



KEEP HEALTH IN MIND

Making the mind-body CONNECTION

When life gets hectic, and you feel as though you are burning the candle from both ends, consider adding some mental relaxation into your physical fitness routine.

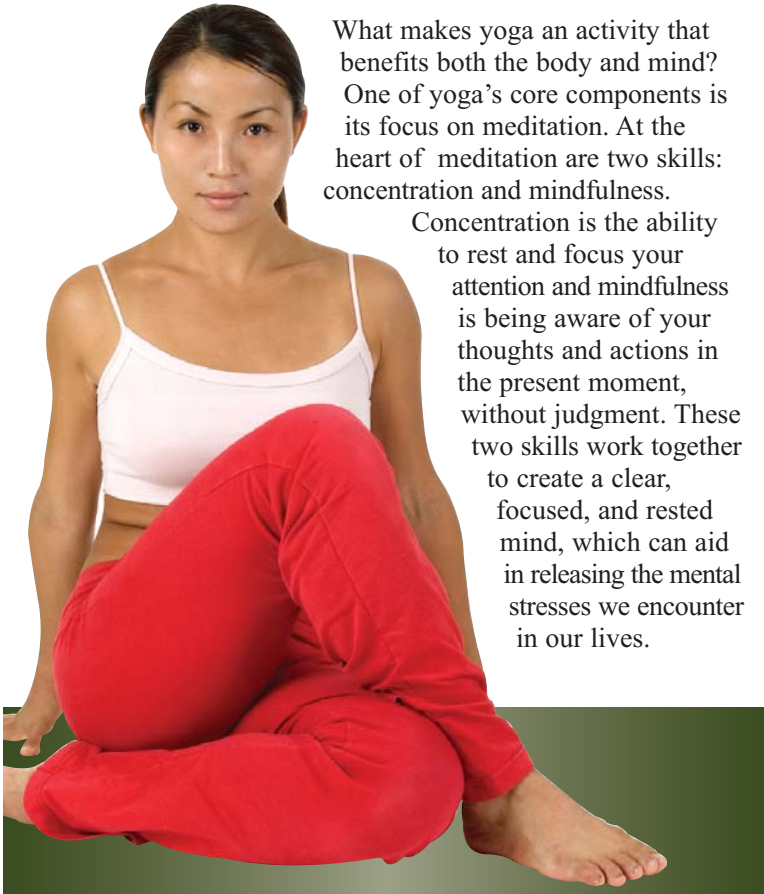
Physical activity of any kind will help reduce stress levels and symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. However, there are two unique types of physical activity that are widely recognized for their benefits to the mind and body. They are Yoga and Tai Chi.

What is Yoga?

Yoga is practiced in many ways and can offer greater flexibility, relaxation, and stress relief. Hatha yoga is the term for the physical practice of yoga and Raja and Karma are types of yoga that focus more on meditation. Ashtanga yoga is one of the most popular forms of Hatha yoga. It is energetic, and can be learned and practiced by most people. You don't have to be flexible to get started – that will come with practice. Remember, it is always a good idea to consult your doctor before getting started with any new physical activity.

What makes yoga an activity that benefits both the body and mind? One of yoga's core components is its focus on meditation. At the heart of meditation are two skills: concentration and mindfulness.

Concentration is the ability to rest and focus your attention and mindfulness is being aware of your thoughts and actions in the present moment, without judgment. These two skills work together to create a clear, focused, and rested mind, which can aid in releasing the mental stresses we encounter in our lives.



5 Reasons to Try Yoga

1. **Stress Relief** – Yoga encourages relaxation and lowers levels of stress hormones in the body, which can help ease symptoms of anxiety, depression, and fatigue.
2. **Mental Focus** – The meditation aspects of yoga helps with focusing on the present, and helps create mind-body health.
3. **Increased Flexibility** – The variety of poses taught in yoga can help with achieving flexibility in all parts of the body.
4. **Better Body Alignment** – Yoga helps to improve posture and may help relieve back, neck, joint, and muscle problems.
5. **Cardiovascular Conditioning** – Even gentle yoga classes can help with increasing endurance and circulation.

“She said/He said” Yoga Testimonials

“Yoga has become an important part of my day because it brings focus to the simple things in life like breathing, stretching, strengthening the spine, and balance. After yoga, I feel grounded and relaxed; leaving stress and concern behind and allowing clarity and peace of mind to surface. Unlike other areas in my life, yoga doesn't demand or expect anything I'm not willing or able to give. During a yoga class I know that I'm what matters. It's just me on my mat listening to my body and gaining awareness about my strengths, limits, and small yet, victorious accomplishments.”

*Vita is a Yoga Instructor
from Windsor, Ontario*

“Life can get pretty stressful, and I always seem to store that stress in my body. If I've had a bad week at work I can feel the tightness all over, from the back of my neck through my shoulders and along my spine. Yoga gives me a way of letting it all out. No matter how chaotic my day has been, how stressed out I feel, there is time that I have set aside to focus on me, and get in touch with my body. Yoga gives me time to put my life and my goals into perspective, while giving my body, mind and soul a moment to recalibrate.”

*Ken is a DaimlerChrysler employee,
who enjoys practicing Hatha yoga.*



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What is Tai Chi?

Tai Chi is sometimes referred to as “meditation in motion” and is a widely practiced activity around the world. In Tai Chi, you perform a series of slow and controlled body movements while your body remains straight and upright. It includes stepping, shifting your body weight, and rotating. Throughout the session, breathing is deep and relaxed. Its movements have been compared to yoga and ballet. Like yoga, many styles of tai chi exist. Some of these styles include, Chen, Hao, Sun, Taoist, Wu, Yang and Zhao Bao. The intensity of tai chi varies somewhat depending on the style. For example, the Chen style may be more fast-paced than other styles. However, most styles are gentle and suitable for everyone. Speak with a tai chi instructor to determine which styles are available in your community and would be best suited for you.

What are the benefits?

Because tai chi is slow and gentle, it has virtually no negative side effects. It's possible to you could strain yourself when first learning, but with proper instruction, this shouldn't pose a barrier to practicing tai chi. Some key benefits of Tai Chi are that:

- It's self-paced and noncompetitive
- You don't need a large physical space or special clothing or equipment
- You can do tai chi anytime, anyplace
- It's easy to do in groups as well as by yourself
- You can add new movements as you become more experienced.

Regular practice of Tai Chi can help you:

- Build strength
- Enhance both muscle tone and circulation
- Improve balance, flexibility, posture, coordination, and range of motion
- Reduce stress
- Improve concentration
- Increase energy
- Increase feelings of well-being.

Reliable Links

Canadian Health Network

Search for articles about Yoga

<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca>

ACE Fitness

American Council on Exercise

<http://www.acefitness.org/getfit/yoga.aspx>

International Taoist Tai Chi Association

A non-profit organization that is focused on helping others practice Taoist Tai Chi

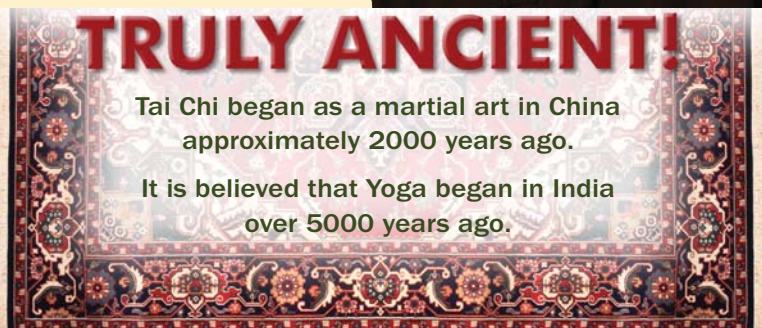
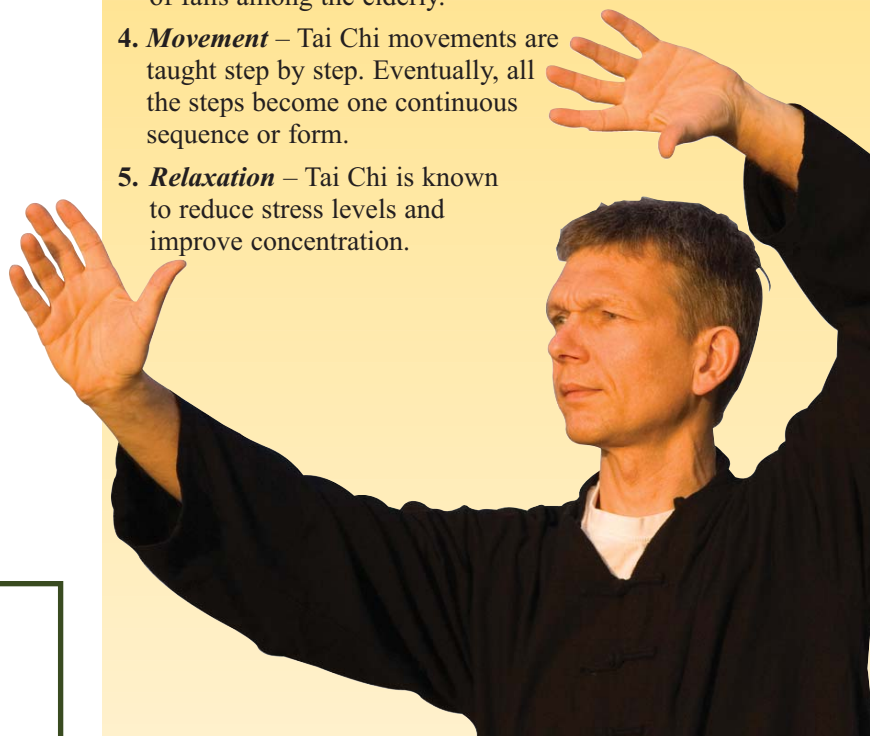
<http://taoist.org>

The Tai Chi Mind-Body Connection

Tai chi is believed to increase strength and calm the mind by improving the flow of energy throughout the body. In addition to the movements, the meditative aspects of tai chi are helpful in relieving stress and anxiety. Many people who practice tai chi regularly say the exercises give them a sense of well-being. As a physical activity, tai chi can benefit the entire body by increasing muscle strength and improving balance and flexibility. By improving balance, tai chi can reduce the risk of falling, which is especially important in the elderly population.

Tai Chi Basics

1. **Getting Started** – The best way to learn Tai Chi is to attend a class and receive instruction first hand.
2. **Daily Practice** – You may need to practice Tai Chi regularly before you see any health benefits. Daily practice is recommended.
3. **Balance** – Tai Chi enhances balance and can reduce the risk of falls among the elderly.
4. **Movement** – Tai Chi movements are taught step by step. Eventually, all the steps become one continuous sequence or form.
5. **Relaxation** – Tai Chi is known to reduce stress levels and improve concentration.



Key References:

Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). *Exercise for well-being*. Retrieved June 19, 2006, from http://www.cmha.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=2-267-1320-1321&lang=1

Mayoclinic.com (n.d.). *Stress reduction, balance, agility and more*. Retrieved June 19, 2006, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/tai-chi/SA00087>

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