

## Yoga helps calm generalized anxiety disorder

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Anyone who has ever suffered from any type of anxiety can attest to the fact that the feeling can be so distressing that you are willing to do just about anything to make it stop. It's almost understandable that people are so willing to turn to prescription medications out of a desire to turn off those worrying thoughts, even when they know that there are some very serious side effects that come along with these pills. However, a new study points to a very effective treatment for anxiety that won't put your health at risk.

The study out of Georgia State University found that yoga can help lessen the symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Participants in the study reported their daily worry levels dropping or leveling out after starting to practice yoga. The study was published in the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*.

The study's lead author, Jessica Morgan Goodnight, said that those suffering from anxiety are plagued with uncontrollable worries about the future, which manifests itself physically via muscle tension and sleep troubles, and it can even affect their relationships. Yoga's ability to reduce worrying is what makes it such a promising treatment for Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

This study is not the first to point to such an effect. An earlier study supporting this finding came out of Boston University, where researchers examined the effects of Hatha yoga in particular on anxiety. In that study, which was published in the *Journal of Evidence-Based Medicine*, more than 500 cases were studied. The researchers found that yoga was the most beneficial for those who had higher levels of anxiety. Hatha yoga is a fairly broad term that includes all types of postural yoga, which is used in conjunction with breathing techniques.

## **Yoga is a long-term coping mechanism**

Nova Southeastern University voluntary assistant clinical professor of medicine, **Dr. Adam Splaver**, said: "As our knowledge of the downsides of drugs increases, more and more people are becoming interested in non-drug alternatives to treat anxiety. There's evidence to show that yoga can work, and instead of just treating the symptoms like meds do, it actually helps you learn to cope with your worries. Given the choice, most of my patients would rather overcome their problems than put a Band-Aid on them."

**Dr. Splaver** raises an excellent point: Why would anyone want to take a dangerous pill that will only suppress symptoms when they could learn a technique that would help them truly conquer their anxiety? It seems that part of the problem is that people simply do not realize the extent to which options like yoga can help, whereas they are constantly being bombarded with marketing messages from pharmaceutical companies.

## **Yoga helps with anxiety in several ways**

How exactly does yoga help with anxiety? First of all, it reduces tension and emphasizes relaxation. When a person is anxious, they can hold tension in their neck, jaw, shoulders and other places, and this tension feeds back into the mind to prolong that uneasy feeling. The relaxation that yoga brings about helps loosen anxiety's grip.

Yoga's emphasis on breath control is also part of its success in treating anxiety, and breathing clean air can be tremendously healing. By breathing slowly and deeply, the nervous system can be soothed. Perhaps one of its best properties, however, is its ability to interrupt those all-consuming cycles of worry and fear. Practicing yoga helps you step outside of your head a bit, letting go of worries without even realizing it as you focus on your breath and body instead.

Research such as the Georgia State University study couldn't come at a better time. Anxiety disorders, which include post-traumatic stress and depression, are the most common mental illnesses in the nation. According to *CBS News*, they affect around 40 million adults, and are on track to becoming the second leading cause of disability around the world by the year 2020. Yoga has incredible potential to help deal with anxiety naturally and keep people off dangerous pills.

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