

Yoga

By: Rachel Goldstein

Close your eyes (not while reading my article, of course!), imagine you are in a quiet room with soft music streaming, you are focused on your breathing (instead of your endless to-do list) and an instructor is calmly directing you on where to place your hands and feet. You are in a yoga class and I promise you will feel better after. (I don't make promises I can't keep!)

Practicing yoga has many benefits and can improve flexibility, strength, balance, and endurance. For me, yoga helps to reduce anxiety and stress and even helps me sleep better. Yoga is beneficial for everyone because of the physical postures and focus on breathing. Each pose can be modified or adapted to meet the needs of the student so regardless of ability level yoga is for everyone. Yoga postures can be performed while seated in a chair or wheelchair and may be performed with assistance from the instructor as needed. In a yoga class, students usually watch an instructor to learn how to properly complete each position. For students with low vision or who are blind an instructor can easily incorporate more spoken instructions and feedback on what to change to accurately complete each yoga pose.

Yoga is often a slow, deliberate and meditative process, so it helps you to slow down and increases attention and focus. For individuals on the autism spectrum and with ADHD or anxiety this can be especially helpful with concentration and following directions. Practicing yoga is empowering because it is so individualized and inclusive as the differing abilities and limits of each student are accepted and welcomed. Yoga starts wherever you are. Every yoga pose can be adapted to meet your current level of functioning. With regular practice you will meet your goals, whether it's to have the breathing and stamina needed to be able to lift your head or to stand on your head.

Yoga is offered in many gyms, health clubs and recreation centers. There are adapted yoga classes where yoga is practiced by individuals with disabilities as well as inclusive classes where there are students with and without a disability. No two people (or yogis) are the same! Yoga is one of the most complete and inclusive forms of exercise and one of the best things you can do for your body, mind and spirit.