

Yoga Health Secrets - Be Happy in Health!

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Happiness is in the mind. Health is a positive state; not just the absence of a negative one. Yoga means "to unify." It's the holistic approach to all aspects of life: physical, mental and spiritual. Yoga views the person as a whole; as a unique combination of body, mind and consciousness (or what some may call soul), and its techniques maintain that body-mind-soul harmony.

"Nature cures," so said Hippocrates. He also said, "Nature is the physician of all diseases". He understood that no medicine matches the body's own capacity to revitalize itself. Treatment of any kind just helps that process. Prevention is better than cure. Nobody can deny that to prevent an illness is far better than to have to cure one. So it's important to live a life that prevents illness from developing, rather than to have to deal with it afterwards. We want to be healthy and stay that way.

How? There are 3 important points.

1. Cleanliness

Maybe you've seen the westerns. It goes something like this. Cowboy just arrived in a small town. The first thing he did was get a bath. The scene shows him sitting in a soap-sudded bathtub with a cigar in his mouth. Then he gets out of the bath, picks up his still dust-covered clothes, and proceeds to put them all back on again.

That little anecdote brings up an important concept: there are two aspects to cleanliness: internal as well as external. We're usually preoccupied with the way we look on the outside, but we don't pay any attention to our inside. We may bathe every day and keep our body relatively clean on the outside, but meanwhile people stuff so much garbage down our throats that the intestines start to resemble a clogged-up sewer pipe. Sorry to tell you such a horror story, but I'm not making anything up here. Germs in the body don't cause disease; they're a sign of it. They're scavengers – they feed on dirt. It's

the dirt, toxins and dead matter in the body which cause the disease in the first place, including the vast majority of major diseases in the Western world.

Why should you not look after the inside of your body as much as you do the inside of your house or car? And a house or car is something you can actually replace! There's a saying that if you lose money you've lost nothing; if you lose your health you've lost something; and if you lose your peace of mind you've lost everything. "Health is wealth." You can't be healthy without inner cleanliness. It's likely that if you're clean internally, you won't even catch a cold.

2. Vitality

Vitality comes from the body's energy resources. We gain energy from the environment: from the sun, our food and water, and the air we breathe. That energy becomes vital energy in the body; the vitality that keeps us alive. The more vitality you have, the stronger you are, the greater your physical well-being, and the more inspired you'll feel.

3. Resistance

Resistance to disease is an automatic result of both cleanliness and vitality. If the blood is pure, the cells that fight disease can function freely, without being caught in a "traffic jam" of toxins and impurities. Resistance is an internal matter, and healing is also from within. Medicine only assists the body's natural internal resistance. Resistance also depends on your lifestyle. A well-controlled lifestyle gives physical health, mental peace and contentment.

But nowadays it's difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle – what with the pollution, the pressure of everyday life, and the lack of nourishing food and drink. Try this: leave a Big Mac for six months to see what it would look like. What does it look like after all that time? Exactly the same as when you bought it! Only it was hard, like plastic! Can you imagine what they put in those things! Much of the food we eat is sorely lacking in nutrition and vitality, even if it is supposedly fresh. On top of that, our ever-increasing materialistic outlook on life leaves us dull and uninspired.

So what's the answer?

Know yourself; take responsibility for your own health; be your own doctor. I'm not saying you're never going to need specialised medical treatment, but at least you can minimize the chance of needing it. "An apple a day..." well you know the saying! What's the use of going to the doctor for something you can cure ten times easier yourself? Or even better, something you could have prevented yourself, with no extra demand on your time or your finances! And these are very simple things that you just need to be mindful of. They're not even things you have to learn – they're that simple. But the point is we're not mindful of them. Even the basic things like how to eat, how to breathe ... even how to think – there's an art and science to every aspect of life that we should be aware of and make good use of.

Well, the good news, if you haven't already done so, is start from today! It's not a matter of learning – just knowing what are the right things to do. And it's the doing that counts. If you don't learn to read, you may have wasted half your life. But if you don't learn to swim and you like to venture into water, you could find yourself in a situation where you've wasted your whole life! The point is: it's what we do that matters most. You can start practicing these techniques as soon as you read them.

Rule No.1: Mind

Keep your mind positive! Here's a quote from Alice in Wonderland: "Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said: 'one can't believe impossible things.' 'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'"

What's the point? The mind creates its own reality. You become what you think. If you think negatively, your life will automatically be negative. On the other hand, your life will be positive if you think positively. The state of your mind is ultimately going to determine how you feel, what you experience and who you are. What kind of a life we lead depends on our thinking. Negative thinking makes life miserable, while positive thoughts create a happy, successful and fulfilling life. Create your own reality! If you think the chair you're sitting on is a throne, then for you it is a throne! See the bright side of everything – and there is a bright side; we just have to see it. "Live in the

present", and avoid stress, anger and other negative feelings.

These days many people are missing a sense of purpose in what they do. We tend to lose sight of the big picture in our lives, and become depressed and disillusioned. In the past people had to survive the elements, defend themselves from enemies, and struggle to overcome the hard realities of life. That infused them with a sense of mission. Nowadays our mission has become nothing more than to be as comfortable as possible; to earn more money; to buy more things. Indeed, mass media portrays that if you aren't doing this, then there's something wrong with you. Perhaps they'll even tell you that you have been brainwashed! Well, these superficialities just doesn't cut it as far as the mind is concerned – it won't satisfy the mind. And if the mind's not satisfied, you can forget about real well-being, let alone a successful and fulfilling life.

I still have the memory of a game I was playing when I was a young kid at school. We were all in the middle of a field fighting a "battle" with cardboard swords and shields. I was "struck" to the ground. I smelt the fresh spring grass, and I remember thinking, "Life is sweet". It had a purpose – I had a mission! Well, of course it was only a game, but just as a game is reality for a child, life is just a larger game. We only have to learn to play it.

What news will make a rich person sad and a poor person happy? Nothing lasts forever! Joys will come and go, and so will sorrows. We have to keep everything in perspective. There's no reason to be pessimistic. Infuse your life with optimism, keep positive and feel the love that pervades the whole universe! Meditation is a simple and effective technique to feel that love.

"You are never alone or helpless; the force that guides the stars guides you too." (Anandamurti)

Rule No.2: Lifestyle

Good habits lead to good health. Regulate your habits and your health will automatically be good. You don't have to live in a monastery! But everything should be in moderation: "Everything in moderation, except for moderation." Buddha learnt a great lesson when he witnessed a musician tuning the strings of his instrument. After contemplating, he realized that everything should be like that: not too tight; not too loose. Over-indulgence in anything reduces our vitality. Food is essential for

life, but if you eat too much you'll die! There's a saying, "If in doubt about eating, don't eat; if in doubt about going to the toilet, go to the toilet!" You can even get too much water – or even air!

The point is that we should do everything in a balanced way. You don't have to give up anything you like – just moderate it. Excess leads to discontent. The appetite is keener at mealtimes than in between, and so it is with everything else. There is a time and place for everything. If you do everything at the right time and place then you'll enjoy it all the more, and be healthier to boot.

Here's a start: If you live in the city, make a habit of going to a natural place at least once a week. It could be a forest, a beach, the desert, some cliffs overlooking the sea: wherever you choose, the natural sounds and fragrances (not to mention the fresh air) will be both therapeutic and inspiring for your body and mind. For example, the sound of a trickling stream – or waves lapping at the shore – will naturally sooth the mind. Remember: at least once a week – you owe it to yourself!

Rule No.3: Sleep

There's a Zen saying: "Eat when hungry; sleep when tired." In some ways, that sums up the simple philosophy of yoga. But how often do we actually do that? We tend to ignore the signals of our body, eat when we're not even hungry and stay up when we're tired.

Sleep is a medicine in itself. It rests the nerve cells of the brain and body, and preserves vital energy. When we relax, the body recharges and the mind recovers its strength. But too much sleep is harmful. The old saying, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy and wise" is still good advice. Some of those old adages really did have a useful message!

Rule No.4: Yoga postures and related techniques

There's been a popular misconception that yoga only means the physical postures. In fact, yoga is a whole lifestyle that includes yoga postures as one of its many components. Yoga postures have physical benefits, including curing disease, but the main benefit is mental – they balance the emotions and calm the mind. That's because of their effect on the glands, because it's the hormones produced by the glands that determine the way we feel.

You don't need to know many postures. In some parts of the world there is a craze to be the champion of yoga postures. But who really has the time to do this all day, and in any case what spiritual and enlightening social purpose does it serve? Rather, do things in a balanced way. Actually, doing meditation has a far more subtle effect on the body, than even doing the yoga postures.

There are three simple yoga postures that are more than enough to cover basic health and fitness to start with, and they're so quick and easy that anyone can do them. As mentioned these are the yogamudra, long bowing and snake postures.

Also, try out a couple of things usually done after yoga postures.

The first is the foot massage. Would you laugh if I told you it's more relaxing than having a drink after work?! Well it is! Why is that? Because every part of the body has a subtle nerve connection to the foot. So each organ has an area on the foot that directly affects it. The top of the foot (near the toes) is related to the surface of the body, while the sole is associated with the deeper organs. The big toe is even associated with the subtle pineal gland.

Maybe you noticed that if you scratch a certain part of your foot, you can feel a twinge somewhere else on your body. That's because of the subtle connections. So it goes without saying that if you massage your feet you're also indirectly massaging your whole body – external and internal. Try it for yourself and see – first the top, then the sole. Press down with your thumbs, like you're moulding a piece of clay. If you feel an area that's sore, spend more time there – it probably means the part of the body connected to it is tired or injured. For example, if you have sore shoulders from hunching over a computer all day, massage the area on the outer part of the foot behind the little toe. See?! So it turns out there was a lot of truth behind that old story of getting your feet massaged after a hard day's work!

Now, deep relaxation. If it's done properly, it's more effective than sleep. Yep, I can certainly vouch for that! Just 5 to 10 minutes of deep relaxation is more rejuvenating than one hour's sleep! Don't believe me? Well try it for yourself!

But you have to do it properly – completely relax all your muscles without sleeping. Find a warm, comfortable place on the floor, lie down on your

back with your arms by your side, and make sure your breathing is calm and relaxed. Now go through your whole body, starting at your feet, consciously making sure that each part is completely relaxed – with no muscular tension at all. Go from the feet up the legs, consciously checking each part, into the groin area, into the abdomen (feeling that your internal organs are also relaxed), into the chest and shoulders, from the fingers and hands up the arms, then into the neck and up into the face, relaxing the facial muscles, including the eyes, and finally to the top of the head, feeling your brain is also relaxed. Check once more that your breathing is calm and relaxed, and imagine you're lying in the most soothing place you can think of: it could be floating on the sea, suspended in space, on top of a mountain – wherever you like. Now stay like that, fully relaxed, for a few more minutes. But don't sleep!

You'll soon realize the benefit of deep relaxation. It'll prepare you for the day ahead, rejuvenate you throughout the day, and help you sleep well at night. Do it as often as you can, especially if you do a lot of mental work, and see how it keeps your body and mind calm and refreshed. It also lowers the blood pressure, relieves stress and relaxes the nerves.

Rule No.5: Exercise

Yoga postures balance the internal glandular system, as well as toning the internal organs. That's why they're sometimes called “innercises.” But we also need exercise to keep the muscles toned and fit. While yoga postures are energy-assimilating, exercise is energy-expending, tiring the body. So exercise – as with everything else – should be in moderation, according to your capacity. Aristotle said exercise should be “neither excessive nor insufficient.”

Practically any sport you want to do is good for you. Even just walking a half hour a day has a positive effect. Martial arts are particularly beneficial, not only for the self-defence skills you get, but also because they include forms of mental development. Martial art was first taught 1400 years ago at Shaolin, central China, by a yogi from India. From that time on the Shaolin practitioners became renowned for their physical prowess, courage, mental calmness and powers of concentration.

There are two special exercises, taught only by a small number of instructors in the world. One is a

recent innovation. It increases the life-span, cures many types of diseases and is particularly good for women. It is a medicine in itself, but until now very few people have had the benefit of experiencing its profound effects. This is called *kaoshiki*. It is a type of dance. You'll get to learn it soon in the classes. The other, because of its effect on the glandular system, is for men. It is called *tandava*. Unlike standard exercises, tandava is the only physical exercise for the brain, and has specific positive effects such as instilling courage in the mind and improving the memory. Instructions will be given in due course.

Rule No.6: Air

Oxygen purifies the blood and acts as a nerve tonic. It invigorates the body and inspires the mind, giving a sense of well-being and contentment. Some illnesses can even be cured with just pure fresh air. Depending on how you breathe, you can even control your mind and your vital energy.

Generally it's best to breathe calmly and deeply, through the nose. The muscles you use when you breathe, the phase of the breath, and which nostril you breathe through – all these affect the mind, and you will get to know about this and look into them all from proper yogic instructors. You can do your own research also from reputable sites on the internet and find out about ways we absorb oxygen, such as through the skin and digestive system.

Try to walk outside in fresh air daily, if not at least once a week as a minimum. Brisk walking increases oxygen absorption, especially if you get into a good rhythm, synchronizing your breath with your step and keeping your mind positive. A steady breathing rhythm combined with fresh air increases the power of the mind. In fact, the mind is very closely linked to the breath: if the breath is calm and relaxed, so will the mind be.

Rule No.7: Sun

The sun is the source of all the physical energy on our planet. It heats the earth, creates the winds as the earth revolves around the sun, and drives the life-giving rains. The sun's power is instilled in the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. In fact, many scientists now agree that the earth originally came from the sun. Combined with fresh air, sunlight is essential. It even gives the body some vitamins we can't get from food.

Try and spend some time in the sun every day. If it's bad weather outside, you can utilize the little sun-time you get with some techniques like the sunbath that will be explained later.

Rule No.8: Water

Water is indelibly associated with life, and with the history of civilization. Human settlements evolved along the course of rivers and waterways. It's written in the ancient Vedas (the first literature produced ten to fifteen thousand years ago) that “water is the universal remedy.”

There are many things yoga has to say about the use of water externally – not just as the ultimate cleansing agent, but also for balancing the body temperature – and there are techniques like the half-bath and full bath that can assist in this regard.. But water is equally – if not more – important internally. One of the best things you can do for your body is to drink plenty of clean, fresh water, more so in the morning than later in the day. Water has more of a cleansing effect if you add lemon juice to it. Squeeze half a lemon into a glass of water, and add a tiny pinch of salt to counteract the acidity of the lemon. It'll also help to keep the bowels moving and prevent constipation. A glass of lemon-water with salt first thing in the morning after brushing your teeth and scraping your tongue will go a long way to keeping your digestive tract clean, strong and healthy. It really is amazing!

Rule No.9: Food

In the tradition of Zen, poems and subtle anecdotes are used to convey insights of timeless wisdom in a very understated way. One example would be the master's question to the disciple: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Don't worry – I didn't get it either! But here's a Zen story we're all sure to understand. A Zen monk was undergoing austere training in a monastery in the countryside of Japan. One of the rules was that he wasn't allowed to talk, but after a year he would be given the opportunity to say three words; words that should convey something of the deeper realizations he'd had during that time. So as the end of the year approached everyone was eagerly awaiting the special day. The townsfolk were talking about the upcoming event and his teachers were anticipating what he would say. On the day, all the people from the surrounding area gathered for the occasion. He was brought out in front of everybody, his head teacher gave him the

go-ahead to speak, and he said these three words: “Not – enough – food.”

Well, whether you found it funny or not, the point is: food is important! Not just to get enough food, but to get the right amount and the right type. Our attitude should be “eat to live” not “live to eat.” Our eating habits are also important – when and how we eat, and how we prepare our food.

Food is fuel for the body – it provides energy. But that's not all. Fresh fruits and vegetables that are still “alive” give vital energy (life-force – prana - chi) to the body's cells. Natural foods cleanse and purify the system, especially if they're “wholefoods” with lots of water, vitamins, minerals and fibre. There's also the vibrational effect of food on the mind. Different foods affect the mind in different ways – some are “uppers” and some “downers”! It all depends what you eat, because “you are what you eat”: whatever you swallow will make up the cells of your body, and that'll in turn affect your mind.

Many diseases are caused by eating the wrong foods in the wrong amount at the wrong time. The science of food is a big subject, but can be made simple. More on that later.

Rule No.10: Fasting

Now don't get scared when you hear that word! Fasting doesn't have to be something arduous. We normally fast every day anyway – while we're sleeping! In fact, the best fasting should only be for a day at a time, twice a month. Many great people fasted regularly, and you can also benefit from it with just a little effort. Think of it on the bright side – apart from all the other benefits, you'll save time and money by not having to prepare food and eat it! As a habit, when you start it, it is not actually that hard once you are regular. Really, that's true.

So what are the benefits? Fasting rests the body, especially the stomach (which usually doesn't get any rest at all!), detoxifies the digestive system, prevents chronic illness and even cures many diseases. It rockets your motivation into the stratosphere, and boosts your creativity. It increases willpower (tremendously), determination and mental clarity, balancing the mind as well as inspiring it. It's an all-round tonic for the body and mind, something you wouldn't want to do without once you've gotten used to it!

Rule No.11: Toilet

I don't have to tell you how lousy you feel if you haven't been to the toilet for a long time! Constipation is the single main cause of practically every disease we know of. That's because toxins are released into the body from the stagnant waste matter in the intestines, and those toxins cause disease. So clearing the bowels daily is vital for good health and happiness. Some foods are notorious for causing constipation – they're mostly the ones not good for the body or the mind. As mentioned, food can be dealt with in some depth as a topic of its own. So, we'll look into that later. Also, there are some postures and exercises to help you avoid constipation.

Meanwhile, make sure you drink plenty of water – preferably with lemon juice and a pinch of salt – especially in the morning. Also, try the following as soon as you wake up in the morning.

While lying on your back in bed, bring your knees up to your chest and hold them with your arms, then kick them out straight. Do that three or four times. Then, after you've cleaned your teeth and mouth, drink a glass of water. That'll help a lot in getting you to your regular toilet appointment every morning – your appointment with destiny!

OK, so you might think that is all a bit weird. But it is scientific, does work and is very exhilarating. What is weird is bad habits – smoking, addictions, the need or intoxicants – well they kill. Wise habits are better, don't you think.

Rule No.12: Life-plan

Ask anybody who's had any kind of success in any kind of management, work, social service, creative or other position and they'll tell you that planning is crucial to success. And that doesn't just mean for companies and organizations – it applies on the personal level as well. It doesn't mean being a technocrat, either.

Nature operates on a beautifully integrated pre-planned system. If we want to be successful in our own lives, we should also make a pre-planned system for ourselves and follow it – it's vital to success in all aspects of life. Take some time to contemplate where your life is going and where you want it to go. Are they the same? If not, how can you change your life for the best? There are many yogic and meditation practices that do just that.

In your effort to adjust your daily life with these recommendations, you find life better and happier every day. Remember: these are very simple techniques that don't require any special equipment or additional expense. You just have to know them and practice them: that's all your mind and body are asking of you.

You won't know until you try it. Just like anything practical, you have to find out for yourself.

Rule No.13: Meditation and yoga lifestyle and philosophy

What is the one thing you want, more than anything else? You may say different things: freedom, success, love, money; but the essence of all these is happiness. We want them because they give us happiness. Happiness is a sweet feeling; a flow of love; an expression of joy. We want it limitlessly and all the time.

"There is in the living being a thirst for limitlessness" (Shrii Shrii Anandamurti)

Where do we look for it? Maybe you like chocolate ice-cream, and someone else likes vanilla. Two different ice-creams – two different responses. So where is the happiness? Not in the ice-cream! It's in the mind. It's a mental experience; a mental feeling. Happiness is a state of mind. If you think your chair is a throne, then for you it will be a throne!

There's three things wrong with looking for happiness externally. For one, it's always limited. You can't find anything infinite in this world – it always has a fixed size and shape, so it can't give unlimited happiness. Two, it never lasts forever. What's the best part about eating an ice-cream? The beginning! After a while you get used to it, then you get finished of it! And so it is with every worldly object – it can only give a limited and temporary experience; a limited and temporary amount of happiness. And three, there's always a reaction (painful or otherwise) to counteract an action (pleasure or otherwise). The universe is a world of opposites – for every action there is a reaction! There's a saying that there is the same amount of pain for every amount of pleasure. But pain and pleasure are relative. The mind wants something more.

So we can only find infinite happiness in the mind, not in the physical world. If that's so, then that's

where we should look for it – in the mind. You don't use a torch to look for light – the light's already within the torch. Happiness is in the mind, and that's where we should look for it. How do we get it?

We want happiness, and not only happiness but infinite happiness, and that happiness is in the mind. Now what's the process of looking for infinite happiness in the mind? Meditation. Meditation is the process of looking within yourself for infinite peace and happiness. But don't believe a word I've said! Why? Because you have to experience it for yourself! It's a personal experience. You have to eat a banana to know what it tastes like! Meditation is an internal process, and the important thing is to practice it. And that's all there is to it. You can't read a book about meditation and leave it at that.

There's a story about a fisherman who took a well-read intellectual out on his boat. The intellectual asked the fisherman if he could read. "No" was the reply. "Then half your life has been useless", the intellectual remarked. Suddenly the boat was capsized by a huge freak wave. They were both in the water, when the fisherman asked, "Can you swim?" The intellectual was swallowing water as he just managed to reply, "No!" "Now your whole life has become useless!" the fisherman concluded.

What follows is a brief explanation of how meditation works, and how to practice it. It's not difficult. It's a very simple technique. Sure, with a more personal meditation technique it can be more involved, but also you learn from a competent teacher by practice. You just have to do it, because as in the story, it's the doing that counts! Forget about wanting to learn all the ins and outs and why it is this way or that way when you do meditation. Why the technique is such and such, and so on. You WILL learn and know all that by the doing only. In fact from your personal experience of meditation you will be the master and fully competent and then the book knowledge will just clarify what you are already doing (and will be assistance also). Practical is what counts.

Let's go on now to see how the simple and effective technique of meditation can change your life for the better! It is important to know a little about the psychology of the mind, and how meditation works.

How do we meditate? In a nutshell, we have to concentrate on the idea of infinite happiness. Concentration means only one thought. But there's usually many different thoughts in the mind, almost

all at the same time! So how do we control them? Try this exercise: Close your eyes, and for about a minute try not to think about a pink elephant. You can think of anything you like, but not a pink elephant! Try it now. Did it work? Probably not. Why? Because when you tell your mind not to think of something, it doesn't take any notice of the "not". It only sees the "something." Suppression doesn't work. The mind is too curious for that!

Then what's the answer? If you have a garden full of weeds, the best way to control them is to plant a tree right in the middle of them. As it grows, it will naturally smother the weeds. But do it properly so the veges still get enough light! And so it is with the mind. We have to channelize all our thoughts towards a greater one; a stronger one; a more positive one. And the strongest and most positive thought is that of infinite happiness; what in meditation we call bliss – perfect peace and contentment.

How does it work? So how does meditation work? That positive thought is introduced into the mind through what we call a mantra. Of course you've heard the word before, but what does it really mean? It means a word or phrase that "liberates the mind." Although we rely mostly on our eyes, sound has the most powerful effect on the mind. So the internal sound of a mantra is a very powerful way of creating a feeling in the mind.

Here's how. First it acts as an object of concentration, because the mind has to have something to focus on. Then, secondly, it vibrates the mind. Everything has a particular vibration; everything and everybody. You like someone when their vibration suits your own. You like music that suits your own vibration. The mantra gives your mind the vibration of infinite happiness, and you feel it as bliss. Then last but not least is its meaning. "As you think, so you become." If you think negatively, your life will be negative; but your life will automatically be positive if you think positively. We're continually in the process of becoming the object of our ideation. So the meaning of the mantra is vital. It must be the most uplifting ideation; the most positive of thoughts. Again: infinite happiness; perfect peace and contentment – bliss.

Ready to try it? Then do! Some previous instructions have been given on the **BABA NAM KEVALAM** mantra, keep doing that. Some of you have already been lucky enough to get your own personal meditation technique, so keep at it.