

CELEBRATING International Yoga Day 2024



United Nations

**International Day of Yoga
21 June**

‘Yoga for Self and Society’



Written by Dr Chrystal Fong Chern Ying (MBBS Melb (Aus), FRACGP)

Family Physician

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Dr Chrystal’s vision is to educate and motivate the individual and population towards better health outcomes.

Her mission is to help make sense of the rich science articles that are important to health to the everyday person through her articles.

International Yoga Day is celebrated on the 21 June of every year.

This day serves as a global platform to raise awareness about the manifold benefits of practicing yoga, emphasising yoga's role in fostering individual well-being and societal harmony.

This year marks the 10th International Day of Yoga with the theme “Yoga for Self and Society.”

Yoga, a transformative practice, represents the harmony of mind and body, the balance between thought and action, and the unity of restraint and fulfilment. It integrates the body, mind, spirit, and soul, offering a holistic approach to health and well-being that brings peace to our hectic lives. Its power to transform is what we celebrate on this special day.

Yoga is more than a physical activity. In the words of one of its most famous practitioners, the late B. K. S. Iyengar, “Yoga cultivates the ways of maintaining a balanced attitude in day-to-day life and endows skill in the performance of one’s actions.”¹

Lifestyle medicine uses therapeutic lifestyle interventions as a primary modality to treat chronic conditions including, but not limited to, cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and obesity. Applying the six pillars of lifestyle medicine- a whole-food, plant-predominant eating pattern, physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, avoidance of risky substances and positive social connections- also provides effective prevention for these conditions.²

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/yoga-day>

² <https://lifestylemedicine.org/>

Regular practice of the mind-body fitness programs provides many therapeutic benefits.

Regular practice of yoga promotes strength, endurance, flexibility and facilitates characteristics of friendliness, compassion, and greater self-control, while cultivating a sense of calmness and well-being.

Sustained practice also leads to important outcomes such as changes in life perspective, self-awareness and an improved sense of energy to live life fully and with genuine enjoyment. The practice of yoga produces a physiological state opposite to that of the flight-or-fight stress response and with that interruption in the stress response, a sense of balance and union between the mind and body can be achieved.³

Results from a study 'Exploring the therapeutic effects of yoga and its ability to increase quality of life'⁴ show that yogic practices enhance muscular strength and body flexibility, promote and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, promote recovery from and treatment of addiction, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life.

³Desikachar K, Bragdon L, Bossart C. The yoga of healing: Exploring yoga's holistic model for health and well-being. *Int J Yoga Ther.* 2005;15:17–39

⁴ *Int J Yoga.* 2011 Jul-Dec; 4(2): 49–54.

Four basic principles underlie the teachings and practices of yoga's healing system.⁵

1. The first principle is the human body is a holistic entity comprised of various interrelated dimensions inseparable from one another and the health or illness of any one dimension affects the other dimensions.
2. The second principle is individuals and their needs are unique and therefore must be approached in a way that acknowledges this individuality and their practice must be tailored accordingly.
3. The third principle is yoga is self-empowering; the student is his or her own healer. Yoga engages the student in the healing process; by playing an active role in their journey toward health, the healing comes from within, instead of from an outside source and a greater sense of autonomy is achieved.
4. The fourth principle is that the quality and state of an individual's mind is crucial to healing. When the individual has a positive mind-state healing happens more quickly, whereas if the mind-state is negative, healing may be prolonged.

Yoga is recognized as a form of mind-body medicine that integrates an individual's physical, mental and spiritual components to improve aspects of health, particularly stress related illnesses.⁶

Evidence shows that stress contributes to the aetiology of heart disease, cancer, and stroke as well as other chronic conditions and diseases.⁷

⁵ Desikachar K, Bragdon L, Bossart C. The yoga of healing: Exploring yoga's holistic model for health and well-being. *Int J Yoga Ther.* 2005;15:17–39

⁶ Atkinson NL, Permeth-Levine R. Benefits, barriers, and cues to action of yoga practice: A focus group approach. *Am J Health Behav.* 2009;33:3–14

⁷ Granath J, Ingvarsson S, von Thiele U, Lundberg U. Stress management: A randomized study of cognitive behavioural therapy and yoga. *Cogn Behav Ther.* 2006;35:3–10

Due to the fact that stress is implicated in numerous diseases, it is a priority to include a focus on stress management and reduction of negative emotional states in order to reduce the burden of disease.

Yoga encourages one to relax, slow the breath and focus on the present, shifting the balance from the sympathetic nervous system and the flight-or-fight response to the parasympathetic system and the relaxation response. The latter is calming and restorative; it lowers breathing and heart rate, decreases blood pressure, lowers cortisol levels, and increases blood flow to the intestines and vital organs. The practice of yoga generates balanced energy which is vital to the function of the immune system.⁸

Consistent yoga practice improves depression and can lead to significant increases in serotonin levels coupled with decreases in the levels of monamine oxidase, an enzyme that breaks down neurotransmitters and cortisol.⁹

Improved flexibility is one of the first and most obvious benefits of yoga.

Yoga helps to build muscle mass and/ or maintain muscle strength, which protects from conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis and back pain.¹⁰

Yoga also increases proprioception and improves balance.¹¹

Many studies show yoga lowers the resting heart rate, increases endurance, and can improve the maximum uptake and utilization of oxygen during exercise.¹²

When practicing yoga, a fundamental emphasis is placed on accepting one's moment-to-moment experiences creating mindfulness and not forcing the body past its comfortable limits. Research suggests that yoga can produce an

⁸ Arora S, Bhattacharjee J. Modulation of immune response in stress by yoga. *Int J Yoga*. 2008;1:45–55

⁹ McCall T. New York: Bantam Dell a division of Random House Inc; 2007. *Yoga as Medicine*

¹⁰ Desikachar K, Bragdon L, Bossart C. The yoga of healing: Exploring yoga's holistic model for health and well-being. *Int J Yoga Ther*. 2005;15:17–39

¹¹ McCall T. New York: Bantam Dell a division of Random House Inc; 2007. *Yoga as Medicine*

¹² Bharshankar JR, Bharshankar RN, Deshpande VN, Kaore SB, Gosavi GB. Effect of yoga on cardiovascular system in subjects above 40 years. *Indian J Physiol Pharmacol*. 2003;47:202–6

invigorating effect on mental and physical energy that improves fitness and reduces fatigue.¹³

With its ability to increase relaxation and induce a balanced mental state, yoga has been studied to evaluate its possible effects on sleep and insomnia. Pharmacological treatment of insomnia is often associated with hazardous side effects such as states of confusion, psychomotor performance deficits, nocturnal falls, dysphoric mood, impaired intellectual functioning and daytime sleepiness, especially in older adults.¹⁴

Practice with intention, live with purpose and gratefulness.

Towards better health outcomes with yoga.

¹³ Carson JW, Carson KM, Porter LS, Keefe FJ, Shaw H, Miller JM. Yoga for women with metastatic breast cancer: Results from a pilot study. *J Pain Symptom Manage.* 2007;33:331–41

¹⁴ Manjunath NK, Telles S. Influence of yoga and ayurveda on self-rated sleep in a geriatric population. *Indian J Med Res.* 2005;121:683–90

Final Thoughts:

The next time you have your health screening done, spare a moment to reflect on your lifestyle habits and discuss with your doctor on ways to improve the above towards a better and healthier you and our planet.

‘Towards better health outcomes’

About the author:

Dr Chrystal Fong Chern Ying (MBBS Melbourne, FRACGP) is currently practicing as a family physician at Asia HealthPartners under the subsidiary of Singapore Institute of Advanced Medicine (SAM) Holdings, located at Lucky Plaza, Orchard, Singapore.

Dr Chrystal Fong is listed on the editors list of health screening providers on Health365, a healthcare, wellness and aesthetic medicine publishing agency in Asia. She has a special interest in health prevention and incorporates sports psychology and lifestyle medicine principles in her health screening and advocacy in health promotion.

She will be featured in the Britishpedia’s upcoming 6- edition of 'Successful People in Malaysia and Singapore'.

She is an active sports person who has keen interests in lifestyle medicine, medical technology and longevity themed medical care. She takes personal pride in living the lifestyle medicine pillars herself and advocating through her sports communities and social media platforms. She is a certified personal trainer and has a basic diploma in Jumping Fitness.

Her personal mantra being 'The world is changed by your example, not your opinion.'

She incorporates her consultations with health coaching methods and inspires behavioural change with sports psychology angles.

Her current professional memberships include:

Associate Member of the College of Family Physicians, Sg

Executive committee board member of the Society of Behavioural Health, Singapore

Member of the Singaporean Society of Lifestyle Medicine