

STRETCH FOR HEALTH – IN THE 3 SPHERES

Many people think that Yoga is just a physical exercise. But Yoga is much more than that: it's a method for developing your body, mind and spirit. It's about Meditation. Yoga means inner oneness. It's when you feel totally in peace with yourself ... beyond self-doubt and fear ... radiating inner strength, joy and love from within. We all want to feel like that and we can.



Yes, to be healthy is important.

Yoga: Stretch away disease?

Studies have generally confirmed what Westerners say about yoga: It boosts flexibility and strength and makes you feel good by inducing relaxation and a sense of well-being. Now emerging evidence suggests that yoga may also do what Eastern practitioners have claimed for millennia: It eases symptoms and combats disease.

- **Pain.** Researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation found that practicing

yoga three times a week for one month reduced pain and the need for pain medication in people with chronic back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, or arthritis.

- **Cardiovascular disease.** A one-year clinical trial of people with coronary heart disease found that yoga reduced the number of angina attacks and even the need for angioplasty or bypass surgery. Several other trials have found that yoga may help control high blood

pressure almost as effectively as medication would.

- **Lung disease.** Yogic breathing exercises clearly improve the lungs' ability to saturate the blood with oxygen, enabling healthy people to exercise harder and longer. Some clinical trials have indicated that yoga may also reduce the severity of the two most common lung ailments, asthma and chronic bronchitis. ■

Illustrations by William Hamilton

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Assume the Yoga Position

If you can't tear yourself away from your desk some days, here are a few fun tips to relieve headaches and tension without leaving your cubicle. Push back from your desk, and find a stable chair with good back support.

1. **"Bless You."** With the tip of your middle fingers, rub the sides of your nose from the base at the nostrils to the bridge between your eyes in an up-and-down movement. Apply light pressure on upward movements and a firmer pressure on the way down. Repeat nine times. This can help with colds, constipation, allergies, flushing out pollutants and opening the lungs.
2. **"Wipe Your Face."** This energizes the facial muscles, aids skin tone and adds luster: Place fingertips at jaw line and make circles on each side of your face. The first half-semicircle is formed by stroking upward from your chin to your forehead, the second half by continuing down along the side of your face at your hairline and then to the chin to begin again. Repeat nine times.
3. **"I Just Don't Know What to Do!"** This stimulates concentration, scalp and hair growth. Place your fingertips on the scalp above your forehead at your hairline and stroke them toward the back of your head all the way to the back of your neck. Be sure to cover the sides of your head as well. Repeat nine times.

Health and ecology are, however, at 3 levels: physical, mental and spiritual.



ANANDA MARGA

Gentle Yoga for Meditators

If you are looking for a healthier and happier life - Yoga is the natural way. You will get a more balanced body and relaxed mind. You will be able to utilize your energy in a better way. Just a few minutes a day can give you a lifetime of benefits. Ananda Marga teaches asanas (yoga postures) so that the exercises are done together with the breathing in a soft way. Yogic exercises are intended to increase one's energy and are usually not strenuous. This method gradually develops the body and mind. Each session should comprise of stretching, yoga postures with proper breath control, self-massage and deep relaxation.

Wear comfortable clothes. Do not eat before doing yoga postures. The exercises should be practiced on an empty stomach, 3-4 hours after a meal. Use a blanket.

Yoga is not only a physical exercise. The asanas work along with meditation to make the body and mind more subtle. Their effect on the endocrine glands contributes to mental balance and helps you to concentrate properly. Shrii Shrii Anandamurti (founder of Ananda Marga) has selected from the thousands of postures around forty asanas. They are specifically chosen to foster one's spiritual progress as well as preventing different diseases.

The practice of deep meditation is based on Tantra Yoga which is the highest meditative practice available. Beginners to advanced meditators you will find scope for development in the systematic approach to meditation. Shrii Shrii Anandamurti (1921-1990), a contemporary philosopher, composer, humanist and Tantric master gave a new form to the old Tantric practices given by Shiva, 7,000 years ago and adapted it to the modern times. It is a complete system for self-development and for the welfare of the society.

Tantra

TANTRA is the fundamental spiritual science for Self-Realization and the Welfare of all Beings. The Tantric system of meditation is the most effective available and aims for the highest realization. Tantra Yoga is for those who want to go deep and realize the Supreme Consciousness within. Tantra was first systematized by Shiva, 7000 year ago and reintroduced by Shrii Shrii Anandamurti in a way to adjust with the changes of the modern society.

Therefore, ancient spiritual teachings remain valid even until today. Shiva was a practical man and His teachings reflect that approach to life. Ananda Marga teachings represent a happy blending between deep meditation techniques and a balanced life in the society.

Tantra has been much misunderstood and specially now-a-days in the present social environment this subtle spiritual science has been completely misinterpreted. Actually most Tantric practices are internal spiritual techniques that elevate the mind and have

nothing to do with mere indulgence in sensual activities. In name of Tantra various individuals are proposing practices that have nothing to do with spirituality.

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti said in His discourse in 1959:

Those who did not understand the inner spirit of the subtler sa'dhana' of Tantra, or those who did not or could not understand the essence of Tantric practices or could not follow those practices in their lives, misinterpreted the real idea and did whatever they liked according to their sweet will, with the intention of furthering their narrow individual interests and fulfilling their worldly desires.

A section of the polished intelligentsia, because of their meanness and degraded tastes, misunderstood Tantra and went against its idea. Those who could not understand the inner spirit of the terms madya, matsya, mam'sa, mudra', maethuna (known as the Paincamaka'ra), accepted the crude worldly interpretations of those articles, and their Tantra sa'dhana' was nothing but an immoral antisocial activity.

These thoughts are even more true today after 44 years. Shiva proposed the set of five practices known as the 5 M's (Paincamaka'ra) because all start with the letter M. These are Madya, Matsya, Mam'sa, Mudra' and Maethuna.

From these the most controversial is Maethuna which is crudely translated as "sex". But the real subtle Tantric meaning of Maethuna is a different kind of union. As per Yoga and Tantra the unit consciousness in the form of kula kund'a'linii lies asleep in the lowest vertebra and the practice is to raise this sleeping divinity from the lowest "cakra" to the highest at the top of the head. Maethuna happens when kund'a'linii rises and merges with the Supreme Consciousness at the highest cakra. Shiva taught that to spend one's energy in sexual activities will never elevate the kund'a'linii and therefore one's spiritual progress will not happen. So, better one should practice more self-restraint and channelize one's energy for spiritual practices.

"Sex" has its own place in human life and is not to be ignored but it is also not through sex that one will attain any spiritual elevation. It may give pleasure but it is temporary in nature and nothing compared to what Yogis call "Samadhi" or spiritual ecstasy. Tantra actually puts every human activity in its own correct place and it is not to be misunderstood. The goal of Tantra is to give human beings direct realization of infinite bliss.

Tantra is a way of life to develop the individuals and the society to its highest expressions.

METHOD OF MEDITATION & YOGA

The method of Ananda Marga is based on Astaanga Yoga or the eight limbed Yoga. It is a complete system to develop a human being in all the aspects. Special techniques are taught to the individuals by Ananda Marga yogic monks and nuns (Acaryas).

There are eight parts to this method.

Part 1 and 2 are principles on which one can base one's relationship with oneself - "Niyama"; and one's relationship with others - "Yama". These principles help to attain balance in the first layer of mind, the conscious mind.

The third part is the "Asanas". This is commonly known as Hatha Yoga. These are the psycho-physical exercises of Yoga. It is the most common aspect of Yoga and it helps to keep a healthy and balanced body and mind.

The fourth part is "Pranayama" or the control of the vital energy through breathing techniques. This is an advanced practice and in our system is taught personally by an Acarya (monk or nun) to the individual.

The fifth part is "Pratyahara"--introspection or withdrawal of the mind from external objects. Happiness lies within one's mind.

The sixth part is "Dharana"--concentration--only a concentrated mind can have the power to go deep within and perceive the flow of consciousness. There are special techniques to concentrate the mind on the different cakras (psychic energy centers) situated along the spinal chord.

The seventh part is "Dhyana"--meditation--special technique of meditation which makes the mind flow towards the Goal.

The eighth part is "Samadhi"--the attainment of the Goal of Yoga--the union between the Microcosm (individual consciousness) and the Macrocosm (Cosmic Consciousness). A state of perfect happiness and absolute peace.



Remember also the importance of collective meditation (dharmacakra) and retreats. Here people sing spiritual songs (bhajans) and Prabhat Samgiita (a genre of songs) followed by Kiirtan (chanting and dancing), recitation of Sanskrit mantras, silent meditation, spiritual discourse and collective meal. All those who were initiated into the Ananda Marga system of meditation should attend the intensive retreats as they are very inspiring. Wear comfortable clothes, no shorts or short skirts. You may bring a mat or blanket to sit while meditating.