changes in the body, such as decreases in muscle density and in flexibility in the joints, may play a role. Older adults should pay special attention to the tips for practicing yoga safely in [Chapter 4](#) of this eBook and avoid poses that they feel are beyond their physical limitations.

To Find Out More

– **Yoga: What You Need To Know**

(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)

– **National Survey Reveals Increased Use of Yoga, Meditation, and Chiropractic Care Among U.S. Adults**

(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/research-results/national-survey-reveals-increased-use-of-yoga-meditation-and-chiropractic-care-among-us-adults>)



Chapter 7 Yoga in Pregnancy

If you are healthy and your pregnancy is normal, regular physical activity is safe and beneficial. However, it is important to talk with your health care provider early in your pregnancy to make sure it is all right for you to exercise and to discuss the types of activities you can do safely.


Regular exercise during pregnancy improves fitness, promotes healthy weight gain, reduces back pain and constipation, and may decrease the risk of gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, and cesarean birth. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, pregnant women should ideally get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week.

Because of changes that occur in the body during pregnancy, some physical activities, including yoga, may need to be modified for safety. Yoga poses that require you to be still or lie on your back for long periods should be avoided during pregnancy. Hot yoga should also be avoided. Choosing yoga classes specifically designed for pregnancy (prenatal yoga) is a good idea because these classes may teach modified poses that accommodate the shifting balance that occurs when you're pregnant.

Research studies have looked at the potential benefits of prenatal yoga programs. They have found that practicing yoga may help to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression during pregnancy. Yoga might also reduce pain during labor, shorten labor, and increase the likelihood of a normal vaginal delivery. However, the evidence for these benefits is limited, and more research is needed before definite conclusions can be reached.

To Find Out More

- **FAQs. Exercise During Pregnancy**
(American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
(<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/exercise-during-pregnancy>)
- **Yoga: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)



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, weight control, sleep, and balance.

- **Stress Management.** Some research indicates that practicing yoga can lead to improvements in physical or psychological aspects of stress.
- **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 improvements in mindfulness or general mental well-being.
- **Health Habits.** Several studies have found that people who participated in yoga programs improved their health habits—such as their vegetable and fruit intake and their overall levels of physical activity. In interviews, participants in some of the studies said that doing yoga motivated them to make these lifestyle changes.

- **Weight Control.** In studies of yoga in people with overweight or obesity who were not physically active before the study started, practicing yoga has been associated with reductions in body weight, body fat, and body mass index (BMI; a measure based on both 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 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.
- **Sleep Problems.** Research has indicated that practicing yoga may improve sleep in a variety of groups of people, including people with cancer, women with sleep problems, and older adults.
- **Balance.** Several studies that looked at the effect of yoga on balance in healthy people found evidence of improvements.

To Find Out More

- **Yoga: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)



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 chapters 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 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. Your 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.

Complementary, Integrative, and Alternative Health Approaches



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



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

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 is not typically part of conventional medical care or that originated outside of usual Western practice and is used along with conventional medical care.
- *Integrative* health care brings conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way. It emphasizes treating the whole person rather than, for example, one organ system, and aims for well-coordinated care among different providers and institutions.
- Another term you may hear is *alternative* medicine. Alternative means using an unconventional approach in place of conventional health care.
- *Whole person health* refers to helping individuals, families, communities, and populations improve and restore their health in multiple interconnected domains—biological, behavioral, social, and environmental—rather than just treating disease. Research on whole person health includes expanding the understanding of the connections between these various aspects of health, including connections between organs and body systems.

The use of complementary and integrative approaches to health and wellness, 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://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/be-an-informed-consumer>)
- **Complementary, Alternative, or Integrative Health: What's In a Name?**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/complementary-alternative-or-integrative-health-whats-in-a-name>)



Chapter 10 Yoga for Pain Conditions

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 show that yoga probably leads to only a small improvement in chronic low-back pain when compared to no exercise. Compared to other types of exercise, yoga probably has similar effects on the ability of people with chronic low-back pain to move around and perform everyday activities, but it's unclear how different types of exercise compare in terms of improving pain. The American College of Physicians (the professional organization of doctors who practice internal medicine) suggests yoga as one of several options for first-line nondrug treatment of chronic low-back pain.
- **Neck Pain.** Research shows that practicing yoga may reduce both the intensity of neck pain and disability associated with neck pain.
- **Headaches.** Only a small amount of research has been done on the effect of yoga on headaches. However, the studies that have been completed so far suggest that yoga may be helpful for both tension-type headaches and migraines.
- **Knee Osteoarthritis.** A small amount of research suggests that yoga may be helpful for improving pain, stiffness, and function (the ability to move around and perform everyday activities) in people with osteoarthritis of the knee. The American College of Rheumatology and the Arthritis Foundation suggest yoga as a treatment people may want to try for knee osteoarthritis. This recommendation is based primarily on the similarity between yoga and tai chi, a meditative movement practice of Chinese origin that has been better studied and has been shown to be helpful for knee osteoarthritis.

To Find Out More

- **Chronic Pain: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/chronic-pain-what-you-need-to-know>)



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 conventional treatment programs.

- **Cancer.** Quite a few studies have been done on yoga for people with cancer, especially in women with breast cancer. These studies have produced some evidence that yoga can help improve quality of life and reduce fatigue, sleep disturbances, and depression and anxiety symptoms.
- **Multiple Sclerosis.** Yoga may be helpful for fatigue in people with multiple sclerosis, but it has not been shown to have benefits for other aspects of quality of life.
- **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).** Yoga interventions that include breathing techniques may have benefits for lung function and the ability to exercise in people with COPD.
- **Asthma.** Studies of yoga in adults and children with asthma have shown that practicing yoga probably leads to small improvements in symptoms and quality of life.
- **HIV/AIDS.** The results of a small number of studies in people with HIV/AIDS suggest that yoga is a promising intervention for stress management in this population.
- **Parkinson's Disease.** Yoga may have benefits for mobility, balance, and quality of life in people with mild-to-moderate Parkinson's disease.

To Find Out More

- **Cancer and Complementary Health Approaches: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/cancer-and-complementary-health-approaches-what-you-need-to-know>)
- **Multiple Sclerosis**
(<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/multiple-sclerosis>)
- **Asthma and Complementary Health Approaches: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/asthma-and-complementary-health-approaches-what-you-need-to-know>)
- **Parkinson’s Disease at a Glance**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/parkinsons-disease-at-a-glance>)



Chapter 12 Yoga for Other Conditions

- **Anxiety or Depression.** Growing evidence suggests that yoga may be helpful for depression. Yoga may also be helpful for anxiety associated with life situations, such as coping with a health problem. There's less evidence of a benefit of yoga for anxiety disorders, although it might be beneficial as an addition to other types of treatment.
- **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. There is evidence that yoga may have small beneficial effects on blood pressure in people with hypertension (high blood pressure), a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Whether yoga also has a beneficial effect on cholesterol and other lipids is unclear.
- **Diabetes.** Research suggests 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.** Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a condition that involves repeated abdominal pain with diarrhea, constipation, or both. IBS is a disorder of how the brain and gut work together. Some research has suggested links between practicing yoga and improvements in physical and mental health in people with IBS, but there isn't enough high-quality evidence to allow definite conclusions to be reached.
- **Menopause Symptoms.** Yoga appears to be at least as effective as other types of exercise in relieving menopause symptoms. It can reduce both physical symptoms, such as hot flashes, and psychological symptoms, such as anxiety or depression.

- **Substance Use Disorders.** A small number of studies have evaluated yoga-based interventions for the treatment of substance use disorders involving opioids, alcohol, tobacco, or other substances. Most of these studies showed improvements in anxiety, pain, or abstinence from the substances, but definite conclusions about the effectiveness of yoga can't be reached because so little research has been done.

To Find Out More

- **Yoga: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>)
- **Menopausal Symptoms: In Depth**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/menopausal-symptoms-in-depth>)
- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome: What You Need To Know**
(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/irritable-bowel-syndrome-what-you-need-to-know>)



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.

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 questions may help you determine if you can trust the information on the site:

- 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
- **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 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/digital-social-media-tools/mobile>).

If you’re interested in herbs, you may want to consider downloading HerbList™ (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/herblist-app>), 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. Here's how to reach the Clearinghouse:

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

Telecommunications relay service (TRS): 7-1-1

Website: nccih.nih.gov

Email: info@nccih.nih.gov

Postal mail: NCCIH Clearinghouse,
P.O. Box 7923, Gaithersburg, MD 20898

To Find Out More

– Be an Informed Consumer

(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/be-an-informed-consumer>)

– Finding and Evaluating Online Resources

(<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/finding-and-evaluating-online-resources>)



Chapter 14 Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is yoga?

A. Yoga is an ancient and complex practice that is rooted in Indian philosophy. It 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, vinyasa, ashtanga, kundalini, viniyoga, Sivananda, restorative, hatha, and hot yoga.

To learn more about the nature of yoga, see the NCCIH fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know \(https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know\)](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know).

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 ages 4 to 17, 8.4 percent practiced yoga.

For more statistics, see the [National Health Interview Survey 2017 \(https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/statistics/nhis/2017\)](https://www.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 Common Complementary Health Approaches Among Adults: United States, 2012 \(https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/wellness-related-use-of-common-complementary-health-approaches-among-adults-united-states-2012\)](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/wellness-related-use-of-common-complementary-health-approaches-among-adults-united-states-2012).

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 the NCCIH fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know) (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>).

Q. Can children practice yoga?

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

Find out more about yoga for children and adolescents from the NCCIH fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know) (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>).

Q. Can older adults practice yoga?

- A. Yes, and yoga's popularity among older Americans is growing. Yoga may have physical and mental health benefits for older adults, but older people should be cautious when learning and practicing yoga. The rate of yoga-related injuries—particularly sprains and strains—is higher among people ages 65 or older than among younger adults.

Q. Is it OK to practice yoga when you're pregnant?

- A. In most cases, yes, but it's important to talk with your health care provider to find out whether yoga is safe for you and to learn about how you should modify yoga for safety during your pregnancy.

To find out more, see the [FAQ about exercise during pregnancy from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/exercise-during-pregnancy) (<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/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, enhance positive aspects of mental health, sleep better, and adopt healthy eating and exercise habits. Programs that include yoga may also be helpful for losing weight.

To find out more, see NCCIH's fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know) (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>). You may also be interested in NCCIH's [Stress](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress) fact sheet (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>).

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 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 according to your individual needs and limitations.

Q. Can yoga help people manage any health conditions?

A. Yes, for some conditions.

- Yoga may help relieve some types of pain, such as low-back pain, neck pain, headaches, and pain from knee osteoarthritis.
- Yoga may help people with some chronic diseases, such as cancer, manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.
- Yoga may also be helpful for other conditions such as anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, menopause symptoms, and substance use disorders.

To find out more, see the NCCIH fact sheet [Yoga: What You Need To Know](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know) (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>).



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Additional Resources

Chapter 1: What Is Yoga?

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

Chapter 2: Who Practices Yoga

National Health Interview Survey 2017 (NCCIH)

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

Chapter 3: Why Do Americans Practice Yoga?

Wellness-Related Use of Common Complementary Health Approaches Among Adults: United States, 2012 (NCCIH)

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

Chapter 4: How Safe Is Yoga?

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

Chapter 5: Yoga for Children and Adolescents

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

National Survey Reveals Increased Use of Yoga and Meditation Among U.S. Children (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/research-results/national-survey-reveals-increased-use-of-yoga-and-meditation-among-us-children>

Chapter 6: Yoga for Older Adults

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

National Survey Reveals Increased Use of Yoga, Meditation, and Chiropractic Care Among U.S. Adults. (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/research/research-results/national-survey-reveals-increased-use-of-yoga-meditation-and-chiropractic-care-among-us-adults>

Chapter 7: Yoga in Pregnancy

FAQs. Exercise During Pregnancy (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/exercise-during-pregnancy>

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

Chapter 8: Yoga for Health and Well-Being

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

Stress (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>

Chapter 9: Yoga for People With Health Conditions

Be an Informed Consumer (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/be-an-informed-consumer>

Complementary, Alternative, or Integrative Health:

What's In a Name? (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/complementary-alternative-or-integrative-health-whats-in-a-name>

Chapter 10: Yoga for Pain Conditions

Chronic Pain: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/chronic-pain-what-you-need-to-know>

Chapter 11: Yoga for People With Chronic Diseases

Cancer: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/cancer-and-complementary-health-approaches-what-you-need-to-know>

Multiple Sclerosis (NCCIH)

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/multiple-sclerosis>

Asthma: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/asthma-and-complementary-health-approaches-what-you-need-to-know>

Parkinson's Disease at a Glance (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/parkinsons-disease-at-a-glance>

Chapter 12: Yoga for Other Conditions

Yoga: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-what-you-need-to-know>

Menopausal Symptoms: In Depth (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/menopausal-symptoms-in-depth>

Irritable Bowel Syndrome: What You Need To Know (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/irritable-bowel-syndrome-what-you-need-to-know>

Chapter 13: Be an Informed Consumer

Be an Informed Consumer (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/be-an-informed-consumer>

Finding and Evaluating Online Resources (NCCIH)

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/finding-and-evaluating-online-resources>



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