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Yo Joan



Straighten up and fly right

Dear Joan,

Another question that I've got is about my very tight and inflexible hamstrings. Whenever I do the down-dog pose, I cannot straighten my legs completely, let alone putting my heels on the floor. My hamstring is so tight that I cannot sit in dandasana with straight legs and straight back at the same time. Any tips for modification or exercise to loosen my hamstrings? I've been suffering from low back pain and I suspect that my tight hamstrings have something to do with it.

Thank you very much for your help in advance. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Namaste,
Lulu



Dear Lulu,

I often do downward dog as part of my morning yoga practice. It feels so good for my spine to stretch this way. I fully bend the knees in the morning. As the day wears on, my hamstrings wake up more. By the time I do my evening yoga practice, my heels 'sometimes' touch the floor. I say with emphasis, "sometimes." I listen to my body and don't push it into positions it's not ready for. Some days the heels are able and willing to reach the floor, but often they are not.

When I was younger, I felt a great need to prove or demonstrate my physical flexibility as a yogini. I do not feel this need as greatly anymore. I certainly do feel the need to do hatha yoga and to develop my practice. It makes me feel better in every aspect of my life. But I don't judge the heels on the floor as being "more in the pose." Some people are born with tighter hamstrings, and you and I may very well be of these people!

Do not rush into downward dog or dandasana with purely a physical objective. In each of these poses, stretch your legs with love and caring. The stretch feels good. Lift your quadriceps as you stretch, and try to bring your focus to the front of the thigh. Take more of the mental (and physical) strain off the hamstrings. Strengthen the quadriceps. The hamstrings will help you by elongating. You see, the hamstrings help the quadriceps. They help best when the focus is not entirely on them. Just like people, they help best when they are not in the spotlight. The best help comes from the inside, from the heart. ... When you give generously, and do not expect anything in return, you are given more than you could ever expect.

**Namaste,
Joan**

The right stroke

Dear Joan,

I want to thank you for a great site. Your answers to letters are very insightful. I have graduated from Oregon School of Massage and am going into practice with an established LMT in a small town. I was considering bringing massage and positive touch into the schools giving a demonstration and spiel on touch and possibly showing students how to massage their parents shoulders and feet. I was wondering if you did anything along these lines at the Montessori school? I would appreciate any comments you have.

I was wondering if you were a Christian by the beginning quote of Jesus. I am a Quaker and have trouble with some of the religious aspects of yoga and eastern religion and wondered if you are how you adjust? I was wondering about the opening quote from Matthew 10:13 as I recalled it as a very real threat or as the opening of it. I looked it up and it was. I wonder if your trying to say, "If you don't like my site to hell with you." I got kind of a chuckle out of it. The other wonder is picayune and is for information sake, please not criticism, ...in your letter DEAR LYNN, at the end of first paragraph: "Real life changes happen _____ much less bravado." A "with" was left out.

Again GREAT site and I can't wait to try out your recommended stroke. I bought IDIOT'S GUIDE TO MASSAGE that's how I found the site. Excellent work on the book very informative and readable. If you wind up not answering this E-mail don't worry about it. Make sure your taking care of yourself and family. God Bless You for helping me in such a wonderful profession.

Tom

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your very kind letter. Your ideas about taking massage into schools by teaching children how to massage their parents is very beautiful and very much needed. I want to encourage you to develop this into your school system. There are still many people worried about touch in our schools and society does have a serious problem with touch in education because of the ways touch has been

misused and exploited. I think bringing touch in through the feet is very wise, and also based in ancient principles of reflexology - healing through foot massage. Let's take this one step at a time.

The classes I taught at the Montessori school were firmly based in yoga, and I did not explore massage in the classes. I do not have specific examples to share with you regarding my experiences in massage with children. However, I do bring massage into my yoga classes with adults. It's usually well accepted and enjoyed. My experiences have found that not everyone likes to be massaged by others. There are many reasons for this, and each reason and each person is to be respected. Self massage has been a way for me to introduce massage to classes in a safe and non-threatening way. Foot massage can be a wonderful form of self massage. The feet are sacred symbols in many traditions, and so it is particularly rewarding for me to bring this form of massage into yoga classes. In addition to my general practice of massage, I am also a Reflexologist (foot and hand massage specialist). You may want to explore this type of study in your massage travels, Tom. It's a fascinating field, and I think is a great way to bring massage into schools. Maybe we can start a program together? Keep in touch!

Lastly, I am not religious, though I read from many religious texts. Regarding the Biblical quote from Jesus which appeared in the December issue of Yoyoga, "And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." I didn't mean to refer to it on my website as a threat, though I did chuckle at your thoughts about it. I interpreted it to mean, that peace can be expanded upon, but it ultimately and finally rests within one's self. I saw it as another way of saying, Om shanti, or all peace...or let peace begin with me.

Namaste,
Joan

AIM

Dear Joan,

Best wishes from Denmark for a great coming New Year! Although I have not written for a couple of years I, of course, follow your site, advice, and am entranced by your sound philosophy of life. One of my interests is in the subject of integrated medicine ("integrating" the best from western medicine and the best from alternative or complimentary therapy). Yoga and massage evidently play a big part in integrated medicine, and in this respect I would like your advice. What is your opinion of "deep neck massage"? Is this massage of the tissues of the muscles surrounding the vertebral arteries or the carotid arteries, or a combination of both? Why is it done, to whom should it be done, what effects are produced? To me the neck appears to be a very sensitive area, so is there a danger for the patients in having this done?

The reason for asking is that until recently I hadn't given massage much thought -- it was just something that you had once every few years after playing sports and had some sore muscles. But a few months ago a friend suggested that I have an ayurvedic massage by an Indian therapist just passing through Scandinavia. Well, it was nothing at all what I expected. After being basted head to toe in something that smelled like warm coconut oil the therapist started pushing and probing and within an hour I found things moving that I didn't think were designed to move. Aside from the smell from the oil which lingered for days (and attracted hungry animals), it was a great experience and sparked my interest in finding out more -- and experiencing more -- about massage.

With kind regards,
Ed

Dear Ed,

I do not have experience with this type of massage. The fact that you had a great experience and it sparked your interest in massage and Ayurveda techniques is fantastic. Here is an organization that might be able to help you further: American Association of Integrated Medicine at: <http://www.aaimedicine.com>. I have recently joined as a member myself!

It's such a joy to hear from you, Ed. Even though I'm sending you on to yet another link, don't take so long to write back next time. Perhaps I'll see you at an AAIM Conference someday soon!

Namaste,
Joan

A blessed new year

Dear Joan

I have been reading Yo Joan for more than two years, and have never written to you. I wish it is under a better circumstance that I write this message, but I could not turn back the clock. To make a long story short, I found out I have breast cancer three weeks ago, and decided to have mastectomy of my right breast, and the surgeon also removed 17 lymph nodes. I'm quite lucky in a way, because my cancer was found at a very early stage (both mammogram and doctor's palpation did not detect, Ultrasound did), the test result showed no lymph node was involved, however, the cancer is the most invasive type (Bloom Richardson grade 3). I'm also recovering very well from the surgery. I will start chemotherapy in 2 weeks, and after that five years of hormone therapy. What I want to ask you is : Can I do yoga during the chemotherapy? How about after the chemo? What poses can I do? What other thing can I do to make the side effects of chemo less serious? Any suggestion will be greatly appreciated.

Love,
Vicki from Tokyo, Japan

Dear Vicki,

Thanks you for your honest and exploring letter. You are on an inspired path of self discovery. You are finding ways of turning obstacles into opportunities. Some of us let difficult experiences hold us back, others let these experiences take us into deeper aspects of self realization. I am glad you are seeing this experience as a way to continue growing and evolving. Chemotherapy is highly personal in how it effects individuals. Listen to your body and be gentle with it. Approach yoga as a form of stress reduction rather than an aerobic or physical routine at this time. Read Dr. Bernie Siegal's book, "Love, Medicine, and Miracles" as continuing inspiration in the positive exploration of this process of recovery. The word "recovery" is really not the most accurate word. You are on a path that will continue through recovery beyond into deeper and more profound understandings of who you are.

I have personally taught many cancer patients through the years. After surgery, you must be gentle with the body. Many of the yoga stretches of the chest are not comfortable or even suitable for you at this time. Although yoga can increase flexibility, strength, and range of motion, there are even deeper, if I dare say, more mystical benefits of the study. To experience a oneness, a stillness, a life force that emanates within yet beyond one's own heartbeat, these are some of the benefits a practice of yoga can offer. I am not recommending a specific posture. I am recommending an attitude of gratitude for a body that has the capacity to heal on multiple levels and to lead you into the deeper and ever more beautiful realizations of who you are. I am recommending that hatha yoga be explored as an avenue of stress reduction. This involves a study of the physical postures in a way that is gentle, non-competitive, and quiet. Find a class that is soothing, and inwardly focused -soft lights, slow movements, gentle music or silence. I would also encourage you to study mantra yoga. The repetition of mantra is incredibly purifying. Look for a teacher who is familiar with mantra and uses some in his or her classes. Take these mantras home with you to work with on your own. Approach all of your yoga studies as studies in stress reduction. If a pose, a mantra, or an attitude is stressful, release it and enter into an environment of peace. You don't need to kick a door down to enter. Simply take a calming breath and enter through the exhale. And when you enter, you will find there was no door. It was all right there. It was all right here. It is all right now. All peace. Om shanti.

Happy New year.

Namaste,
Joan

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www.yoyoga.com

1000 10th Street, Suite 100

San Francisco, CA 94103

Phone: (415) 774-1111



Yo Joan



Bees Knees

Dear Joan,

Right now I have not been doing yoga for about a month due to my knees injury. Besides doing yoga, I swim and run frequently. While I am yet to see a knee specialist, my family doctor told me that my injury is caused by lack of flexibility/stretching of the quadriceps and hamstrings muscles. I hope to ease back to yoga once I see the specialist. Meanwhile, any yoga pose/tips will be greatly appreciated.

I may I say that your reply (in last yoyoga issue) about loving kindness to stretch ..., muscles is right on target and very insightful. I realized that my injury may be due to my lack of respect and love for my own body. Thank you once again!!

Namaste,
Lulu

Dear Lulu,

Standing poses help to strengthen the knee caps. Standing poses where the knees are bent at a right angle (like Warrior) strengthen the muscles of the front thighs that support the knees. Standing poses where the legs are straight (like Triangle) stretch and strengthen the muscles of the back of the thigh. Work regularly with standing poses to stabilize and strengthen your knees.

Namaste,
Joan



Ole! Oak brook!!

ar Joan,

Do you teach yoga classes in the Oak brook area? If so, can you provide me with some information?

Thanks.
Chris

Dear Chris,

You're in luck, and so am I! I'm teaching new classes in the area beginning in March. They'll be offered through the York Center Park District. One class will meet Monday mornings 9-10am, and another class will meet Thursday evenings from 7:30-8:30PM. You can sign up for both classes or just one. They'll run through May. The focus will be on breathwork, mantra, and yoga for stress reduction. The classes will be small with a limited enrollment of only a few students, so I suggest you call soon if you are interested in attending. The number to call is : 630-629-0886

**Namaste,
Joan**

Indogroove

Dear Joan,

I'm Susetiya from Jakarta, Indonesia. I am reading your interesting book "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga". Four months ago, I suffered the slip disc on my L4-L5. Now I am recovering, but I feel very tight hamstring. After reading your book, I am planning to practice Yoga based on your book. My question is what poses is best for my recovery? And what poses is dangerous for me? Thanks for your help. I am waiting your reply.

Regards,
Susetiya

Dear Susetiya,

Thank you for your lovely letter. I didn't know our books were in Indonesia...wow! Would love to hear re about how yoga is developing there? Are there many studios? Do you have a teacher nearby? Is skrit used in describing postures? Now to your questions...

As in your case, when an injury has already been diagnosed, it's best to study through the personal tutelage of an experienced yoga teacher. Someone who could carefully watch your movements and help guide you into the healthiest movement for your particular body. Not seeing you, it's difficult and even irresponsible for me to determine the best postures for you. Certain physical characteristics, like height, ght, balance, proportions, can help determine the best poses for you. A personal yoga teacher is best.

Along with my book, I would recommend you also pick up BKS Iyengar's latest book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health." I was the US Consultant on this book. Mr. Iyengar focuses on the use of props to help one adjust appropriately into yoga poses. I think props are perfect and often essential for those who have suffered injuries. One of the poses he recommends for a fused or painful lumbar spine is spinal twist. This helps to lengthen and stretch the lower spine. I would recommend you get this book and study it in relationship to your body type. You can determine what type of props you'll need to work effectively with the poses. Although there's a market now for yoga props, it's not necessary to invest lots of money in them. For example, books can be used instead of specially made yoga blocks. Ties can be used instead of yoga belts. I don't mean to take away from those businesses profiting from the sale of these tailored yoga items. I only want it to be known that yoga need not be an expensive pursuit. The only necessary ingredient to the study is a good book and/or a good teacher.

**Namaste,
Joan**

sticky subject

Dear Joan,

I am just wondering how you clean your sticky mat -- sorry for the silly (but important) question! Laura J.

Dear Laura J.,

Hahaha! I love silly questions! Hohohoho. Wait, this question isn't silly? I ruined one of my sticky mats in a washing machine once. So, let me give you some helpful advice. Soak your sticky mat in a bathtub with mild soap and water. Do not put it through the cycle of a washing machine unless you have a soak/hand wash cycle.

**Namaste,
Joan**

lu Returns for the Finale!

Dear Joan

Meanwhile, I've got another question, this time is about yoga posture. During the bending downward poses, is it better to hang down and not reaching the floor, or to bend my knees a bit and rest my chest on my thighs so that my feet can reach the floor? I have very tight hamstrings. For example, while doing downward facing dog pose, I don't straighten my legs at all. Thanks again and thank you for all your help!

Namaste,
Lulu

Dear Lulu,

Bending down without touching the floor is a forward bend. Downward dog pose is a strengthening pose and it also balances the upper and lower parts of the body. The balance happens over time. At first it will seem like more weight is either in the upper or lower part of the body. This is also a study in body awareness.

You don't need to straighten your legs in downward dog or in forward bends. In fact, for those with tight hamstrings or painful lower backs, I recommend that you keep the knees bent. In fact, bend them a lot! It'll increase the curve in the lower back. The problem with studying yoga through pictures, is that you think you have to look like the picture. Remember that yoga is an internal study.

For example, let's study downward dog from the inside-out. Open the shoulders. Don't "ground the heels." Instead, bend the knees, lift the tailbone, extend the spine, open the shoulders, feel the curve in the lower back. Straighten the legs only to the point where the lower back curve can still be felt. Relax the neck. Look at your navel to stretch the neck, then bring the neck back in line with the spine. Breathe deeply. Hold the pose for as long as you can comfortably breathe. It may be one breath, maybe two, maybe 102. It's the quality, not quantity, that makes a pose a yoga pose.

Namaste,
Joan

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Yo Joan



I'm a believer

Dear Joan,

I just want to let you know how much I enjoyed your book. Although I have been interested in Yoga for about 23 years(collecting books, following along with PBS and videos, and trying to incorporate Yoga in my daily life-unsuccessfully-), it was only after I started reading your book that I finally understood where the power of Yoga is... I get it!!! I just finished the book today and have already signed up for, and attended, a great Yoga class (two times so far). Thanks for the motivation: I never had a true need to find a good teacher! Also, today, I was going through old books and found the book that started my interest in Yoga, my Psychology book from 23 years ago. Before returning to the section on Yoga (I wanted to see if the concept of awareness and breath were there all along and I just didn't understand it) , I read a little about Esalen in the foreward . The book didn't expound on what Esalen was and I figured I'd look it up on line after I checked out your website. Can you imagine how surprised I was when I read about your visit? It's one of those amazing everyday miracles that makes me a believer...again, thanks.



Namaste,
Sue

Dear Sue,

I'm a believer too:-).

Namaste,
Joan

Vegi 101

Hi Joan,

I am looking to find a yoga facility that makes a special effort to teach students how to eat. I am having a little trouble getting back into the swing of things with my diet. I want to attend a workshop or visit a lodge that could help me get started again. Reading books just isn't working for me. I need to detox! Thank you for your help.

Deborah

Dear Deborah,

I understand. There's a great need for this in our society. Our diets are so important and it's very difficult to learn a healthy vegetarian diet in our fast food culture. I designed a new course for the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn that will probably be offered through the Continuing Education Department this Fall. It's called Vegetarianism 101. If they don't pick it up, I'll teach it somewhere else this Fall. Updates on where and when will be in my seminar page of this site. I realize though, that Fall is quite a ways off. On the internet, check out the Chicago Vegetarian Society. It's a support and social group for Vegetarians. They have many interesting seminars and social gatherings for members to help encourage and support a healthy vegetarian diet.

Also, why not take a yoga retreat?! Most yoga retreats are vegetarian. Check ahead to be sure. Yoga retreats are listed in the new issue of Yoga Journal Magazine that can be found in most bookstores. Or look in Yoga Retreats in Yahoo search engine and see what you come up with too. If you've never been on a yoga retreat, you definitely deserve one. Esalen, by the way, has an incredible feast for visitors. The options are vegetarian with some non-vegetarian fare as well. However, as a vegetarian, I can say that the vegetarian food is absolutely fantastic there. Many compliments to the fabulous chefs! Much of the food is home grown right on the beautiful Esalen grounds. Esalen is a retreat center I highly recommend. For more information on Esalen, click here: <http://www.esalen.org> Let's go there together sometime!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Nosey News

Dear Joan,

I just wanted to say how much I enjoy your website, I have allergies very bad because I live in a house that is not insulated, no storm windows, near the water...found mildew and mold in here so aside from moving away, I am doing everything I can to breath better...I use the nose pressure point and it does work.

Deanna of West Island
I wish you had a newsletter!Ê :)

ir Deanna,

Thanks, Deanna. You may also want to try a neti pot. This is a yoga tool that is a little pot that you fill with saline solution. You place the nozzle of the pot against one nostril, tilt your head forward and to the side and let the water rinse out the other nostril. When the pot is empty, refill and pour through the other nostril. These pots can be purchased at most health food stores or on the internet through the Himalayan Institute. And, I do have a newsletter. This is it!;-)

**Namaste,
Joan**

Yoga School Loans

Dear Joan,

I have been doing yoga for 3 years now, and absolutely love it. My children are getting older and I have been thinking about my return to the workforce. I realize I don't want to return to my old career as a Medical
biologist. I'm looking for a new direction and a lifestyle that feeds my soul. While I realize 3 years is a short time
in the yoga world, I have become more serious in my practice. I am interested in learning to teach yoga on a part
time basis.

I have many questions as to what would be the best way to pursue this goal. I still consider myself to be at the
beginner-intermediate level, and would obviously need instruction and study. I've gotten some information about
teacher certification from the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago, and it sounds like a wonderful program, however, it
does require a financial and personal commitment. I've also seen information from yogafit teacher training which are
basically only weekend workshops. What is the best route for someone who wants to learn if teaching yoga is right
for them? Should I get a certificate, teach some, then enroll in the Temple of Kriya Yoga for registered Yoga
Teacher status? Should I do home study, reading, and attend yoga classes? I would appreciate any insight you have
to offer.

Thank you ,
Karen
Downers Grove, Il

Dear Karen,

am not familiar with Yogafit training, but I'm familiar with the Temple of Kriya Yoga's training and it's

excellent. It's been ten years since I went through the Temple's training program. It's now much shorter and involves different teachers, but I have heard from reliable sources that it's still excellent. However, I do know of really wonderful teachers who went through various different yoga training programs. What matters is what you do with the program and how your personal practice continues to evolve. Yes, you should do home study, reading, and attend yoga classes. If you plan to teach, this is important in whatever program you take. There are no national requirements for yoga teachers. If a school or certification program tells you there are, come back to the US, because there are no national requirements for certification for yoga teachers in the United States (I'm really not sure about other countries).

There are some organizations that are trying to make a national certification requirement for all yoga teachers, but quite frankly, I have my doubts about the merit of this whole political venture. The ego's a funny thing. Once a certain type of "yoga certification" becomes mandatory, the ego becomes mandatory as well. Yoga is about releasing the ego...so, I find this national requirement for certification questionable at best.

What certification did for me was build my self confidence and educate me more about yoga. It was also fun to have the comradery of others on the same path. It was helpful to hear other's questions and answers as we moved along together on our yoga journey. Some societal institutions think that if one is "Certified" with a capital "C" one is more credible. Saying you are "Certified" may open the door for some jobs. I don't agree that being certified makes one more credible, but I'm in the minority of a society that appears to want reasons to certify most everything and everyone. It's big business mentality.

I wonder what yoga school Paramahansa Yogananda got certified from? Or Mahatma Gandhi? Or Swami Sivananda (who was a medical doctor)? Or the many other masters through the ages. Many had personal gurus and/or scholastic training, but not the almighty Certifiable yoga school training. So, my suggestion to you, Karen, is to meditate on this subject and keep your head clear from all the advertisements that go along with money making ventures, of which yoga schools are now one of them. Go to the school or certification program that is best for you. I don't know which certification program that is. I wish you well and believe any program can help you get started. A lot is dependent on who the yoga teachers are in the program and where they are at in their own yoga practice. The rest is up to you. My only advice, don't mortgage your house to go to one.

Namaste,
Joan

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Yo Joan



Thyroid Tip

Dear Joan,

Namaste. I have enjoyed reading your book, 'The complete idiot's guide to yoga'. How can I treat the symptoms of hypothyroidism or the underproduction of thyroid hormone? I have 'vata type' body, and I have bad PMS.

Sincerely,
Rita

Dear Rita,

Inversions, like shoulder stand help to compress the thyroid. Balancing shoulderstand with fish pose helps to stretch the thyroid. The beauty in the yoga poses is that they are held for at least several breaths. This allows time for full compression or expansion of the area of focus in the pose. The major area of focus for shoulderstand and fish is in the neck, the cervical area of the spine (the mercury chakra).

I assume you are under medical care for the condition you mention. This would mean that you are taking some drugs for this condition. If you are under doctors care, I would also recommend you demonstrate these poses to your doctor.

Namaste,
Joan



Yoga, Meditation, and the Indy 500 mind

Dear Joan,

ce the idea of yoga. And in theory, it's something I want to do -- but practice? I can pose all day, if they're basic enough, but I can't seem to keep my attention on what I'm doing. And meditation? I do one of two things: fall asleep within about 30 seconds of sitting there, or get so bored that I have to get up and move, especially if I'm in a silent room. It's like, if I have nothing to do, if I'm not moving, I'm fretting myself to pieces, or I'm thinking of things. Is there a middle ground with this meditation stuff? I've even tried 'soothing' music, or the mantras..those had no effect either. The only thing that worked somewhat was listening to Creed, but predictably enough I fell asleep anyway, even though they're heavy metal.

All that to say...help. please?

Elise

Dear Elise,

My recommendation to you is to put meditation practice aside for now. Study hatha yoga instead. Study the physical postures of yoga. The study of these postures, in a disciplined and thorough manner, leads one into a meditative practice. The study of the yoga postures helps the mind to calm down. It also strengthens and flexes the body, permitting the body to sit comfortably for longer periods of time in meditation.

er studying the postures, and ending your practice in the relaxation pose of shavasana, try sitting in quiet meditation for several minutes. You'll find that as your body becomes more acclimated to the holding of the postures, it becomes easier to sit in meditation. In fact, it becomes enjoyable to meditate. The steady stillness becomes a natural extension of a hatha yoga practice. Don't rush it. Just start a hatha yoga practice. Your practice will evolve as a lotus blossom.

**Namaste,
Joan**

The Fear Factor

Dear Joan,

Why are western cultures afraid of yoga? Is it the perceived differences between eastern religions and western religions? East vs. West cultural upbringings? Thinking that yoga involves some sort of voodoo rituals?

Jonathan

Dear Sardonicus,

I see the western culture, and particularly the younger generations, to be embracing yoga. It has become extremely popular within the past five years. When Eve and I were working on the first edition of the complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga in 1998, yoga was still not as big a phenomena as it is today. Our timing was such that as soon as our book came out, yoga took off with a bang! We are now on our third edition of the yoga book, and with it's increasing popularity, we are planning to write even more editions. Today, you'll find yoga studios in all the major cities and most minor ones too. Yoga mats are sold at most athletic stores and department stores. The study of yoga in the United States has had a rebirth!

You mention eastern versus western religions. Yoga is not a religion. Because it comes from the East, and derives out of Hindu influences, it's often confused as a religion. To see the divinity in all of nature is an aspect of the yoga study. It involves a deep appreciation and recognition that we are all one, and this includes all of nature. In days of old, and perhaps still in some old churches, eastern religions were viewed as a competitive religions to christianity. Yoga was clumped in with these views.

As you study yoga, you will come across the niyama of self study. This involves the study of sacred literature of all kinds. Sacred literature that connects you to the deeper meanings in life. Through the study of such literature, one becomes more aware of one's own life force, one's own sense of divinity. It's not saying, "I am God," as a territorial and egocentric claim. It's saying, "God exists within all, and all, including one's self, are honored, respected, and loved for their divine nature."

Namaste,

in

Do you have a question for Joan?

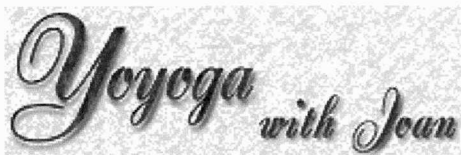
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Yo Joan



Isolate Energy

Dear Joan,

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am a 39 year old male (UK) who has recently come to yoga having been diagnosed as having mild depression after a period of extreme stress at work.

My doctor has prescribed a course of mild antidepressants which have helped get me on an even keel at least although there are still good days and bad days. I have been going to a class and also studying books to assist me (including recently the Complete Idiots Guide which I am still working through).



Doing a yoga workout in the morning certainly helps me feel better for the day ahead but I was wondering whether there are certain poses that a beginner could use which would focus the energy on alleviating the feelings of uselessness and lack of enthusiasm for the future. Before the depression I was always a very upbeat sort of person (a big kid my wife always said!) and I am still worried that I may never again regain the enthusiasm for life that I used to have. Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

With Love,
Neil

Dear Neil,

You need poses that focus on energy. First let's determine where these feelings of uselessness are coming from. Let's explore it from a physical level. Do you feel this heaviness in the heart? In the pit of your stomach? In your throat? In your head? In your tush that will not get out of the chair? When you are feeling depressed, spend some time determining where you are actually feeling the majority of the heaviness. With concentration, you will see that one part of you is heavier with feelings than another part...and here is where the practice begins.

Let's say it's your heart that is feeling the pain, is feeling despair. This is the Venus chakra. Let's bring it into balance with some spinal twists, some child's poses, some back bends. The difficult part about depression is that it becomes hard to move. Yet, if you do not move, you will become more depressed. So, I am suggesting that you pick one area of the body, one chakra to work with. Isolate it, and then you will open up a blocked passage way of energy. When this flood gate opens, a new brighter world awaits you.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Tummy Trainor?

Dear Joan,

A group of girls from my town get together on a Monday evening and practice yoga for one hour...I'm sort of the group leader as I've taken yoga for many years and it seems to be going wonderfully. My question to you is...the majority of the girls are of child bearing age and all complain about their stomachs...have you got anything that targets the stomach area...we do a few but I'd like to have more just so the classes don't get stale. I'd appreciate your help...

thank you,
Natalie

Dear Natalie,

This is not the kind of yoga I teach. "Targeting the stomach" is more for a physical trainer. There are many excellent physical trainers and I would not hesitate to contact one regarding this concern. I teach a holistic way of living and a holistic way of approaching the postures and study of yoga. The yoga I teach is about gaining acceptance for the body and all its many varying beautiful parts (all of the parts are beautiful, including the stomach). It's about gaining appreciation for the marvelous mind, and it's about developing the tranquil soul. Targeting the tranquil soul can be quite challenging and quite a strenuous work-out, and that's where my main focus lies.

**Namaste,
Joan**

An Angel has spoken

Dear Joan,

Hello again it's me Angel....in divine friendship....remember me?-well I just want to ask you for one thing.Do you think it's possible for you to add some kind of meditation advise every month;on your monthly Issue?-you know the sameway that you include the "Asana of the Month" which I like a lot;....why not the Meditation tip of the Month" or something like that...I think a lot offreader's we like something like that....what do you said?-I hope I dont askyou too much....thanks....your friend....Angel.

Dear Angel,

I appreciate your suggestion, Angel. I often have meditation tips within theyoga tips section. The two often seem inseparable for me. I've just put up anarchives link that I have yet to develop. I'm thinking maybe to change that to a meditation tip link. What do you think, Angel - would you rather have an archives or a meditation tip for the month? What's the vote from other Yoyogareaders too? Thank you very much for your suggestion, Angel. It's anexcellent one.

Namaste,
Joan

This one's quite handy...

Dear Joan,

I read your article all the time and enjoy them very much. do you have something to get the fingers healed after one had surgery and the fingers are still numb. cant bend them down into the palm of the hand nor can straighten them up without it hurting? I sure would appreciate any advise you have.

Thank You
Mary Lou
Hinsdale, IL

Dear Mary Lou,

I would recommend massage for your fingers. Gentle rotations and gentle pulls.If possible, see a professional massage therapist who can be more specificwith the musculature of your fingers. Many people view massage as a luxury. It is rather a form of health care. It can aid in healing after surgery. It can also help prior to surgery as well. I strongly suggest you look into this avenue to help you rather than a yoga posture. After you have been getting some hand massages, contact me again and we will go from there.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Sweet Dreams

Dear Joan,

I am an epileptic and have a weight issue. I am also severely stressed 6 days a week. Other than the epilepsy, I am in remarkably good health, if that information helps any. Is there anything you can suggest that wasn't in "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" (an amazing book, by the way) to help alleviate some of my issues?

Also, is there some other suggestions you can give for making time for a regular practice? I work 40 hours a week, as well as going to school 4 nights a week (that is 24 hours). By Friday I am completely worn out, and I need to recharge. Any help at all would be amazing.

Thank you,
Tricia

Dear Tricia,

First of all, there is absolutely nothing wrong with getting some rest, sleep, relaxation when one is tired. We live in a society that tends to put a lot of pressure on movement. We think we are not productive unless we are doing something. Sleeping can be very productive. Dreaming can answer many of the questions we ponder, if we take the time to listen to our dreams. You say you are severely stressed, overweight, and have epilepsy. These are all separate concerns, yet they all involve the nervous system (the weight puts a strain on all our systems of the body). Pranayama, or yogic breath exercises can be extremely helpful for the nerves. Shavasana, the relaxation pose, can help to create a more restful sleep. A more restful sleep permits us to have more beautiful and creative dreams. Dreams that can answer the problems that are creating the stress. We choose the paths we are on, including the work we do. It is important that your work be one of service to yourself and to others. This does not necessarily mean the "service industry." This means a job that is making this world a better one. I hope, Tricia, within this response of mine, you've been able to discern some answers. Much love to you.

**Namaste,
Joan**

**Do you have a question for Joan?
Send your questions or mail to Joan .
Please include the city and state you are from.**



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Yo Joan



Practice makes Perfect

Dear Joan,

It's been a process for me to find which poses were good for my enlightenment. I have narrowed it down to 5 poses, Warrior 2, Warrior 1, Deep knee bend, side angle pose, and fierce pose. These poses stimulate my adrenal glands and liver, therefore helping me release old rage and anger. These poses produce heat in my body. It is also helping me release alot of pain. I also realize with these very specific asanas, I become a lot more illuminated or enlightened on my perception. As for the many other asanas, they stimulate kundalini way to my chakra. As a person with an emotional handicap, I must be careful. Even too much meditation makes me spacey and disenchanted. Yoga and meditation are very powerful and shouldn't be underestimated. I've always liked yoga...I find that it really grounds you. Yoga is so important because it really enlightens us on the way we perceive the world.



You definitely need both meditation and yoga. Meditation alone is kind of empty without yoga...yoga is what a householder is about, because it works those first three chakras, where we are connected to others and how we view one another and how we view the world. I meditated for three years before doing yoga. When I started to do yoga, then I started to become enlightened on who I was. I am grateful for teachers like you Joan, who have provided us with the way to know ourselves. I've started with the info., and now I have used my experience to find what is right for me. Thank you so much for the yoga books and your taking the time to answer each of us on a individual basis. Yes, it is along road.

Namaste,
Chris
Franklin, NJ

Dear Chris,

Thanks, Chris. You demonstrate that it's the actual practice which frames our understanding of what yoga really means.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Knees can be Lulu's!

Dear Joan,

I recently suffered from knee pain and went to the dr. to get diagnosis. He said that my ligaments/tendons (don't know which one's which) that holds my knee cap is weak, thus the knee cap is rubbing to the bone joint inside my knee and causing pain (I hope this makes sense). I underwent an 8-week physical therapy. One thing that my therapist said is to never sit cross legged/bend my knee in steep angle (such as in the lotus pose, cross-legged sitting, or even child's pose). And yet those poses are so crucial in yoga. What can I do? I am very much eager to resume my yoga practices. Right know I can use my legs for my daily activities just fine. Thanks a lot for any help in advance!

Namaste,
Lulu

Dear Lulu,

I broke my left knee cap in October 11, 2001 from a hard fall on a driveway. The first doctor I saw, said to keep my leg straight in a cast and to stay off my leg for several months. He did not think much about yoga, when I mentioned I did it. (My friend was with me at the office visit. She said to the Doctor, "You don't understand, she REALLY does yoga." He replied that his wife hurt her back doing yoga once, and he doesn't put much stock in it. I realized he was not really listening to me, or my friend. I went for a second opinion. This next doctor listened to me. I walked into his office in crutches with no weight on my left leg. I walked out with a cane and almost full weight on my leg.

I am now fully recovered. I can do lotus pose and all of the other poses I once did. I have no knee pain and no residual effects from the break. The point is, get a second opinion if you are not happy with the first.

To strengthen the tendons and ligaments of the knees, standing poses are in order. Poses like warrior and lightening bolt, which hold the knee at a right angle to the ground are quite good at developing the quadriceps muscles which support the knees. You mention that the tendons and ligaments of your knees are weak. You CAN strengthen them It takes work and consistency, but you can do it. Get into a regular practice of the standing poses today.

**Namaste,
Joan**

ress test of strength

Dear Joan,

I would like to know if there is a class starting in the Winter session around the Brookfield, IL area. Also, I try the Introduction to Yoga, is there a difference between a stress Yoga and I guess regular strength Yoga?

Yours,
TC

Dear TC,

Yoga Chicago newspaper, which is available on the web, will have a list of teachers and classes in your area. Regarding stress yoga vs. strength yoga. Yoga means union. Bringing all the elements of your life together in harmony. The teacher is extremely important in what style of yoga is being offered. If you do not connect with a certain way of teaching, find another teacher. Many stress reducing classes are also strength building. One is not necessarily exclusive of the other.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Posturing for answer

Dear Joan,

I read your articles in the Downers Grove Reporter. I was wondering if you could give me any advice on how to improve my posture, and also how to relax so I can fall asleep at night. Please let me know if you can help.

Thanks so much.
Marilyn

r Marilyn,

I don't know what the problem with your posture is. If your back is starting to curve out, called kyphosis, this can be caused by weak back muscles. Yoga exercises strengthen the spine and also strengthen the back muscles which support the spine. Back bends can be most helpful for this. For example, something as simple as sitting at a computer all day, can create varying degrees of weak back muscles.

at the computer a lot. I recently purchased a large yoga ball. It's an inflatable rubber ball that's sold at most dept. stores. After a long day at my desk, I lay back on this ball, and it's similar to getting a chiropractic adjustment. I actually hear all the bones clicking back into place. I recommend trying this yourself.

However, this is a passive form of a backbend. It's a way to flex the muscles in an opposing way, but is more for flexibility development rather than strength. To strengthen the back muscles, I recommend a more aggressive backbend that energizes and strengthens the surrounding muscles. This type of backbend is done without a ball. You do the work of pushing yourself up into this kind of backbend. Yet, on those days when you're just too tired to push yourself into a full backbend, simply have a ball instead!

Backbends energize, so to fall asleep at night, rather do a series of forward bends. The last pose in this series should be a relaxation pose. In yoga, this is called shavasana. It's a pose that works to progressively relax all the muscles of the body. A regular practice of forward bends followed by shavasana can help to make your sleep more restful.

**Namaste,
Joan**

A Doc a day, till the right one comes your way

Dear Joan,

I have been doing yoga for a few months and something strange has come up: through some trial and error, I have eventually found out that whenever I do standing forward bends (any posture where my head is hanging down), I tend to suffer from heartburn for the next several days, with a very unpleasant feeling of 'lump in the throat', dry throat etc. At first I couldn't believe there was any connection with yoga but I have to admit it seems to be the case. May I add that I am a vegetarian, that I don't do yoga until a good 2 hours after a meal so I don't think I'm doing anything wrong. My doctor even had my thyroid gland x-rayed just in case but everything is ok. Do you know what could be happening? I would be very glad if you could help me since the only 'solution' I've found so far is to stop yoga, which is really frustrating and unsatisfactory.

Thank you very much in anticipation.
Fran
Paris, France

: Fran,

I too once had the condition you describe, Fran! Friends told me then I might have had acid reflex. It happened several years ago. I even went to the emergency room once for it, thinking there might be a heart connection. I was referred to an internist who took several blood samples and found out I had a virus in my stomach. A type of virus that one can have since birth but may lay dormant. I was given an antibiotic that I took for a week or two. It solved the problem for me and I've never had the pain since. mentioning this to you so that you can inquire to your doctor of this possibility in your problem.

I think it's extremely important to work with a doctor who's actively researching to solve this problem you describe. I would not recommend yoga postures over your medical care. I do recommend that you get excellent medical care. If one doctor does not have an answer for you, another will. Keep looking for a doctor that is responsive to your concerns and is actively working with you to come to the bottom of the cause of this condition. Do not settle for less in your health care. You deserve the best in yoga teachers, and also the best in your medical doctors.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Do you have a question for Joan?

Send your questions or mail to Joan .

Please include the city and state you are from.

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.

Joan respectfully gives each letter received her individual and kind attention.

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Yo Joan



Ouch! Tattoos!

Dear Joan,

I've been an avid yoga practitioner for some time now and would like your opinion about something. I think that the symbol for "om" is absolutely beautiful and would like to have it tattooed on my body. I can't help but wonder, though, if this would be sort of contradictory to my practice of yoga, perhaps almost yogic blasphemy, as "om" has such a deep and peaceful meaning, and one of the base principles of yoga is "do no harm" to oneself. Any thoughts?



Thanks and Namaste,
Jen

Dear Jen,

My thoughts consider this to be a fascinating topic! It's come up in the college classes I teach. Many college students have tattoos and many are considering getting them. I think it's great that you too are exploring these questions on non-violence.

As you know, the study of yoga involves ahimsa or non-violence. This concept of ahimsa is studied and applied in one's life to bring one into deeper experiences of yoga. Yet, each of us must explore this on an individual basis. It's true that a tattoo can be viewed as a form of violence. It also can be viewed as a form of art. To canvas one's body with the om (aum) symbol, sounds beautiful to me. The process of painting the tattoo on the body does not; however, this is an individual decision. Some people don't see the tattooing process as painful. Various parts of the body involve less pain than others. Some do not see the struggles in creating art, in whatever form that takes, as violent. For example, a dancer must work very hard and struggle with the body to perfect certain moves. Some of this intense training may even be seen as violent. However, the dancer does not see it as violent because the process of creating art leads to incredible beauty. Another example would be some of the austere poses and practices of yoga. Some see the kriya cleansing techniques as violent. Others see these techniques as leading to incredible

purification of the body. The Yoga Pradipika, considered a sacred text in the principles of hatha yoga, does not consider these kriya practices as violent. And, who am I to question a sacred text? I am Joan Budilovsky. But, who's that? I'm the wind, the air, the earth the water...am I going too far here? I question everything, and I think you're also right to question, weigh the options, and make a decision based on an educated mind. I don't think there is one answer on this. Let me know what you decide, Jen.

**Namaste,
Joan**

3 x's the charm

Dear Joan,

I just wanted to tell you I added three new poses....staff, butterfly, and bridge. I took your advice. It seems that doing less asanas, but holding them longer and going deeper, feels more fulfilling than doing 45 different asanas, and holding the poses for 10 seconds each. My practice has deepened thanks to your advice.

Chris
Franklin, NJ

Dear Chris,

Thanks, Chris! 3 x's can be the charm! Onward!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Ain't no mountain high enough

Dear Joan,

My name is Laurie and I live in Oregon. I grew up near you in Indiana, but have been living in Oregon for about 1 years now. My boyfriend had your book "Yoga for Idiots" on his bookshelf and I read some of it this weekend and loved it. I plan on reading the whole book once I finish my other one. I wanted to write you to let you know that I had no idea that yoga had spiritual guidelines. I thought it was just an exercise system. I read some of the spiritual

guidelines (yamas and...I forget the other term) and loved it. Although I was raised Catholic, I found the yoga spiritual principles were ones I could follow.

I started taking a yoga class at my gym because I rock climb with my boyfriend. He said yoga helps with the force needed for rock climbing so I started taking a yoga class and it does help my climbing. Yoga also helps me with recovering from rock climbing, as well as other life stresses. My boyfriend and I do some yoga together and, like your book said, it does help me feel connected more closely with him than before we did yoga together. Anyway, love your book and will read other books you've written.

Thank you and namaste,
Laurie

Dear Laurie,

Yoga is a lifestyle. The principles of the study can fit into any religious framework. Yamas and Niyamas are guidelines for living.

The Yoga Yamas are:

**Non-violence
Truthfulness
Non-stealing
Non-lusting
Non-greed**

The Yoga Niyamas are:

**Purity
Contentment
Self-discipline
Studiosness
Devotion**

This study of yoga thrives in a spirit of non-competition. These aren't easy principles to practice in a culture that thrives in competition. That's why studying with a class of fellow students is important. A class can help us realize that it's possible to rise above difficult conditions presented to us in our lives. A class reminds us that we are all in this together. It also helps us to see our own competitiveness in an atmosphere that supports non-competitiveness and non-judgment. Even if the strains of competition are released for only a few moments in class, these few moments form the basis of ever growing moments of peace. This peacefulness, if experienced on a regular basis, can transcend into various struggles in our lives. A class of yoga students helps us see that there are others who also strive for a life lived within deeper expressions of reality, rather than a life led by the superficial tidings of success. Continue to enjoy the journey, Laurie, and all the various mountains along the way.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Divine Inspirations

Dear Joan,

Can you give me some practical example or exercises' for practice Vinyasana?- You mention that on art.129 last month; but I don't know how to apply that to my daily life. Thanks and forgive me for such question.

In divine fellowship,
Angel.

Dear Angel,

Vinyasana is the combination of various yoga poses into one flowing moment. The breath helps the poses connect to each other. A simple way to do this is to exhale into the next posture. For example, exhale into a standing forward bend. Inhale, step one foot back, bend the front knee and look up. Exhale both legs back and come into downward dog pose. Hold this pose for several long breaths. Come down to the floor and rest.

Notice any changes in your breathing process after doing this. Is your breath more rapid? Is it uneven? Is it calm and steady? One works to develop a steadiness of breath throughout a Vinyasana sequence. Body and breath eventually become as one. As the body and breath come into balance, the mind is able to join in as well. Body, breath, mind are developing a peaceful, steady relationship - Om shanti.

Namaste,
Joan

Parkinsons and Stress

Dear Joan,

Have searched high and low but have not been able to find anything for Parkinson's and yoga - they almost seem the opposite extremes. I have a friend of a friend who wants me to chat about yoga to his Parkinson's support group this Sat- I did look up exercises for Parkinson's on the internet but am not sure just what I can say about yoga except yoga in a chair, supine, on knees and savasana and breathing. Any suggestions will be passed on if I really am 'dumb' at the meeting.

BC in Clinton, Ia

Dear BC,

Parkinson's is still very much a mystery in the medical world. What isn't a mystery is that "dis-ease" happens when the body is "not in ease". Yoga is about bringing the body into balance. It's not a cure. It's about re-alignment of the physical/mental/verbal body. Each of us is unique in our imbalances. For example, although I may share a lower back pain with you, the experiences of my life and the heredity that created my back pain are unique. Just as each person with Parkinson's has a unique history of stresses and concerns.

Yoga is a path of self-awareness. It's not necessarily a cure for Parkinson's disease, although, one person may find it to be. Yoga is stress reducing. Perhaps someday science will find all diseases to have the common denominator of stress. I hope you find these thoughts helpful.

**Namaste,
Joan**

A sticky situation

Dear Joan,

I just started yoga recently at my gym. They provide sticky mats but I want to buy my own personal mat for cleanliness reasons. I was wondering if you could recommend a yoga mat. I'm tall (5'10") and I also get very sweaty during yoga. I was looking at the mesh yoga mat and thought that might be better for me since I usually end up sliding down the smooth surfaced sticky mat.

Thank you,
Jennifer

Dear Jennifer,

I've gotten my yoga mat from Hugger Mugger. I've had it for over 10 years. It's quite worn, but I have no intentions of getting a new one soon. I think this one will probably last me at least another ten. I'm sure there are other good mats out there. Hugger Mugger (located on the web at: <http://www.huggermugger.com>) is just where I got mine. I am very happy with it too.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Classes and Tapes

Dear Joan,

I am looking for 'gentle yoga' classes here or near Downers Grove. Had been taking one at College of DuPage but they have canceled all upcoming classes. After having been in a car accident several years ago and having broken bones, stiffness Inc, the gentle classes are all I can do at present. Do you have any suggestions? Would even consider tapes to do at home. Thankyou very much.

Cyndy

Dear Cyndy,

Check out Yoga Chicago newspaper (on the web at: <http://www.yogachicago.com>) for classes near you. Phone numbers are listed with classes so that you can speak directly to the instructor about what you are looking for. I sell many tapes and CD's in the Yoyoga Bookstore on this site for at home training. I hope you may find some helpful.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Diet First

Dear Joan,

I am from Fort Pierce, Florida, USA. I found your e-mail address at "Yoyoga.com." Sometimes when breathing I feel something [?my breath?] move all the way down to the base of my spine. Usually I feel my breath hit a wall/stop at the solar plexus in the pit of my stomach. Can you tell me what it is that I perceive as this wall and how to remove it so that my breathing is always on a deeper level?

I appreciate your time!
--Martin--

Dear Martin,

It may be as simple as something you ate. Explore your eating patterns before your yoga class. It's best to do yoga on an empty stomach. Some foods take longer to digest than others. I'm not sure by your question if your breath stops at the inhale or the exhale. Do to the location of where it stops, I'd explore your diet first.

**Namaste,
Joan**

The example you set

Dear Joan,

I am wanting to become a certified yoga teacher. I have visited the website for the Asheville Yoga Center. Could you possibly give me some insight on the center or if you can recommend another center. I live in Baton Rouge, Louisiana area.

Thank you for your help.
B.J. Jackson

Dear BJ,

I'm not familiar with this center, B.J. It's best to write to them directly. Ask for some yoga teachers in your area who have been certified by them. Taking a class with these teachers might be the best way of learning about the center.

**.maste,
Joan**

Friends

Dear Joan,

I am a new convert and just love yoga. I've taken a several classes and have read two books. currently reading yours and would like some information on "Anusara" Yoga style. Classes are offered in this style but I can't find any info. Someone told be its new. Please point me in the right direction. Thank you.

. Love your book.
Ellen

Dear Ellen,

Anusara Yoga is taught by John Friend. I happen to love his style of study. I've really enjoyed my workshops with Thomas Fortel who has studied with John. Thomas's website is at:

<http://www.yogawiththomas.com>.

e also enjoyed John's CD's and videos. You can find more information on John, Anusara Yoga, his products, and his classes at:

<http://www.anusara.com>.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Kundalini Rises?

Dear Joan,

One of the things I have noticed over the past two years of my yoga practice is the kundalini. It seems that when I do basic hatha yogapostures, it tends to rise anyhow. I did a little research on the way the energy is rising. I found some illustrations in a book on kundalini. There were several illustrations in the book that showed the flow of kundalini in a person...both in a healthy nervous system and a nervous system with mental imbalance's. The picture with the flow of kundalini through a person with mental imbalance was the one I identified with. Now mind you, I am diagnosed with a mental illness. The picture showed the kundalini stopping at the crown chakra...the flow is impeded...this is exactly how mine is going...I feel a buzzing sensation in my brain. Theenergy doesn't flow up and out of my body through the top of my head like it should in a healthy person's body. It feels like voltage in my head. I am concerned about this and I need your guidance on this. Should I take it a little bit more easy...not do yoga so much? I am concerned that I will burn my brain out. It's like my crown is wide open and on fire. This has been a frustrating process for me. I've tried to weed out any postures that even arouse the kundalini energy to a minimal degree...i.e. spinaltwist, cobra, etc. I know kundalini can really be beneficial to most; I know in your book you say it was one of the goals in yoga. But what should I do with my practice?

Chris
Franklin, NJ

Yoga's goal is self-realization. But, I'd really rather not say that yoga has a "goal." It is rather a path toward self-realization. Part of this path involves the activation of Kundalini energy. This activation is experienced differently with different people. Chris, this question needs to be addressed to the yoga teacher you are studying with on a one-to-one basis. The activation of Kundalini energy can be extremely powerful. Sometimes other types of energy are confused with Kundalini energy. Medications can also confuse the process. Kundalini energy is pure and encompassing. I encourage you to discuss this question regarding your medications and experiences directly with your individual yoga teacher.

Here's to beautiful energy ever rising!

**Namaste,
Joan**

**Do you have a question for Joan?
Send your questions or mail to Joan .
Please include the city and state you are from.**

Yo Joan



Mantra and Yoga

Dear Joan,

Do you have any suggestions for background music or noise during yoga and meditation?

Barry

Dear Barry,

Well, that's a tough question to answer in one swoop. I often teach without any music at all. If I do use music, it's something that's not distracting, like gentle Tibetan Bells. I don't want the student's (or teacher's) mind to get so engaged in the music that it disassociates from the study of the body. However, and it's a big **HOWEVER**, I sometimes use Mantra in studying the postures. In fact, I've been using Mantra more and more. I've found mantra to be very useful in calming and steadying the breath. Robert Gass of Springhill Music has recorded an assortment of mantra CD's that are especially wonderful in the practice of the postures. Mantra quiets the mind. It also engages the mind. For this reason, I think Mantra with posture study works best when people are confident in the postures being performed.

Namaste,
Joan



› with the flow

Dear Joan,

I just moved here (Downers Grove) from Austin, TX and found your studio online. I am so interested but don't see a class schedule. Do you only hold seminars? If so, are there any particular studios you would recommend that are in Downers Grove? I have practiced yoga for about a year and a half and really love Vinyasa Flow. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Thanks so much!

Namaste,
Jennifer

Dear Jennifer,

I teach at Columbia College in Chicago on Saturday mornings. Other than that, I only do seminars. I would recommend contacting a studio in Downers Grove called, "Yoga Among Friends." They specialize in "Flow Yoga." This is similar to the type of vinyasana yoga you have studied. These styles involve flowing movements from posture to posture. Depending on how these styles are taught, the practice can be quite aerobic. "Yoga Among Friends'" phone number is 630-960-5488.

Namaste,
Joan

You're turning me upside down

Dear Joan,

My question is about the benefits of being upside down. What IS the benefit of being upside-down? I can't do headstands very well and a headstand won't "uncompress" the back. Through my massage therapist I have found a contraption called "The Total Back System" which provides "inversion therapy." What's nice about it is that I can hang upside-down and get a good spinal stretch. Have you ever heard of such a machine? What would the yoga benefits be, if any?

Wishing you peace and wellness,
Bonnie

Dear Bonnie,

There are many benefits to a regular practice of inversions. Inversions take pressure off the heart. While the body is upside down, the heart doesn't have to pump as hard to get blood to the extremities.

Inversions help to bring blood to the brain as it brings clearer thinking to the mind. According to BKS Iyengar in his new book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health," the regular practice of a headstand, "builds stamina, helps to cure halitosis, strengthens the lungs, improves the function of the pituitary and pineal glands, increases the hemoglobin content in the blood, and relieves the symptoms of colds, coughs and illitis."

In addition, an inversion helps us to befriend gravity. After all, gravity is constantly pulling us down, and for brief moments of time we can reverse this energetic pull. The process is like a fountain of youth. And so, headstands can help to keep us young in many ways. However, if there are any serious health problems, a doctor should be consulted before doing inversions. Detached retinas, high blood pressure - these are some of the contraindications for doing headstands. Partial inversions can also be of great benefit. For example, lying on your back on the floor and putting the legs straight up against the wall is a way to invert the body that does not affect pressure on the eyes.

Regarding the back system you mention, Bonnie, it sounds great! Although I have not seen the specific one you refer to, I have seen other contraptions that help to invert the body. For example, if you click on the [Yoyoga Bookstore](#), you will see me doing a headstand in a headrest. This little contraption takes pressure off the neck. It's very helpful for those who cannot go up into headstand comfortably on their own. Various aids can be very helpful for those who cannot go up into headstand comfortably on their own. Headstands performed without any aids have the additional benefit of developing arm and stomach strength. In this way, the body gets a more balanced development from a headstand that is unassisted. Hatha Yoga means Uniting through balance. The body is the only necessary ingredient to the study.

Namaste,
Joan

Stress Reduction

Dear Joan,

I used to attend yoga classes before but had stopped for about 3 years. I intend to continue practicing yoga at home. I have this condition know as "hives" or the scientific name for it is "urticaria". It is basically an allergy and could be caused by preservative & additives in food stuff, drugs, internal infections and stress. Appreciate if you could suggest specific yoga asanas that will help in stress management.

Thanks in advance.
Regards,
Vijayaraj

Dear Vijayaraj,

Breath is a key element in stress reduction. It's important that you learn how to breathe properly in holding the poses. Only hold a pose for the period of time you can breathe steadily. Once your breath

becomes uneven, it's time to come out of the pose. Go into every pose with full awareness and a clear, steady, relaxed breath. Take time to visualize the pose before flowing into it. Slow your breath down. Any pose can become a stress-reducing pose. It's all a matter of how the postures are studied and approached. Breath is the key that opens the door to yoga. A beautiful yoga teacher named, Julia, said it so well,

"Open the breath, open the spine, open the heart, open the mind."

**Namaste,
Joan**

Have a Ball!

Dear Joan,

Do you have any suggestions for morning back pain relief? I have your book, if you could suggest some asanas. Would the ball do me any good? Usually if I get right into the shower with real hot water that helps but I wonder if I can loosen up prior to that?

Thanks,
y

Dear Barry,

The Yoga Ball stretches, but does not strengthen the back. Abdominal exercises will strengthen the back. A regular practice of leg lifts can help to strengthen the back muscles by strengthening the abdominal muscles. Start with bent knees and progress to straight legs. Keep your arms lying straight with palms facing down under your back. This supports the structure of the spine and takes more stress off of it as you develop your leg lifts. Eventually you will not need the arms for support. I still often use my arms under my back in leg lifts. It just makes the movement more comfortable.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Posting flash cards

Dear Joan,

Hello, my name is Racheal. I've enjoyed browsing through your website. It's quite nice. I was wondering if you could direct me to a source where I could purchase some posters of different styles of yoga poses. I have had a bit of a trial trying to find some and I would greatly appreciate your help.

Thank You for your time,
Racheal

Dear Racheal,

I don't know about posters, but I can help you with flashcards. I have Iyengar flash cards with drawings of the postures on one side and their Sanskrit names on the other side of the card. These flash cards can be purchased through Iyengar organizations. The drawings are simple. The Sanskrit names are not. But, hey...it's all about balance;-)

**Namaste,
Joan**

etic Study in Competition

Dear Joan,

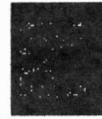
I just saw your Yoga for Dummies book 2nd edition, and Yoga for Dummies-Illustrated- Edition 3. Because I didn't have time to compare, I was hoping you could answer the following. Is the latter book an updated, bigger, better version of the first book or do they both contain different information?

Thanks,
Kathi
MN

Dear Kathi,

The new edition is expanded and updated. It's almost twice as big as the second edition. By the way, it's "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." The "Dummies" are our competitors. Hahaha...serves us right!;-)

Yo Joan



There IS someplace like Om

Dear Joan,

Joan, Your response to my question about an "om" tattoo was much appreciated. You reminded me what a personal experience yoga is, and that was the bottom line for me. Your dancer analogy hit especially close to home since I happen to be a dancer as well as a yogi! Just wanted to let you know that my left shoulder is now adorned with some beautiful Sanskrit, and thank you again.



Namaste,
Jen

Dear Jen,

Thanks for the update, Jen! There's no place like Om...with the exception now of your shoulder!;-)

Namaste,
Joan

For whom the bell tolls

Dear Joan,

Last year you presented at The College of DuPage Women's Wellness Fair. I am interested in the CD (it was a selection of bell chimes) that you used for a series of breathing exercises. Can you help?

Deb

Dear Deb,

Could it have been "Ocean Bowls" by Karma Moffett? Or perhaps one of my meditation tapes? On the back of my shavasana and sun salutation tapes I have a 20 minute meditation exercise using bells. I use an assortment of CD's and tapes in my presentations. I'm not sure which ones I used then, but very likely it would have been one of the above.

**Namaste,
Joan**

You're turning me upside down

Dear Joan,

question referring to the last yo yoga edition. You responded to a question about the headstand saying that you use a headrest to take the pressure of your neck. Can you let me know where you can buy/order such a headrest?

Thanks in advance and best,
Priya

Dear Priya,

These headrests are advertised in the back of Yoga Journal and Yoga International Magazines. You can find these national magazines in major bookstores. The particular headrest I recommend and have used for over 20 years, is called, "Body Lift." The cost is \$108.00. To order, call 1-888 AGEEASY. Or contact them on the web at <http://www.ageeasy.com>

**Namaste,
Joan**

o with the flow

Dear Joan,

Hi Joan! I just moved here (Downers Grove) from Austin, TX and found your studio online. I am so interested but don't see a class schedule. Do you only hold seminars? If so, are there any particular studios you would recommend that are nearby? I have practiced yoga for about a year and a half and really love Vinyasa Flow. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Thanks so much!

Namaste, Jennifer

Dear Jennifer,

I teach at Columbia College in Chicago on Saturday mornings. I also teach seminars around the country through Fordham University's Demello Spirituality Center. Contact them on the Web at <http://www.demello.org>. The next Demello seminar is in the Bahamas in December. Come join me there! You may also want to check out the 'Yoga Among Friends' studio in Downers Grove. They specialize in "Flow Yoga," which is a style I think you will like. Their phone number is: 630-960-5488

**Namaste,
Joan**

High Blood Pressure

Dear Joan,

I have just been diagnosed with high blood pressure. I do not believe in medication (even though I am taking it). Are there any specific yoga poses that are helpful in bringing down high blood pressure? Your help would be appreciated.

Thanks

Dear Friend,

It's important to work closely with your doctor when you are on medications. Yoga has been known to lower blood pressure. Make sure your doctor is aware of your exercise program so that he can monitor your pressure and see if you require less medication with regular yoga practice. If you have a cardiac condition, practice the standing and balance poses against a wall. Forward bending poses are especially good for lowering blood pressure. They are very calming. Be careful when you lift your head back to standing position, that you do not tilt the head back. This may cause dizziness. Poses like downward dog, child's pose are also very effective. Backbends tend to have a more energizing effect on the body, whereas forward bends quiet the body. Backbends and forward bends done in a flow, or vinyasana, can

bring the body into balance. Since you have high blood pressure, I would recommend a practice that included a higher percentage of seated forward bends.

**Namaste,
Joan**

HOLA!

Dear Joan,

Hola Joan mi nombre es Erica soy de Catamarca Argentina. Hace unos dias una amiga mia me regalo uno de tus libros de masaje, yo soy una aficionada a ellos y disfruto mucho "regalando" un poquito de bien estar . Y queria decirte que me senti muy comoda y feliz de poder conocer un poco mas, lo disfrute muchisimo y es como la biblia para mi. Gracias por compartir tus concimientos con la gente, espero que puedas leer este e-mailya que me encantaria poder tener un contacto con usted.

GOOD BLES YOU.

rica

--**Translation to English**--

"Hi Joan, my name is Erica. I am from Catamarca, Argentina. A few days ago, a friend of mine gave me one of your massage books. I am a fan of them and enjoy giving a little bit of well being. I would like to tell you that I feel very comfortable and happy to be able to know a little more, I enjoy it very much and its like a bible to me. Thank you for sharing your knowledge with the people. I hope that you will be able to read this e-mail because I would be delighted to be able to have contact with you.

GOOD BLESS YOU.

Erica"

Dear Erica,

Thank you very much for your letter. Muchas gracious! My friend, Jackie, translated it for me. Unfortunately, I don't speak Spanish, although my massage book was translated into Spanish. I encourage you onto the path of massage. The world needs more massage therapists. I am convinced that if people received regular massages we would have a much kinder and a more beautiful world. I hope you tinue to receive massages as well as give them. Continue to let your beauty shine as it has so utifully brightened my life. Muchas Gracious, mi amiga, Erica!

**Hasta manana,
Juana**

Vegan Vicki!

Dear Joan,

I'm currently reading the 3rd edition of your Idiot's Guide to Yoga, and it's great! I was SO thrilled to see that you mentioned veganism in it!

These are not my Web sites, but they are very good, so I'd like to submit them to you to consider adding to your "Favorite Links" page:

Animal Rights Links: <http://www.cok.net>

This is the Web site of Compassion Over Killing, an incredibly active, kind, national organization based in Washington, DC that is committed to animal rights in particular, and peace across the board. They have had numerous positive articles in The Washington Post about the suffering of chickens on factory farms, and all of their outreach efforts are positive and friendly. They are so great my husband and I donate to them on a monthly basis.

Vegetarianism Links: <http://www.whyvegan.com/> (or <http://www.veganoutreach.com> -- both sites are the same)

This is the Web site of Vegan Outreach, probably THE authority on ethical vegan diets. This site contains their popular "Why Vegan?" booklet online.

Thanks for considering adding these links. I look forward to finishing your book, and ordering some of your CDs and tapes!

Vicki

Dear Vicki,

These sites have just been added to my links page. Thanks, Vicki!

**Namaste,
Joan**

1e Temple of Kriya Yoga

Dear Joan,

I went to the Temple of Kriya Yoga when I was 17. Now almost 50 and living in Seattle, I am drawn back to creating a congruence in with my life. I have my Ph.d, am also a RN , have studied and dabbled in meditation. I wish to find a path and discipline to manifest a congruence for my spiritual journey . Do you have a suggestion on how to begin this daunting process. I love you web site. Namaste, MO

Dear MO,

Everything old is new again. Why not re-aquaint yourself with the Temple of Kriya Yoga? The are located on the web at: Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago. The Temple now has home study courses and certification programs in hatha yoga and meditation. You can study through the Temple even in Seattle! Welcome Home!

Namaste,
Joan

Bikram's and the '70's

Dear Joan,

o you have a bikram yoga class? if not, do you know a place that does?

Thanks,
Gary

Dear Gary,

No, I haven't studied Mr. Bikram's method. It's a very specific set of yoga poses and involves keeping room temps over 100 degrees. There are studios in Chicago that offer classes in this style advertised in the Yoga Chicago newspaper. You can pick a copy of this free bimonthly newspaper at local health food stores.

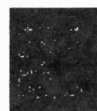
I have Bikram's first book written in 1978 called, "Bikram's Beginning Yoga Class." He's on the cover with Juliet Prowse. Ruth Buzzi, Tommy Smothers, Quincey Jones, Herbie Hancock, Paula Prentiss, and Herb Albert are some of the 70's stars featured in it. It's a hoot to read. If you can find a copy of this first edition on the web, I recommend getting it.

maste,



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Yo Joan



Thumbs Up!

Dear Joan,

I've been using your book (Complete Idiots Guide) to practice yoga on my own for about three years now, I'm really happy with the way practicing makes me feel! My question is: I seem to have acquired a bad case of tendentious in my thumb. Since the muscles that work the thumb originate as far up as the shoulders can you think of any poses that might help stretch the tendons from my shoulders to my thumbs?

Thanks,
Greg



Dear Greg,

Wow! The universe really works in incredible ways. I have had a problem with my thumb these past few months too! My problem was effecting my harp playing. Perhaps if I share my healing journey, it might help you with finding insight into yours.

I went to see my Chiropractor in Downers Grove, Dr. John Mostrando, and we narrowed the problem down to some trigger points in my biceps and in the tendons of my forearm. Trigger points are built up hard sections of stress in the muscles. These trigger points can build out of various unhealthy conditions, i.e poor diet, poor posture, repetitive movements, overall stress, etc. Many people have trigger points in various parts of their bodies. Often trigger points go undetected and can cause other problems. My trigger points were causing my thumb joint pain. When the trigger points in my biceps and forearms were pressed upon, the pain shot down to my thumb.

Dr. Mostrando outlined a very effective program that has been helping to solve my problem. It began with massage. I now receive regular half hour deep tissue massages to my arm twice a week at the National University of Health Sciences Massage Clinic in Lombard. The trigger points have slowly been dissolving. Since Dr. Mostrando is very holistic in his work, he also assessed my diet and sleep patterns. I discovered I formed a habit of sleeping on my right bicep! I believe this is where my problem originated. I have been ing more attention to how I sleep and trying to change sleeping on my arm.

In addition to massage, Dr. Mostrando outlined a regular series of simple stretches for me to do.

- 1) Straightening my arm out in front of me and pulling back on the palm with the other hand - Holding this stretch for several long deep breaths before releasing.**
- 2) Placing a rubber band between my thumb and fore finger and pulling on it. This stretches my thumb muscles in opposing way to the repetitive movements I use with my thumb on the harp strings.**

In addition to Dr. Mostrando's excellent therapy recommendations, I am practicing the yoga pose of the cow more often. Asana For The Month This stretches all the muscles of the arms, with an extra stretch to the triceps (muscles of back of upper arm), to balance all the biceps work I am doing (muscles of front of upper arm).

I hope you may find some or all of these therapy suggestions helpful for your condition.

**Namaste,
Joan**

The pressure of blood

Dear Joan,

" " the majority of Americans I am overweight and have high BP. now I know yoga will help with my BP. I already do meditation. but will it speed up my metabolism as well? and do it without raising my BP? anything special I should attempt [and I say attempt because I'm not very good at yoga yet.;-)]?

thank you so much
Bill the overweight in Syracuse, NY aka "the great frozen north";-)

Dear Bill,

Yoga can lower blood pressure because it's stress reducing. Hatha yoga is a study to bring the physical body into a more balanced state, and this includes the blood pressure. People with high blood pressure should avoid inversions and practicing in overly heated rooms. It's important to study under the guidance of an experienced yoga teacher. Since every one has a unique physical body, it would not be possible for me to generalize about your specific blood pressure concerns. This is why it's important to work with your doctor and also to study the postures with a yoga teacher face to face.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Mommy Yogi

Dear Joan,

I am not sure if you would be the right person to contact but I teach Baby & Me and Prenatal Yoga at the Richport CA and I think it is so crucial to reach out to pregnant women and stay at home parents and their infants, to let them know that there are classes available in the western suburbs that they can utilize as tools to build their yoga practice and relieve the stresses (mind and body) associated with pregnancy and parenthood. I would be happy to provide more information and would love someone to help me promote my classes. I am so grateful for your time and help.

Thank you.
Namaste,
Kristine Scott Schultz

Dear Kristine,

Future Mom Yoyoga readers take note!

**Namaste,
Joan**

ong of India

Dear Joan,

Namaste. I am wanting to practice the yoga. I am inspired by the book "Autobiography of a Yogi." But I am not wanting to be charged fee for the same. I am from Orissa, India, & a Govt. employee. Requesting for early reply.

Yours,
Bibhu

Dear Bibhu,

This website is free of charge. Paramahansa Yogananda is an incredible writer, so you are in good hands with his book, "Autobiography of a Yogi." I'm not familiar with India's yoga schools, but I'm sure there are many. Perhaps the Sivananda Center, Iyengar Institute, or Himalayan Institute may be more helpful for you. They all have schools in the U.S., and also in India. They can also all be found on the web. Best wishes!

**Namaste,
an**



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Yo Joan



Knees Please

Dear Joan,

I am recently taking up yoga again after a year long hiatus (rough pregnancy), and for no apparent reason (except maybe age!) I'm really having trouble with my knees -- I can't seem to cross them! Even the simplest poses seem to cause a lot of pain in the inner part of my left knee -- I could never do a pose like the Cow you show this month. Can you give me some suggestions on how to ease back into things? I really miss the stretch I used to get in my hips -- are there "knee-friendly" poses?



Thanks!Sandy
Morristown, Tennessee

Dear Sandy,

This is a perfect case for Iyengar! Iyengar styled yoga uses props of various sorts which are particularly helpful for those with injuries. The pose you refer to that was featured in the last Yoyoga issue involves the knees crossed on top of each other. It's not recommended for those with knee problems. It's a more advanced pose for knees. The warrior poses and the lightning bolt pose, Asana For The Month, are poses that can help strengthen the tendons of the knees. It's important to align the legs so the bent knees stay directly over the ankles. For those of us with weak ankles, the knees tend to sway in or out.

Do not hold the poses long. Hold the yoga pose for several comfortable breaths and then release. When your breath becomes strained or uneven, it's time to come out of the pose. This is a general observation to make in any yoga poses. I would also recommend purchasing a copy of BKS Iyengar's latest book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health." I was the US Consultant on this book. This book thoroughly explores the use of props in the poses. Props, such as blocks and belts, can help to take strain off joints and ligaments. It's a gradual approach to deepening the physical approach to the poses. It's an excellent reference book for home study. A prop can help you relax into a pose. "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health," is sold in the Yoyoga Bookstore.

**Namaste,
Joan**

The High of Headstands

Dear Joan,

I was excited to find you and have someone to ask my question. I am a home yogi and have been loving yoga for about a year and would like to learn some modifications to help me work into doing a headstand. This is one of the few poses I can't seem to do. I do not want to use a wall since it defeats the purpose of strengthening the muscles needed. Besides, I don't have available wall space in the needed area. I have watched several different tapes of this pose and getting in and out of it. One time I flipped over and rather scared myself. I really want to do this and meet the challenge. Do other people take a while before mastering headstand? What is the best way to achieve it?

Thank you!
Ellen

Dear Ellen,

Headstand against the wall does not defeat the purpose of the pose. The muscles are still being strengthened. Using a wall simply helps in balance. It helps prevent injury. I'd highly recommend using wall when beginning the study of headstand. Even though I have been doing this pose for years, I still often use the wall. On days when I am feeling off balanced or tired, I find it comforting to know there is a wall behind me to prevent me from overturning.

Headstand is considered an advanced pose. I remember watching swamis go effortlessly up into headstand and thinking to myself that learning this pose would certainly be a key to deepening my yoga practice. I found it extremely difficult and I wondered if I would ever learn it. I did the dolphin movement for many years. This is a movement that strengthens the arms and is a preparation for headstand.

Dolphin Movement:

- 1)Downward dog on your elbows**
- 2)Moving your chin towards your wrists**
- 3)Lifting back into elbow dog**
- 4)Repeating this back and forth movement of elbow dog to the wrists.**

One day I tried headstand and poof! I just went up. It was very satisfying. I felt great, so I understand your feelings of wanting to master it. I also want to encourage you that in due time it'll happen. You can still be a master yogi whether you go up into headstand with or without a wall. In fact, you can be a master yogi without going up into headstand at all! Perhaps though, you will have to go up into headstand to realize this. I would encourage you to continue to use the wall and continue working with the dolphin movement until one day headstand becomes an effortless movement up.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Angelic News

Dear Joan,

Hi Joan, just to say hello. It's me Angel...remember me? I like to share with you the good news that last Saturday Nov.15; I was Initiated in Kriya Yoga, by Ananda in Dallas Texas. It was wonderful!. And everything start two years ago when I first read your book "Idiot's guide to Meditation" and Paramahansa Yogananda book;"Autobiography of a Yogi...both books inspire me as a Catholic Christian that I am. Now I became a better Catholic and a better Christian.....deep inside me. Thanks, Joan, for your book and your job well done God bless you....Angel....Namaste. In Divine friendship.

Dear Angel,

Angel, angel, angel...May your life continue to be a beautiful inspiration.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Final shin-note

Dear Joan,

I read with interest your discussion regarding the thumb (last Yoyoga issue). I was wondering if you know of a technique for reducing and preventing shin splints? My daughter who is a runner and teacher is constantly plagued by shin splints and cannot seem to resolve them.

Thank you so much.
Donald

Dear Donald,

That's a new one for me too! I'll do some more research on this and try to have a leg up on it (pun intended) in the next Yoyoga issue. Any yogis out there who have some experience regarding yoga and shin splints - would love to hear from you too. We'll all put our thinking caps on for you on this one, Donald! In the meantime, wishing you, your daughter, family, friends, and all Yoyoga readers, a most blessed holiday season.