



Yoga – Uniting All Aspects of Your Life **Yoga for Weight Management**

By Chris Covington, Editor-in-Chief, Cream No Sugar On-line Magazine, 3/18/2013

Yoga – Uniting All Aspects of Your Life

Yoga is an excellent way to incorporate a comprehensive mental and physical workout into your daily routine. CNS wanted to learn more about yoga so we reached out to Joanna Barrett of Joanna Barrett Yoga in the Boston area. She shared her insight and experience with us in a three part series on incorporating yoga into your fitness life, yoga for runners/walkers, and yoga for weight management. Thank you Joanna!

So whether or not you are considering yoga or are a long-time practitioner, we have good information for you. Here is our final interview in the series with Joanna. Thank you so much for your insight and inspiration!

Yoga for Weight Management

Q: How can yoga help women with weight management?

A: According to the March 2013 issue of Yoga Journal, a regular yoga practice can make you not only physically tone and fit, but also inspire you to make better lifestyle choices and choose healthier food options. The topic of yoga for weight loss is complex and multi-dimensional. Self-acceptance is the key to any type of transformation. Women should be aware of their starting point and approach weight loss with kindness and body-awareness. Change is only possible from the inside first. Inward reflection is developed through yoga and can increase one's capability to reach and preserve a healthy weight. Yoga helps build this awareness and can show a woman what is going on inside her body in ways such as signal when the belly is full. This awareness also leads to healthier food choices and can help curb emotional eating. Yoga can help with concentration and mindfulness, and eating may become more enjoyable without the TV, a book, or music to distract you while you eat. Yoga, which includes the physical practice (asana), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation, can show a woman the bigger picture and have less anxiety about the number on the scale. Yoga focuses on health and encourages a balanced picture of eating and exercise.

According to one study that was quoted in the magazine, a 12-week yoga program helped people lose weight, decrease blood sugar and triglyceride levels, and lower their blood pressure. Abdominal fat can be caused by stress and cortisol levels. Relieving stress through yoga is a powerful way to store less belly fat that is triggered by stress.

Q: What steps should women take to include yoga into their healthy lifestyle to manage their weight?

A: The first step is to find a class or teacher to guide you through the asana postures. If you are self-conscious about being in a class, ask a studio if they can recommend a teacher for private instruction. Once the basics are learned in a class, a student can incorporate what is taught in the studio into their own home practice. Once the fundamentals are understood, online videos and DVDs are a great way to practice as well.

Q: How can yoga help women who have 20+ lbs to lose?

A: Vinyasa-style class, where movement and breath link poses together, can build heat and potentially result in greater calorie burn. Yoga styles can be added to your regular work-out routine, which may include walking, running, biking, or swimming. Yoga stretches and strengthens the muscles, which over time can create a leaner look. Once a student is comfortable with the poses, they may want to try something more intense, such as the Ashtanga, Power, or Hot yoga, which should only be done if a student is comfortable with aerobic activity and won't strain the body.

Q: Can yoga play a role in helping women who have reached a plateau in their weight loss?

A: Yoga teaches us that whatever is occurring in this moment is perfect just as it is. A student can try to acknowledge where she is today, and know that next week, next month, and next year may all be different. Self-acceptance is the biggest key here. Understanding that this is where the body may want to be at the present moment is important. The number on the scale doesn't matter. It is how the body and mind feel. Again, mindful eating and healthier choices can help with losing weight.

Q: How can yoga help someone maintain their healthy weight?

A: Weight loss is about a lifestyle change. By altering food and exercise habits, including harmful choices such as excess drinking and smoking, changes can occur in the body. Mindfulness and awareness in all actions are important to recognize. Regular asana practice, with healthful eating and supplementary exercise routines can help someone maintain their healthy weight.

Q: Can yoga help someone who has an eating disorder with healthy weight management?

A: In my opinion, there is nothing more beneficial to someone with an eating disorder than incorporating a regular yoga practice into their life. This can be in the form of going to class, requesting a private teacher, or practicing at home. To start, I recommend finding a teacher with knowledge of eating disorders to offer private instruction. Eating disorder clinics and hospitals may offer classes or be able to recommend teachers. Yoga builds self-acceptance and quiets the self-judgment and critical parts of a person. It builds stronger self-esteem over time, and helps someone let go of old and harmful patterns. Yoga creates mindfulness in all actions, and mindful and healthful eating is important. Yoga helps us choose nutrient-rich foods to nourish the body. It also helps to connect to the food – the source of where it's from and the preparation that goes into a delicious meal. Yoga helps people take care of themselves better and create better self-care practices. Connection to self is created and it's the small steps that lead to an overall better lifestyle. It's important, however, to create these changes while still under the supervision of a doctor, healthcare professional, or treatment facility.

Q: Anything else?

- A great resource is <http://www.yogajournal.com/weightloss>. They have several articles and links on a variety of weight-loss topics.
- This is a great list of tips from WebMD (<http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/yoga-for-weight-loss>):

1. Practice in a room without mirrors, and put the emphasis on your internal experience rather than your outer performance.
2. Learn to experience the sensation of movement, down to the tiniest micro movement.
3. Always try to find your "edge" -- the place where your body feels challenged, but not overwhelmed. When you achieve this, keep an open, accepting state of mind.
4. Give yourself permission to rest when you're tired.
5. Combine your yoga session with positive self-talk. Appreciate your efforts and praise your inner goodness.
6. Go to class faithfully. If you work out at home, set a specific day and time for your yoga session and stick to it.
7. Recognize that you are not only working on your body, but are also working to develop qualities like patience, discipline, wisdom, kindness and gratitude.
8. Look for a teacher (in a class or on video) who you feel offers a balance between gentleness and firmness, and who inspires you to practice.

9. Recognize that simply buying a yoga DVD or attending the class is a step toward creating a better you. Use it as momentum to keep going.

10. Realize your efforts are not just inspiring you, but also inspiring others as you become more attuned to who you are, inside and out.

• Some poses to try:

1. Sun salutations (whole body strengthener and stretch)

2. Chair pose (firms thighs, butt, core)

3. Plank (firms shoulders, arms, core, and back)

4. Boat (firms core)

5. Tree (helps with balance, firms abs and standing leg)

6. High lunge (helps with balance, firms core, hips, and thighs)

Joanna Barrett is a Boston-based vinyasa, yin, and restorative yoga instructor. She has a passion for sharing the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of yoga with her students in both public and private classes, and encourages them to listen to the intuitive wisdom of the body. Joanna is a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT 200) through Yoga Alliance and a member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists. Her website is www.joannabarrettyoga.com