

YOGA FOR OSTEOPOROSIS

SITTING DOWN WITH REHABILITATIVE MEDICINE SPECIALIST DR. LOREN FISHMAN.

BY LESLIE KAZADI

LOREN FISHMAN, M.D. has been a rehabilitative medicine specialist for over thirty years. As a pioneer in integrative medicine, from the start of his practice, he incorporated yoga into patient care. A prolific, published researcher, he is the author of eight books, including *Yoga for Osteoporosis*, *Yoga for Osteoarthritis*, and *Yoga for Back Pain*. His research into yoga for osteoporosis has provided valuable insight into adapting yoga practice to support building bone and maintaining health.

Currently based in New York, Dr. Fishman will be visiting Los Angeles to share his research and experience at Exhale's Center for Sacred Movement in November.

What inspired you to begin practicing yoga?

When I was about nine, I saw a TV show called "Ram of the Jungle," where a kid rode on the neck of an elephant. He also did some yoga. And I said to myself: That's for me! I just loved it. Then, in 1972, I knocked on Mr. Iyengar's door, wanting to learn more, hoping I could take a class. I stayed for a year of daily classes!

PEOPLE AGE AT VERY DIFFERENT RATES. SOME 80-YEAR-OLDS SEEM LIKE THEY'RE THIRTY, AND VICE VERSA.

You are 72 years old. Do you think there are any poses that are contraindicated strictly due to age?

No, people age at very different rates. Some 80-year-olds seem like they're thirty, and vice versa. Three factors are key in this process: genetics, epigenetics, and environment, and a lot of interplay between them. Various excellent studies have shown that yoga can change which parts of your DNA are upregulated and which are downregulated. Whether a person can or should do a particular pose is dependent not on calendar age but on the condition of the person who is practicing.

Your workshop at Exhale is titled "Yoga Therapeutics." How do you distinguish yoga from yoga therapeutics?

It's a continuum. The yoga therapist takes a person who is below sea level – who has something wrong – and brings him up to sea



level, back up to normal. I call it medical yoga. But what the yoga teacher does is different. The yoga teacher does indeed take students to above normal, over the rainbow, as far as they want to go, along the way to liberation.

Your integrative medical practice uses many modalities. When do you use yoga rather than other modalities?

It depends on what the patient needs: Tai Chi is excellent for balance, Alexander technique helps with body awareness. Yoga is best for blood pressure, arrhythmias, rotator cuff syndrome, scoliosis, osteoporosis, back pain, and a host of other medical conditions. Just about every day, I get a new idea about how to use yoga for medical problems.

In your integrative practice, do you prescribe yoga practices other than asana? Do you also teach meditation?

Yes, I teach it one-on-one. I learned from Mr. Iyengar's elegantly understated breathing and meditation sessions. Like a Japanese drawing, much of the meaning is in the space between the lines—what is not said.

It's difficult for most people to start and to maintain a meditation practice. How do you inspire people to create that home practice?

I introduce it slowly. At first, we may do as little as three minutes.

In your osteoporosis study, you have 12 evidence-based poses. Could you explain what that means?

It's based on the pilot study I published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2011. After all the participants had bone density scans, half of them were taught the 12 poses and were encouraged to do them every day for two years, then we got another DEXA (bone density) scan on all of them. The non-yogis lost a little bone. But the yogis gained more than .6 on the T-scale for their lower backs and almost an entire point – .94 –with regard to their hips. This was so impressive I made a DVD for participants and now am now doing an international study.

Do you see evidence that yoga can arrest or reverse osteoarthritis?

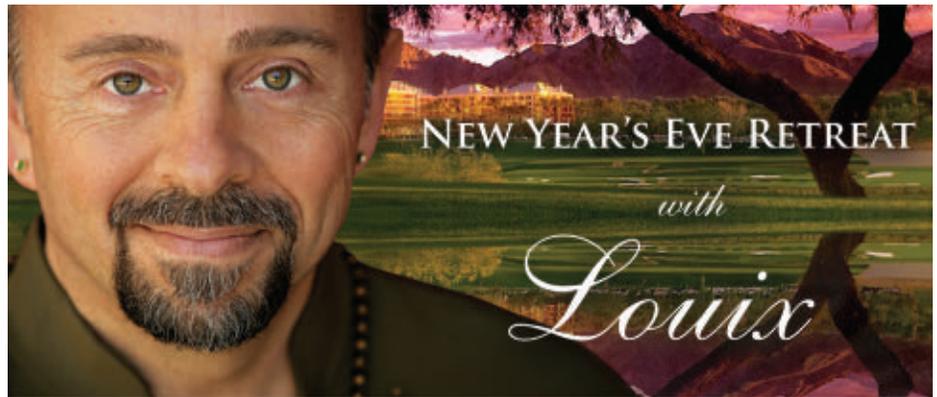
Osteoarthritis is a process. Yoga can affect the process and reverse it. When you do yoga or any endurance-type exercise, you also free a molecule, PGC-1 alpha, a powerful anti-inflammatory that slows down arthritis. Yoga stretches will also improve your range of motion, raise your strength; yoga is excellent for balance and the use muscles appropriately so the joints don't suffer. It reduces anxiety, which can make you tight, therefore putting more pressure on your joints than you need. Certainly, yoga can reduce the ill effects of arthritis.

One reason you became a doctor was to understand how yoga works. What is unique about how yoga works?

To me, yoga is a self-improvement program that really works—it is a beautiful thing. The beauty starts on the outside with the pose, and with persistence, gets deeper and deeper into you.

Dr Loren Fishman is teaching a weekend workshop on Yoga for Osteoporosis and Osteoarthritis November 14-17 (open to the public) as part of Annie Carpenter's teacher training program at Exhale, Venice. Exhalespa.com.

Leslie Kazadi, CYT, E-RYT500, is a yoga therapist, anatomy geek, and yoga researcher who is passionate about making yoga accessible to every body. Lesliekazadi.com



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For more information or to register for the retreat, please contact Samantha:

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