

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ■ INTRODUCTION

Yoga is used in a health and physical education perspective, as this discipline optimizes overall health. Through sequences, postures, breathing techniques and meditation, you will discover in the three sections of this book:

1. How yoga can influence your overall health;
2. How to be effective in your yoga practice;
3. How to become autonomous in your yoga practice.

## How to use

This book is designed to help you deepen your knowledge and skills in the practice of yoga. You'll find "moments of reflection", questionnaires to help you analyze your yoga practice. The "test yourself" section will enable you to measure your progress in relation to your physical capacities associated with your yoga practice. To support the learning of postures and sequences, the practical icons indicate that video tutorials are available. Also available are audio guided relaxations and meditations, identified by the loudspeaker icon. Finally, the lotus icons are exercises for you to try out in order to deepen your learning experience.

**Moment of reflection**



**Test yourself!**



**Video**



**Listen**



**Try it**



## You will need

A yoga mat, blocks, appropriate clothing, a strap and a warm blanket are all suggested for your introduction to yoga. First of all, there's a wide variety of yoga mats available, characterized by their thickness, length and grip. You can choose according to your personal preferences and physiology. For example, if you're a tall person (over 6 feet), you might opt for a longer-than-average mat, between 160 and 183 cm. Another example: if you have protruding vertebrae in your spine, you can use a thicker mat. As for yoga blocks, certain characteristics can influence your choice, including: grip, height, material (bamboo, cork or foam) and rounded or unrounded edges for greater comfort. Also, if you tend to get sweaty hands, you should opt for a yoga block with a grippier surface. Next, you'll need comfortable clothes. Wear clothes that allow you to move your joints through their full range of motion. Choose garments made from breathable fabrics that promote the release of



body heat. We recommend the use of straps to adjust the intensity of stretching and postures. The strap allows you to respect your personal physical limits and capabilities at all times. Finally, the warm blanket is designed to preserve body heat during final relaxation. As the body relaxes, body temperature drops. To keep your body warm and help you relax completely, we suggest you cover your whole body with a blanket, especially your extremities (toes and fingers).

### **Before we begin...**

Yoga is good for your health and a low-risk physical activity. Like any other physical activity, it must be practised safely. If you have any previous injuries or physical restrictions, please consult a physician before starting. Make sure you stay within your physical capabilities at all times, and stop if you feel pain. If pain persists, consult a physical health professional such as a doctor, physiotherapist, osteopath or chiropractor. To check whether your current state of health is adequate, complete the questionnaire on the next page.



## MOMENT OF REFLECTION

In order to practice yoga safely, read the following statements carefully and answer the questions honestly by checking *yes* or *no*.

Yes	No	
		I have bone problems (e.g.: arthritis or arthrosis).
		I'm taking medication for a respiratory problem.
		I am taking medication for a neurological problem (e.g.: epilepsy).
		I am taking medication for a psychological problem (e.g.: anxiety).
		I have balance problems.
		I'm pregnant.
		I tend not to respect my physical abilities.
		I have scoliosis or a deviated spine.
		I have joint problems (wrists, knees, hips).
		I have muscle problems.
		I've already suffered a muscle strain.
		I tend not to eat breakfast in the morning.
		I tend not to eat before physical activity.
		I sometimes feel dizzy when I do physical activity.
		I sometimes overeat before exercising

*If you checked "yes" to one or more questions, please consult a physical activity specialist or health professional before starting yoga. For safety reasons, please also share this information with your yoga teacher.*





HOW CAN YOGA INFLUENCE  
YOUR OVERALL HEALTH?

# YOGA AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Yoga is a practice that originated in India over 5,000 years ago. The word *yoga* means the union of body and mind in Sanskrit. The many benefits of this practice are well documented. In this section, we will discuss the benefits of yoga in relation to the six dimensions of health (Chevalier, 2021): physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual and environmental (figure 1).

Sanskrit is a language belonging to the Indo-European family. The term *yoga* is expressed in this language, as are the names of the traditional postures. For example, *namaste*, the expression used at the end of a yoga class, means in Sanskrit: "I salute the divinity in you". It is also a polite greeting.

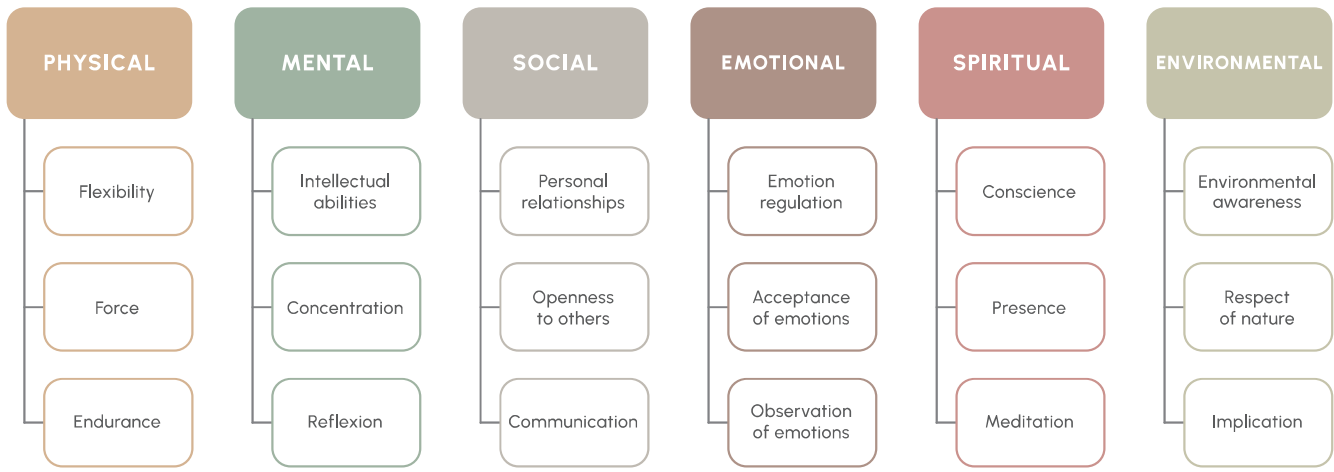


Figure 1: Dimensions of health and their integration into yoga

In 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) introduced this definition of health as a state of physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease (WHO, 1948). According to this holistic or multidimensional model of health, a balance between these six dimensions ensures the development of an individual's full potential to lead a satisfying, fit and healthy life. It is from this holistic perspective that the practice of yoga will be approached in this book. It will look at the contribution of regular yoga practice in relation to each of these dimensions of health.



## THE PHYSICAL DIMENSION

This dimension refers to physical abilities that are developed to their full potential. The determinants of physical fitness are cardiovascular endurance, muscular endurance, muscular vigour, flexibility, posture, body composition and the ability to relax (Chevalier, 2021). On the physical front, one study showed that a 12-week hatha yoga program (Lau *et al.*, 2015) enabled adult participants (aged over 18) to improve their cardiovascular endurance, muscular vigour and flexibility (Reimers *et al.*, 2018). Another study corroborates these results by demonstrating that the practice of yoga, like other sports practised on a regular basis, helps to reduce resting pulse. Note that this effect on resting pulse reduction is beneficial for overall health and may contribute to a reduction in mortality (Reimers *et al.*, 2018).



Figure 2: Determinants of physical fitness and yoga practice

## THE MENTAL DIMENSION

This dimension is approached from an intellectual perspective, taking into account the ability to think, concentrate and make decisions. In particular, it is the ability to acquire and consolidate knowledge in order to update one's intellectual potential. Meditation has been shown to optimize working memory capacity linked to brain activity (Schöne *et al*, 2018).

## THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

It's the ability to interact with others and to show openness towards them. Social skills such as maintaining healthy and respectful relationships, communicating effectively or getting involved in social groups are examples. It appears that yoga helps create an environment that supports a sense of community and mental health (Capon *et al*, 2019). Indeed, yoga offers a space to connect with self and others through the provision of a safe and caring environment in group classes. Practising yoga in a group encourages the development of health on a social level.

## THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

It's the ability to become aware of one's emotions, and then to interpret them correctly. Emotions are the result of perceptions associated with a given event. For example, a person who considers himself to be very good in French and who gets a bad mark in an exam will surely feel disappointed. On the other hand, someone who thinks they're more or less good at French and gets a good mark will feel joy and contentment. In other words, events are interpreted differently from one individual to the next. Reactions vary according to each person's personal experience and ability to accept them. According to a recent study of young people aged 13 to 25, the practice of yoga promotes emotional management, improved sleep patterns and self-regulation in the face of stress. The results of this study show that yoga also promotes better communication and prevents certain psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression (Hagen *et al*, 2021).



## THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Spirituality refers to the code of values or ethics to which a person adheres. Generally speaking, these deep-rooted values are influenced by the type of education received, social beliefs and personal beliefs. First of all, we need to recognize which values we want to live by. The more a person acts according to his or her values on a daily basis, the more likely he or she is to feel a certain balance. For example, a person who advocates honesty, respect and altruism must take action that correspond to these deep-rooted values. It is also important to define one's goals or dreams in order to live a life that lives up to one's expectations. Spirituality is thus linked to health. A recent study adopting a spiritual biopsychosocial approach shows that this dimension is essential to a person's well-being. Gentle yoga and mindfulness meditation can lead to improved measures of spiritual well-being in cancer survivors and can be used as an accessible intervention for those who are suffering (Bryan *et al*, 2021).

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

Awareness of yourself and others is complemented by environmental awareness. The environmental dimension focuses on each individual's involvement in preserving nature through daily gestures such as using active transport (walking or cycling) rather than motorized transport (car, bus, motorcycle), minimizing the use of polluting agents (chemicals or plastic packaging) and making good use of natural resources such as drinking water. The results of a recent study indicate that yoga practitioners who adhere to the philosophy are eco-responsible and sensitive to environmental issues. The individual values taught by yoga philosophy also foster more environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, the results indicated that the practice of yoga could be an effective complement and tool for promoting green sustainable programs currently run by environmental and social organizations (Zafeiroudi *et al.*, 2021).

To find out more about the balance of these six dimensions of health in your life, take the quiz on the next page.

