

# The Health Benefits of Yoga

## How Yoga Has Helped Me

by Jennifer Wright, UMBC student, Summer 2006  
(excerpts from two essays written to fulfill the course requirement)

“With certain types of yoga come certain health benefits including the burning of calories through intense, moderately paced movements. Yoga also improves flexibility and strength. I can now touch my toes with the legs straight – I haven’t been able to do that since middle school! Yoga (also) decreases heart rate and blood pressure, which is good for people like me who become upset at the slightest little thing that does not go their way. Yoga improves physical endurance, posture (if you have to keep your back straight for the entire session, your body will become used to it), and balance. I have personally noticed that it helps with allergies. I have horrible allergies, and when I practice yoga, within ten minutes I can breathe normally and my eyes are not bright red anymore.

Yoga also improves mental health...and has been shown to help memory and concentration. It is definitely easier for me to concentrate after taking this class. My mind wanders when I am presented with a task that I do not want to perform and now I sit down and get the job done. (Yoga) has also been shown to help with one’s acceptance of oneself, which may be the most important health benefit of them all.

I used to take dance and martial arts classes when I was younger. Perhaps because of this I was not sore after the first class. I was, however, very tired. It was difficult for me to accept the fact that I was out of shape. I am 21 years old. It should not be difficult for me to work out at a steady pace for about two hours. I was determined to become more flexible, strong, and have more endurance by the time this class was over...I had gained a significant amount of weight last summer (about 35 pounds) and have not been able to successfully take and keep it off. About halfway through the (six week course), I realized that I could run up and down stairs and not be panting when I reached a landing. My stomach wasn’t flowing over the waistband of my pants as much. I could carry more things to and from my car than I could previously... I can’t say I don’t slouch at all anymore, but I am definitely more aware of it and will straighten my back when I realize I am slouching...

I never thought yoga would affect me the way it has. This class made my walking and jogging class easy! I will definitely keep doing the sun salutations after this class is over, and hopefully I will have the opportunity to take a yoga class again.”

### Additional testimonials:

“This class taught me the meditative and relaxation skills to cope through stressful times... I noticed that...I have a flatter stomach and my muscles seemed to be tighter in my legs and my arms... This is my motivation to practice at least the sun salutations in the morning... This yoga class (at UMBC) was short and intensive but one of the best that I have taken.”

**Lie’ Ann Van -Tull, UMBC Winter Session 2006**

"The UMBC Power Yoga class helped me improve my ballroom dance technique. Particularly in the smooth dances, such as Tango and FoxTrot, you're supposed to elongate your spine and to maintain perfect posture, with your weight placed most often on the inner ball of your foot. Yoga taught me how to feel when my spine is aligned, and it gave me a better sense of balance and control over my abdominal muscles. Furthermore, yoga has made my hips more supple, which has greatly improved my Latin hip action. Truly, I have a better understanding of my body since taking the Ashtanga course."

**Michelle Grasso, UMBC Summer Session 2006**

"Despite the lack of extended volumes of work citing the proven benefits of yoga, I have become a believer in the benefits a yoga practice can bring to the body, mind, and spirit. Perhaps the greatest testaments to yoga's benefits are the widespread "anecdotes" touting the wonderful benefits of yoga and its mass popularity. Yoga has enjoyed a long standing popularity, outlasting most fad exercise. In fact, the best evidence for yoga is to meet someone who practices and to see not only the physical health and shape they possess, but the sense of calm and kindness that emanates from them.

In fact, I myself have experienced some of the same "anecdotal" evidence over the short period of time that I have been practicing. For instance, my friend has noticed that my stomach and legs appear to be more muscular and even I have noticed a reduction in the appearance of pesky cellulite. But even more noticeably, I've noticed how much calmer I have been. I have to admit, I have never been one for meditation or yoga. In all honesty I have always deemed myself someone for whom eastern practice is lost on. However, through the course of this practice I have noticed that my ability to focus, not only during the course of the class, but outside of class as well, has greatly improved. I find that I have more patience for activities that would have normally frustrated me. In fact, all my previous attempts at yoga had ended with my frustration at not being able to perform a specific pose and the limitations of my body. I now have a greater understanding and acceptance of the limitations of my body, but also my ability to expand beyond those limitations."

**Shanna Kibler, UMBC Summer Session 2006**

"This was my first experience in Ashtanga Yoga. I have taken a couple of Pilates classes before, but it was not on a regular basis. Being an ex-cheerleader and gymnast I thought the class would be easy because I stretch all the time and I keep in shape. The first day I did this class I was sore, and realized that I have bad posture. No matter how flexible I thought I was I was doing it all wrong. I think the class is good and I have recommended it for my sister because she is pregnant. I will continue to do Yoga with the correct postures. When I did the yoga class I was always stressed out before I came to class because I had a class before, and I was always driving in traffic. After I was finished the yoga class I would feel a lot better and a lot calmer....

While taking this class I lost about five pounds just by stretching the limbs on my body. I lost the most weight in my stomach...My thighs have gotten tighter and lot more muscular than it was before. I really liked the class it was a good experience for me and I hope that I will continue to keep in shape and take a yoga class."

**Latoya Palmer, UMBC Summer Session 2006**

-----Original Message-----

**From:** "Montgomery Park Health Club"

**To:** "David Smith"

**Subject:** RE: yoga picture from MPHC!

**Date:** Fri, 14 Jul 2006 08:20:48 -0400

Thanks David.....I'll forward those (yoga pictures that I took while you took Sandra's yoga class) on to Sandra...She will appreciate you for doing that.

Are you still taking yoga?

Have a good one and thanks again!

Kasey

Montgomery Park Health Club



David Smith practicing Ashtanga Yoga at Montgomery Park Health Club – his boss didn't believe that was what he was doing when he left the office to work out, so we took pictures!



**From:** David Smith **Sent:** Friday, July 14, 2006 9:05 AM

**To:** mphc

**Subject:** RE: yoga picture from MPHC!

Yes, I am still doing yoga but I am not sure I am liking my private instructor. She doesn't challenge me enough or offer the tips that Sandra would to fix problems in certain positions. Ask Sandra to send me a link to her web page maybe I can join a class of hers somewhere else.

*For more information about Ashtanga Yoga, visit <http://www.AshtangaYogaMaryland.com> be sure to visit my Yoga Blog for the funniest Yoga paper ever written by a UMBC student!*