



Yoga: A Healthy Way to Deal with Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

By: Amy N. Liponoga

Since the 1970s, meditation and other stress-reduction techniques have been studied as possible treatments for depression and anxiety. One such technique is the practice of yoga.

Yoga classes can vary from gentle and accommodating to strenuous and challenging; the choice of technique tends to be based on physical ability and personal preference. Hatha yoga, the most common type of yoga practiced in the United States, combines three elements: physical poses, called asanas, controlled breathing practiced in combination with asanas, and a short period of deep relaxation or meditation.

Studies show that practicing yoga can reduce the impact of exaggerated stress responses and may be helpful for both anxiety and depression. By reducing apparent stress and anxiety, yoga appears to alter stress response systems. This, in turn, decreases physiological arousal, for example: reducing heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and easing respiration.

In a German study published in 2005, 24 women who described themselves as “emotionally distressed” took two 90-minute yoga classes a week for three months. (All participants had experienced emotional distress for at least half of the previous 90 days) Women in a control group maintained their normal activities and were asked not to begin an exercise or stress-reduction program during the study period.

At the end of the three months, women in the yoga group reported improvements in alleged stress, depression, anxiety, energy, fatigue, and well-being. Results of the study concluded: a depression score improvement of 50%, anxiety scores by 30%, and their overall well-being score improved by 65 %. Initial complaints of headaches, back pain, and poor sleep quality improved in the yoga group in comparison to the control group.

Further controlled trials of yoga practice have demonstrated improvements in mood and the quality of life for the elderly, people caring for patients with dementia, breast cancer survivors, and patients with epilepsy.

Although many forms of yoga practices are safe, some are challenging and may not be appropriate for everyone. In particular, elderly patients or those with mobility problems may want to check first with their doctor or a clinician before choosing yoga as a treatment option for alleviating stress in your life. Although, for many patients dealing with depression, anxiety, or stress; yoga may be a very appropriate outlet to manage these symptoms and allow for relaxation and enjoyment at the same time. Evidence is growing that yoga practice is a relatively low-risk, high-yield approach to improving overall mental and physical health.

Get With It offers free beginners yoga in both Monroe and Loudon county. In Monroe, yoga is held on Wednesdays at the **Get With It** Studio from 9-10:15am and on Fridays at the Cora Veal Senior Center from 9-10:00am in Madisonville. Loudon offers yoga on Wednesdays from 8:30-9:30am at Central United Methodist Church in Lenoir City.

In addition, **Get With It** health education is offering a free special workshop called “You are Worth It—Reducing Stress”. This program will include quick tips and demonstrations on taking time for yourself and reducing stress for great physical health. The workshop will include: pampering foot soaks, neck massages, and aroma recipes (foot scrubs, lotions etc.) with guest speakers Carol Lee and Linda Delgado. Join **Get With It** on Tuesday May 19th from 10:30am-noon at the Massage Therapy & Relaxation Center located at 500 Veterans Memorial Drive, Tellico Plains. RSVP at 423-420-3991 / 1-877-420-3991 or to amyl@getwithitwomen.org. Visit our website to print our calendar and view all of our exciting upcoming events and classes!

www.getwithitwomen.org