

My Yoga Experience
By Erika A. Miles
UMBC student, Summer 2006

I have always had an interest in Yoga and Pilates, but never got the chance to take a yoga class until this summer. When I discovered that UMBC offered an Ashtanga Yoga class I was excited to say the least. After practicing Pilates for about a year, I expected this yoga class to be easy; I was wrong. Yoga is challenging, and it requires concentration and motivation. Controlling my breathing and remembering all the details of every new pose were intimidating at first. One of my greatest challenges was trying every pose and not giving up when I couldn't complete it right away. The positions in Yoga take time to achieve and you have to be patient. To this day, I cannot complete the Lotus pose, but I am not giving up. As my instructor suggested, I do Sun Salutations A and B along with a few other positions in the morning before I eat breakfast. Consistently stretching and challenging my flexibility has greatly affected my abilities to complete more and more poses. My Lotus is looking better with every week.

In addition to disciplining my body, I have also been trying to control my eating habits. Eating healthy is difficult, especially when you are a busy college student. My regular diet consisted of pop-tarts, Chinese carry-out, Chipotle burritos, and extra sweet southern iced tea. Over the last four weeks, I have been eating out less and stocking up on healthier foods so I can prepare healthy meals at home. I now eat plenty of organic baby spinach leaves, salads, fruit, lean protein, and I drink as much water as I can every day. I limit my sweet tea and burritos to once a week (Saturdays are my "off-days"). My roommate has even begun to eat healthier because of my lifestyle change. Practicing Yoga at least four times a week and eating more natural foods has made a huge difference in how I feel. I don't feel tired in the mornings anymore, my energy has increased, and my skin looks healthier. Even my co-workers comment on how I look thinner and healthier. A few of them have even begun to look sign up for the free Yoga/Pilates class offered in the UMBC gym. It feels wonderful to pass on the benefits of Yoga and healthier eating. The effects are real and worth the effort.

Consistent exercise and better eating is only half the battle in improving one's overall lifestyle. Meditating and learning the limbs (or angas) of Yoga are also very important to feeling better about oneself and the world around you. Taking the time to reflect on my actions and thoughts at the end of every class caused me to really evaluate myself. I am now more aware of what I say and do to others. When you know that you are positive, being around negative people affects you less. I have learned to let go of negativity and to focus on what is good. At first, it was extremely hard to just let things go, but as time passes you learn that life is too short to focus and react to the negative. I am happier when I focus on what I know is good about me and the world around me than when I allow life's little troubles and negative people to bother me.

The combination of Yoga, healthier eating, and a more positive attitude and outlook on life has, to say the least, made a difference in my life. I plan on continuing this new regimen and recommending Yoga to my family and friends. Thank you, Sandra, for sharing your expertise and advice. You are a wonderful instructor. Namaste, Hon!