



# Yoga and Depression

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In recent years there has been a rise in self-care and doing things for yourself so that you feel good. There are entire YouTube channels and social media accounts dedicated to sharing ways in which you can practice self-care. Yoga is often included in these lists for both the physical and mental aspects of it. While it is certainly a great form of self-care, one aspect of Yoga that is not discussed as much on social media is how it is helping those who are struggling with depression.

In order for us to understand how Yoga can help those with depression, it is important that we understand what depression is. As defined by the American Psychiatric Association “depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act (“What is Depression?”)”.

Yoga is an ancient practice that works towards *Atman*, or the physical self, or pure consciousness, and *Brahman*, or the impersonal and imageless, becoming one. This union is Yoga. (Hewitt)

Proper breathing is a fundamental part of the practice of Yoga. Connecting breath to movement is considered essential in order to reap the full benefits of a practice. The more controlled and calm the breath is, the more oxygen is circulating through the body and the blood. This increase in oxygen allows for the muscles in the body to fully relax and release all tension.

While there are several different Pranayama practices that can certainly aid those with depression. The best thing to do is to start by evening and lengthening the breath. Either sitting straight on a chair or lying down

on your back, begin by noticing the rise and fall of the diaphragm. Refrain from judging the breath and simply breathe; this is the most important part of any yoga practice (in my opinion).

Yoga works to connect your mind and body together, and while we are working on that connection it is important that we create a positive connection filled with nothing but loving and prideful thoughts towards our bodies. With that being said, lie, or sit, and observe the breath without trying to change it. After about a minute or so, begin to inhale for longer and exhale for longer. These fuller breaths will provide your body with an appropriate amount of oxygen, so that the body can fully relax. This deceptively simple practice can be beneficial for those dealing with depression since it requires you to clear your mind and sit peacefully with yourself.

Yoga is a beautiful tool for those who are struggling with depression. In a physical aspect, it feels great to get up and move your body and see it get stronger over time. Mentally, Yoga teaches you how to calm and clear the mind, and how to be free of judgement towards yourself. Hopefully with the rise of social media, not only can we dispose of the stigma placed on mental health, but also discuss supplementary treatments such as Yoga. Yoga is an empowering practice that connects the physical body to the mind to the spirit. It is a journey, not towards a physical goal, but towards a unity with all parts of the self.

Sources and Suggestions for further reading:

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