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by Terry D. Clark

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## **Introduction**

As we march into this bright new millennium, we're constantly reminded of the fusion of east and west.

Whether it's through satellite television programming that beams in productions from different cultures, enjoying books and music from distant lands that, only a generation or two ago, couldn't be accessed, and – of course – communicating with people across time and space through the Internet and other telecommunications advancements, the world has become a much smaller place. Indeed, when Marshall McLuan coined the term Global Village, even he probably didn't envision so much, so fast, so soon.

Riding the wave of information that now crisscrosses our tiny planet is something that has its roots in ancient history, yet is experiencing a blossoming in the west that continues to gain momentum with each passing year. Whether it's at a local YMCA or a lush spiritual retreat in the Everglades, Yoga is establishing itself as a mainstay in western culture; indeed, in global culture.

However, many people are reluctant to experience the

physical, emotional, and psychological health benefits of yoga; and there is really only one major reason for this: misinformation.

While many people might truly enjoy yoga and find it to be the side-effect free answer to a lot of their emotional and physical ailments, they just don't know enough about the subject to take that first step.

Furthermore, a stereotype out there that seems to persist despite evidence to the contrary is that yoga is a religious following; and that to experience its many health benefits somehow obliges one to renounce their faith or, worse, run away to some commune and eat tofu in between chanting sessions.

While, yes, if you'd like to go to a retreat and enjoy tofu and chanting, that's probably possible (almost anything is possible, as long as it's legal and people want to do it, right?).

Yet that vision of yoga – people with shaved heads and handing flowers to strangers at the airport – is by no means the overall picture. Yoga is really a very simple, accessible, and in many countries around the world, ordinary thing to



do.

In that light, this book is created with one goal in mind: to demystify yoga for you, and provide you with a clear, simple, and fun introduction to the topic.

If you've never been exposed to any kind of yoga (except for what you might have seen on television), then this book is for you!

In addition, even if you have experienced some kinds of yoga (perhaps a friend dragged you to a class at the local recreation center all those years ago), this book will reignite your interest in the topic and reattach you to a mode of body movement and mind focus that has lived in ancient lands for millennium.

This ebook is conveniently organized into four sections:

- \* What is Yoga?
- \* Why is Yoga Beneficial?
- \* Different Kinds of Yoga
- \* Yoga Equipment & Accessories

As you read through these sections, please bear in mind that there is absolutely no attempt here, directly or indirectly (or in any other way possible!) to endorse or promote any religious view. This is because the view of this book is same view that is held by the world's foremost authorities on yoga: that it is not a religion. It does not have a dogma.

While there are indeed different schools and streams of yoga – there are actually thousands of them – they have all managed to coexist quite peacefully because, for the most part, yoga is not evangelical, which simply means that it does not seek to spread itself as part of its mission.

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Please note that the statement above in no way criticizes or comments on evangelical orders, such as Evangelical Christianity; the point here is simply that the overwhelming majority of yoga movements does not consider spreading yoga to be a tenet of its identity.

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Yet, while the yoga that is described in this book (and experienced in most of the world) is not a religion, it does

very seamlessly fit into many people's existing religious framework.

In other words, if you are a Catholic, a Protestant, a Muslim, a Jew, a Sikh, or anything else and identify yourself as being a part of any faith at all, yoga doesn't ask you to replace that faith with someone else, or offer you a competing or contradictory view of what you already believe.

So please remember: yoga, as it is discussed and promoted in this book (and in virtually every book worth reading!) is not a religion.

As we'll begin to understand in the next section of this book, yoga is really nothing more, and nothing less, than harnessing the power of human attention, and using it to benefit the body and mind. It is an approach to life, here and now.

## **What is Yoga?**

Yoga can seem like a complicated concept; or, at the very

least, a dizzying array of physical manipulations that turn seemingly happy-looking human beings into happy looking human pretzels.

Or even more disconcerting, as we have alluded to in the

Introduction, a stereotype does exist in places where the term yoga is synonymous with cult, or some kind of archaic spiritual belief that compels one to quit their job, sell their house, and go live in the middle of nowhere.

In actual fact, Yoga is a very basic thing; and if you've had the opportunity to visit a country where it has been established for generations – India, Japan, China, and others – it's really rather, well, ordinary.

The practice of yoga came to the west back in 1893 when one of India's celebrated gurus, Swami Vivekananda, was welcomed at the World Fair in Chicago. He is now known for having sparked the West's interest in yoga.

Literally, the word yoga comes from the Sanskrit term Yug, which means: “to yoke, bind, join, or direct one's attention”.

At the same time, yoga can also imply concepts such as fusion, union, and discipline.

The sacred scriptures of Hinduism (an ancient belief system from India that has a global presence) also defines yoga as “unitive discipline”; the kind of discipline that, according to experts Georg Feuerstein and Stephan Bodian in their book *Living Yoga*, leads to inner and outer union, harmony and joy.

In essence, yoga is most commonly understood as conscious living; of tapping into one’s inner potential for happiness (what Sankrit refers to as ananda).

### **What Yoga Isn’t**

Sometimes it’s helpful to understand things by what they aren’t; especially when dealing with a topic, like Yoga, that is quite easily misunderstood.

Authors and yoga scholars Feuerstein and Bodian help us understand yoga by telling us what it is NOT:

Yoga is NOT calisthenics (marked by the headstand, the lotus posture or some pretzel-like pose). While it is true that yoga involves many postures – especially in hatha yoga – these are only intended to make people get in touch with their inner feelings.

Yoga is NOT a system of meditation – or a religion  
– the way many people are misled to believe.  
Meditation is only part of the whole process of  
bringing ourselves into the realm of the spiritual.

### **The Essence of Yoga**

Virtually all yogic science and philosophy states that a human being is but a fragment of an enormous universe, and when this human being learns to “communion” with this vastness, then he/she attains union with something that is bigger than him/her. This attachment or tapping into something bigger thus enables one to walk the true path of happiness. By flowing along with the force, the individual is able to discover truth.

And with truth comes realization; but to attain realization, our words, thoughts and deeds must be based on truth.

People attend courses on yoga and go to studios to learn new techniques in yoga, but yoga teacher Tim Miller said that “true yoga begins when [you] leave the studio; it’s all about being awake and being mindful of your actions”.

## **Yoga and Physical Health**

Yoga does not see a distinction between the body and the mind; and this is an understanding that western psychology has also concluded for many years now (the link between mental health and physical health, and vice versa).

If you've come to this book looking to understand yoga as a means to help your body heal or improve, then please don't worry; you've come to the right place!

Yoga is indeed a process that involves releasing blocked tension and energy in the body, and helping make the muscles, tendons, joints, ligaments, and all other components work to their utmost potential.

Yoga believes that human beings are optimally designed, by nature, to be flexible and agile; and stiffness and lack of mobility only arrive when the body is unhealthy or out of alignment.

Therefore, countless people have found themselves in a yoga class, or on a yoga mat at home in front of a Yoga video or DVD, in the hopes of improving their physical health; and perhaps you may be one of them. If that's the

case, then keep reading!

There are proven physical benefits of yoga, which include:

- \*increased flexibility and range of motion.
- \*reduced pain in joints and muscles.
- \*stronger immune system.
- \*stronger lung capacity and therefore higher quality respiration.
- \*increased metabolism (which can lead to weight loss!).
- \*higher quality of sleep (especially due to improved breathing and a more oxygenated body).

Given that certain yoga practices require postures to be mastered, yoga has always helped promote the body's flexibility; it also helps in lubricating the joints, ligaments and tendons. Yoga detoxifies by increasing the flow of blood to various parts of the body. It helps tone and invigorate muscles that have grown flaccid and weak.

So please do keep in mind that, while yoga is often discussed in terms of its mental approach, there are clear



and proven physical benefits that are a part of this approach.

Therefore, if weight loss is your goal, or the ability to shovel the snow in winter without having your back ache for days, then yoga is as viable an option to you as it is for the stressed-out corporate executive who needs to find a strategy for coping with the craziness of her busy life!

### **Why is Yoga Beneficial?**

As we've repeatedly pointed out in this book (and probably started to bore you with; sorry!), yoga is not a religion. It can be religious if one wants it to be, and it can co-exist with an existing religious belief. But yoga itself is not religious in the sense that it focuses on belief or faith.

Yoga is a science; and indeed, in many places in the world (such as India), it is referred to as a science. This is not mere playing with words; it truly is approached as a science, which means that it is understood in terms of the scientific method.

Yogic science seeks to verify cause and effect, and build principles based upon objective observations. Indeed, in many places in the world, to be a yogic master of any credibility, one must be highly educated in the sciences, including physics and the biological sciences.

This discussion on yoga as science is important for us to have here, because it allows us to sensibly ask the question: what are the benefits of yoga? After all, if yoga is a faith or a belief, then asking this question isn't fair; because it's one that yoga cannot answer in terms that we can objectively understand.

Yet (again...sorry!) yoga is a science; as empirical and pragmatic as kinesiology, or exercise science, which seeks to understand how the body acts and reacts to changes in the internal physical environment. And even more simply than any of this: each of us has a right to ask the basic question why should I bother doing this yoga thing? before we should be asked to consider experiencing it for ourselves.

Indeed, while the experience of yoga cannot be reduced to words – just as reading a book on preparing for a marathon isn't going to actually physically prepare you to run a marathon – the goals and principles of yoga can easily be

discussed.

Here's the Mayo Clinic's take on the benefits of meditation:

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Meditation is used by people who are perfectly healthy as a means of stress reduction. But if you have a medical condition that's worsened by stress, you might find the practice valuable in reducing the stress-related effects of allergies, asthma, chronic pain and arthritis, among others.

Yoga involves a series of postures, during which you pay special attention to your breathing — exhaling during certain movements and inhaling with others. You can approach yoga as a way to promote physical flexibility, strength and endurance or as a way to enhance your spirituality.

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### **The Mind-Body Connection**

As the website (ABC-of-Yoga [dotcom]) helps us understand, yoga is centered on the mind-body connection. This mindbody

harmony is achieved through three things:

- \*postures (asanas)

- \*proper breathing (pranayama)

- \*meditation

Mind and body draw inspiration and guidance from the combined practices of asanas, breathing, and meditation.

As people age (to yogis, ageing is an artificial condition), our bodies become susceptible to toxins and poisons (caused by environmental and poor dietary factors).

Yoga helps us through a cleaning process, turning our bodies into a well synchronized and well-oiled piece of machinery.

### **Physical Benefits**

By harmonizing these three principles, the benefits of yoga are attained. And just what are these benefits? According to "ABC-of-Yoga", these benefits include:

- \*equilibrium in the body's central nervous system

- \*decrease in pulse
- \*respiratory and blood pressure rates
- \*cardiovascular efficiency
- \*gastrointestinal system stabilization
- \*increased breath-holding time
- \*improved dexterity skills.
- \*Improved balance
- \*Improved depth perception
- \*Improved memory

### **Psychological Benefits**

As noted above, Yoga also delivers an array of psychological benefits; and in fact, this is a very common reason why people begin practicing it in the first place. Perhaps the most frequently mentioned psychological benefit of yoga is an improved ability to manage stress. Yoga diminishes an individual's levels of anxiety, depression, and lethargy; thus enabling him/her to focus on what's spiritual and important: achieving balance and happiness.

### **Supporting a Healthy Lifestyle**

There is some very interesting psychology behind this that students of western thinkers (e.g. Freud, Jung, Fromm, etc.) will find familiar and, indeed, quite rational.

When an individual decides to be happy, something within that person activates; a kind of will or awareness emerges. This awareness begins to observe the jungle of negative thoughts that are swimming constantly through the mind.

Rather than attacking each of these thoughts – because that would be an unending struggle! – yoga simply advises the individual to watch that struggle; and through that watching, the stress will diminish (because it becomes exposed and thus unfed by the unconscious, unobserving mind!).

At the same time, as an individual begins to reduce their level of internal negativity, subsequent external negative behaviors begin to fall of their own accord; habits such as excessive drinking, emotional overeating, and engaging in behaviors that, ultimately, lead to unhappiness and suffering.

With this being said, it would be an overstatement to imply that practicing yoga is the easy way to, say, quit smoking, or to start exercising regularly. If that were the case, yoga

would be ideal! Yoga simply says that, based on rational and scientific cause and effect relationships that have been observed for centuries, that when a person begins to feel good inside, they naturally tend to behave in ways that enhance and promote this feeling of inner wellness.

As such, while smoking (for example) is an addiction and the body will react to the lessening of addictive ingredients such as tar and tobacco (just to name two of many!), yoga will help the process. It will help provide the individual with the strength and logic that they need in order to discover that smoking actually doesn't make them feel good.

In fact, once they start observing how they feel, they'll notice without doubt that instead of feeling good, smoking actually makes one feel quite bad inside; it's harder to breathe, for one.

Now, this book isn't an anti-smoking book, and if you've struggled with quitting smoking then please don't be offended by any of this; there is no attempt here at all to imply that quitting smoking is easy, or just a matter of willpower.

Scientists have proven that there is a true physical addiction

that is in place, alongside an emotional addiction that can be just as strong; perhaps even stronger.

The point here is simply to help you understand that yoga can help a person make conscious living choices that promote healthy and happy living. This can include:

- \*quitting smoking
- \*reducing excess drinking
- \*eating healthier
- \*getting more sleep
- \*reducing stress at work (and
- \*everywhere else for that matter)
- \*promoting more harmonious
- \*relationships all around

Please remember: yoga doesn't promise anyone that these things will simply happen overnight. At most, yoga is the light that shows you how messy things in the basement really are; and once that light is on, it becomes much more straightforward – not to mention efficient and time effective

– to clean things up!



## **Emotional Benefits**

Yoga has also been hailed for its special ability to help people eliminate feelings of hostility and inner resentment. As a result of eliminating these toxic emotions, the doorway to self acceptance and self actualization opens.

## **Pain Management Benefits**

Pain management is another benefit of yoga. Since pain and chronic pain are conditions that affect all of us at some point, understanding the positive link between yoga and pain management could be invaluable.

It can also be financially valuable, since the pain medication industry is a multi-billion dollar marketplace and many people, especially as they age, find that their insurance or government coverage won't cover some pharmaceutical and over-the-counter pain relief medications. The website (lifepositive [dotcom]) provides some illuminating information on yoga and pain management:

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Yoga is believed to reduce pain by helping the brain's pain center regulate the gate-controlling mechanism located in the spinal cord and the secretion of natural painkillers in the body.

Breathing exercises used in yoga can also reduce pain. Because muscles tend to relax when you exhale, lengthening the time of exhalation can help produce relaxation and reduce tension.

Awareness of breathing helps to achieve calmer, slower respiration and aid in relaxation and pain management.

Yoga's inclusion of relaxation techniques and meditation can also help reduce pain. Part of the effectiveness of yoga in reducing pain is due to its focus on self-awareness.

This self-awareness can have a protective effect and allow for early preventive action.

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**Real People, Real Benefits**

The website (beingyoga [dotcom]) provides some great testimonials from real people – not mystical Yogis or people hailing from a spiritual school – who have experienced positive results from their yoga experiences. Here's but one of them:

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Bikram Yoga has helped manage my diabetes unbelievably. I have curtailed my insulin injections by 50%. I have lost 30 pounds, completely lost the desires to smoke, drink alcohol and eat junk food. I even wrote a book on how it saved my life called, No More Diabetes, How Yoga Saved my Life.  
- John Spanek

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### **Different Kinds of Yoga**

It's funny to look at it this way, but one of the things that has promoted the spread of yoga in the west, is the same thing that can sometimes prevent someone from truly exploring it and therefore experiencing its health benefits. This thing is variety.

Sometimes when there is only one of something – such as one idea, or one language, or one anything – it's hard for that thing to spread outside of those who abide by it, agree with it, or simply want it to continue existing.

Yet when there are multiple ideas and concepts, the chances of it spreading increase; there are just more people out there who will be able to access it, talk about it, and indeed, make it a part of their lives.

What does this have to do with yoga? Well, there are many different types of yoga; and the reason for this, as we initially discussed, is that yoga isn't a religion; it's an approach to being alive. As such, it's very agile and flexible (no pun intended!) and carries well across cultural, country, and religious boundaries.

Thanks to its diversity and different facets and types, yoga has spread very swiftly through the western world over last 110 years or so; and is spreading faster now than ever before (many western companies will now pay for yoga classes as part of an enhanced health benefits program).

Yet this very diversity has led to some confusion; and people who have been exposed to one kind of yoga might

accidentally think that they've seen it all. This is more worrisome, of course, when one has been exposed to a kind of yoga that – for whatever reason – they did not like, or perhaps, weren't quite ready for (just as how some people might turn away from a fitness program if they aren't in the right frame of mind to see it through).

So if you've experienced yoga, or seen it on television, read about it in a newspaper, or overheard a friend or colleague talk about it, then please be aware that there's a very good chance that you haven't been exposed to all that there is (which is wonderful, because it means that this next section will be very interesting and informative for you!).

### **Six Major Types**

Yogic scholars Feuerstein and Bodian note seven major types of yoga. In no particular order, they are:

\*hatha yoga

\*raja yoga

\*karma yoga

\*bhakti yoga

\*jnana yoga

\*tantra yoga

Let's look at each one of these in turn.

## **Hatha Yoga**

Graham Ledgerwood, who has been teaching yoga and mysticism for over 30 years, says that hatha yoga is practiced in the west mostly for health and vitality, and is the most popular in western society.

Ha is a Sanskrit term meaning sun, so hatha yoga according to Ledgerwood is a “marvelous means of exercising, stretching, and freeing the body so it can be a healthy, longlived, and vital instrument of the mind and soul”.

Perfecting the postures in hatha yoga has two objectives:

1. Meditating.

People need at least one posture that they can be totally comfortable with, for a long period of time. The more postures you can master, the better you are able to cultivate deeper meditation techniques.

2. Renewing body's energies for optimum health.

## **Raja Yoga**

Similar to classical yoga, Raja Yoga is considered the “royal path” to unifying the mind and body. Raja yoga is considered by some to be a rather difficult form of yoga, because it seeks enlightenment through direct control and mastery of the mind.

People who can concentrate well and enjoy meditation are best suited for Raja yoga. This type – or branch – of yoga has 8 limbs:

- \*moral discipline
- \*self-restraint
- \*posture
- \*breath control
- \*sensory inhibition
- \*concentration
- \*meditation
- \*ecstasy

## **Karma Yoga**

Karma yoga involves selfless action. The word karma itself means action – all actions that come from the individual beginning from his birth until his death. Most importantly, karma is the path to doing the right thing. Hence the practice of karma yoga means giving up the ego to serve God and humanity.

Karma yoga comes from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, which is sometimes respectfully referred to as “the New Testament of Hinduism”. Service to God through serving others is the foundation of Karma Yoga.

## **Karma Yoga**

**Sri Swami Sivananda says:**

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Mark how love develops. First arises faith. Then follows attraction and after that adoration. Adoration leads to suppression of mundane desires. The result is singlemindedness and satisfaction. Then grow attachment and supreme love towards God.

In this type of highest Bhakti all attraction and attachment which one has for objects of enjoyment are transferred to the only dearest object, God. This leads the devotee to an



eternal union with his Beloved and culminates in oneness.

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Bhakti yoga is thus seen as divine love. As a force of attraction, Swami Nikhilananda and Sri Ramakrishna Math say that love operates on three levels:

1. material
2. human
3. spiritual

These two yogis further explain that love is a creative power, and this creative power pushes us to seek joy and immortality. In their own elegant and precise words:

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Love based upon intellectual attraction is more impersonal and enduring... It is a matter of common observation that the more intellectually developed the life of a person is, the less he takes pleasure in the objects of the senses.

---

## **Jnana Yoga**

Jnana yoga is the path to wisdom. Graham Ledgerwood defines jnana as “emptying out” the mind and soul of

delusions so that individuals can be attuned to reality, releasing all thoughts and emotions until the individual is transformed and enlightened.

Jnana yoga is one of the four main paths that lead directly to self-realization (philosophy of advaita vedanda). By crushing the obstacles of ignorance, the student of jnana yoga experiences God.

Concepts such as discernment and discrimination are highly regarded in Jnana yoga, where the student or devotee identifies himself as separate from the components of his environment. “Neti-neti” is also a principle inherent in Jnana

Yoga. Literally, it means “not this, not this” and by removing objects around, what’s left is just YOU and only you.

## **Tantra Yoga**

A seventh type of yoga that many people have heard about, and indeed, are quite curious about, is tantra yoga.

Tantra yoga is considered by some to be most oriental of all yoga branches. It is often misunderstood as consisting exclusively of sexual rituals. It involves more than sex: it is the path of self-transcendence through ritual means, one of which is just consecrated sexuality. Some tantric schools actually recommend a celibate lifestyle after a certain point.

Tantra literally means “expansion.” A Tantra devotee expands all his levels of consciousness so he/she can reach out to the Supreme Reality. Tantra yoga aims to awaken the male and female aspects within a person to trigger a spiritual awakening.

## **Advice for Beginners**

As you now know (if you didn't know it when you started reading, that is!), yoga is a very interesting and ancient approach of uniting the body and the mind. It has proven health benefits, including emotional and physical improvements.

The chances therefore are, if you're on the verge of starting a yoga program (perhaps at a local center or you've purchased a video or DVD and want to try it at home), you're excited, optimistic, and anxious to get going!

Yet it's wise to note that, before going into yoga practice, you should ask yourself some important questions. These questions don't have a right or wrong answer.

They are merely meant to stimulate your own thoughts and give you the mindset that you need in order to succeed as a student of yoga for the long term.

Here are the basic questions that you should ask before starting any yoga program:

- \* what are my reasons for starting a yoga program? Are they realistic?

- \* If my yoga program involves some degree of physical strain, such as certain postures in hatha yoga, have I received medical clearance from a qualified and certified health professional to ensure that I don't injure myself?

\* Are my goals for pursuing a yoga program (or programs) clear and positive? Do I know what I want to achieve?

\* Am I prepared to commit the time necessary to really get the most of out of my yoga experience?

\* Are there people around me who might negatively try and talk me out (or mock me out) of pursuing this path of personal development? Should I either avoid such people, or ask them to respect what I'm choosing to do?

Please note that these are just basic questions; and this isn't an exhaustive list. The point here is really that you should be clear and confident about your choice of experiencing yoga.

And remember, please: there are many different kinds of yoga, and many different kinds of yoga instructors. Most of them are great; a handful of them may be well-intentioned, but may lack some of the foundation that they need in order to teach.

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Remember always: no yoga instructor that you work with should ever humiliate you, degrade you, insult you, or make you feel inferior.

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If you encounter the 1 in a 1000 who has not yet achieved the personal development that he/she needs in order to effectively teach, then remember: there are always other teachers!

The goal here is to make you happy, healthy, and confident. These criteria should be a part of all of your yoga experiences from day one.

### **Final Note on Consistency**

For you to enjoy every benefit of your commitment to practicing yoga, please note that consistency and regularity are keys. You can't go into one session and skip three or four just because you're sore, had an unexpected engagement, or were too stressed out.

For the body and mind to change, you need to practice yoga

consistently. Remove all obstacles, real or imagined and stay committed. Your rewards will be better health, better emotional balance, and a happier, more fulfilled life!

### **Yoga Equipment & Accessories**

The popularity of yoga has given rise to an industry that specializes in yoga equipment, accessories and clothes. The internet is a true market place of things yoga and product lines are as varied and diverse as the many teachings and postures of yoga.

If you've ventured into your neighborhood sporting goods store, or even a department store, you've likely seen an array of yoga equipment that features very happy and peaceful looking people sitting on a yoga mat, or using a yoga towel. Indeed, for someone interested in yoga, this is like a kid in a candy store. There has never been a time in the marketplace where yoga equipment was so easy to find, and indeed, so affordable!

With that being said, it can be rather confusing as to which equipment does what. They all seem to have such happy

looking people on the packaging; how do you know what's worth investing your money on?

Well, ultimately, the answer to that important question will be determined by the kind of yoga that you want to experience, and also, your own preferences.

Some people, for example, don't want to sit on a mat; they prefer the firmness of the floor. Other people find that sitting on the floor is painful and can lead to back and tailbone ache; and as such, a yoga mat is essential.

So, rather than prescribing here what you should buy and what you shouldn't, let's instead focus on the various neat things that you can easily buy, and you can use this information to help you make a wise decision.

## **Yoga Mats**

Let's start with the famous yoga mat. Now, as a general rule (to which there will always, of course, be exceptions): be careful with the supermarket version.

A good yoga mat has a good grip on the floor, which is important if you have to perform complicated maneuvers and postures. They typically measure about 2 feet in width,



and are available in a slew of rainbow colors.

There are yoga mats to fit all levels from beginner to advanced, and you have a choice of thickness. Many yoga stores will provide mats with efficient cushioning. Yoga mats are also available for children.

### **Yoga Towel**

Don't forget your yoga towel. There are also skidless towels and some manufacturers make super absorbent ones – also, in what some retailers call, “chakra colors.”

### **Yoga Bags**

Yoga bags look rectangular – almost tubular – they are designed to hold your yoga mat and towel and other accessories.

Most products have a shoulder strap and are made of different materials, nylon being a common one. There are low end yoga bags retailing for \$12.00 and they go up to \$50.00, depending on make and size.

## **Yoga Straps**

Those who do a lot of yoga flexibility routines often opt for yoga straps. These straps help them stretch their limbs, and to hold poses longer.

## **Yoga Sandbags and Bolsters**

There are also yoga sandbags and bolsters that help your body balance and provide support as you perform your poses, stretches and positions. They are also available in many colors.

## **Yoga Meditation Cushions, Chairs, Benches, and Pillows**

The website (yoga [dotcom]) sells kits that include what they call “cosmic meditation cushion”, which is advertised as ideal for peaceful meditation. There’s the backpack meditation chair (no legs) with firm upright back for support. There are also meditation benches (in different shapes) and the

breathing (prayanama) pillow.

### **Yoga Balls**

Balls are good for building strength, achieve balance and tone muscles. These fun yoga balls sell for about \$25.00, and many dancers and physical therapists use yoga balls for a variety of movements, including: backbends, restorative poses and hip openers. Many balls can hold up to 600 pounds of weight.

And...remember: don't forget your air pump!

### **Yoga Blocks**

These devices look like blocks, and have a mattress-feel to them. They're great for body movement extensions.

### **Yoga Videos/DVDs**

If you're pressed for time, feel a bit shy about attending a public yoga class, or just want to have an idea of how yoga is practiced, yoga videos/DVDs are a great way to get

initiated into yoga.

A great advantage of yoga videos is you can watch the clips over and over again until you've mastered the techniques correctly.

### **Yoga Music**

Consider trying yoga music to help you meditate better, breathe deeper, and hold those positions longer. Recommendation at the end of this ebook.

### **Yoga Clothing**

Though not mandatory for class, many yoga participants want an all-yoga attire to complement their yoga practice. Most beginners however come in a loose-fitting cotton t-shirt and comfortable leggings.

### **Conclusion**

The journey of yoga is one that is always an introduction; and hence, the title of this book is a little bit of a pleasant, zen-like joke. There is no end to yoga; it is a constant process of discovering yourself, and energizing your body to give it optimal health.

With that being said, for purely practical purposes, it's just fine to refer to something as an introduction to yoga, and hopefully this book has been a pleasant eye-opener for you. Among other things, this book has ideally:

- \* Clarified for you that yoga is not a religion and therefore does not request or require you to change your faith.

- \* Helped you understand the benefits of yoga; benefits that range from physical, to emotional, to psychological improvements.

- \* Helped you understand that yoga is not an “overnight thing”, but takes consistency, commitment, and routine in order to deliver all of the benefits that you deserve

\* Helped you understand the various different kinds of yoga available to you (and all of these forms are available in the west, though some of the less popular one might only be centered in large urban areas).

\* Provided you with an overview of the various equipment that you can purchase (if you wish!) to enhance and improve your yoga journey.

In closing – we won't say concluding, since there's no end to this journey! – let's enjoy the sage words of Swami Akhilananda, who very poetically describes the power and joy that people who attentively follow a yogic path experience. (Please note, too, that if you don't like the usage of the word God in the quote below, simply replace it with something that fits within your own preference; the meaning and intent will remain the same).

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The real mystic who has spiritual realizations or superconscious experiences becomes extremely interested in his fellow beings as he finds the expression of God in them.

A mystic feels the presence of God everywhere and so he takes a loving interest not only in human beings but also in other beings.

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- Swami Akhilananda

Bonus Section: Aerobics

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## Final Thoughts

## Introduction

If you really want to get your body in shape, aerobics is the way to go. It is one of the most popular exercise formats that you can use to get flexible and increase the strength in your muscles.

Aerobics will also help you to increase your metabolism and have more energy. There are several celebrity trainers that use aerobic workouts and have videos that people can purchase and follow along at home.

When you are doing aerobic exercises, you are using your major muscle groups which help to increase your heart rates. When you are doing aerobics on a regular basis, your body will be able to use more oxygen and have more energy. Your heart will be stronger and your lungs will be optimized.



In order to perform aerobic exercises, you need to have enough oxygen so that you can breathe properly. There are different kinds of aerobic exercises. The most common and popular ones are walking, running, swimming and bicycling. There is also step aerobics, which can be done at home or joining a class at the health club.

Aerobics is a great way to tone and strengthen your body. Your lungs are strengthened as you breathe and your heart muscle gets larger. The blood in your system won't need a lot to pump to your heart.

This also helps your blood circulation and keeps your blood pressure level. Your red blood cell count will increase and your muscles will have more fat storage and more carbs. This will help you have more energy which gives you a longer period of time to do aerobics.

Aerobics is one of the easiest ways that you can exercise in order to get fit. It can help you lose weight and eliminate stress. People can do aerobic exercises at least three to four times a week for at least 30 minutes a day starting out. Then as they get more energy, they can increase the time limit.

Don't push yourself to the place that you want to be. Take your time when you are doing aerobic exercise. If you start out overdoing it, you can hurt your joints and muscles.

Before you start your workout, you should always warm up with stretching for about 10 minutes so that your muscles will not be stiff when you are ready to start. After you have finished, cool down with about 10 minutes of stretching.

If you are not sure about doing aerobic exercises, get with your physician for further consultation.

One of the main purposes for aerobics is that it can be used to burn a lot of fat from your body. You need to work most in the area where you need to get rid of a lot of fat.

Walking, running and riding a bike are some of the best ways to burn the fat from your body. You can do any of these exercises in moderation.

Aerobics can only be effective for you if you are doing it at certain times. It can be done in the morning before you eat or any time that you can fit in during the evening.

In the morning before eating - make sure that you have drunk at least 24 ounces of water before you start. This will help you from becoming dehydrated. Doing aerobics in the morning will help you to burn more body fat than any other time during the day. There is nothing in your body to burn so aerobics affects where the fat is stored to retrieve energy that is needed to get you moving.

### **Other Benefits Of Aerobic Activity**

Lungs - Doing aerobics can affect your lungs to where the muscles that are used to breathe gain more strength. If you have any chronic illnesses, such as bronchitis or asthma, aerobics can help with that as well. These illnesses, along with emphysema, will help you to breathe better. Aerobics also helps you to gain an advantage with oxygen for your lungs.

Heart - If you do aerobics at least three times every week, your heart rate will

increase. Your heart will also be able to pump additional blood into your body. Your muscles will get oxygen at a quicker rate.

**Muscles** - Your muscles will gain more strength when you do aerobics. They also get larger and your body will become leaner because you will have more muscle mass. Your muscles will also increase in body fat so that you will have more energy. Your metabolism will increase due to the lean muscle, which results in you losing more weight.

**Burn calories** - Since aerobics is a fat burning exercise, you will burn more calories quickly. The more fat that you burn, the more weight that you will lose, hence the loss of calories.

## **Doing Aerobics At Home**

If taking an aerobics class is out of your budget, then you can do them at home. In fact, it's probably easier to do because you can be more relaxed and you don't have to use gas to go anywhere. The exercises can be done in the comfort of your own home. It does not matter how you look because no one will see you.

Aerobic is an easy exercise routine to start out at home. If you are one of those people who have not worked out in a while and your body is not looking its best, doing aerobics at home can help you from being embarrassed in front of others. Once you get into shape, you can venture outside to take some classes.

Just because you are doing aerobics at home does not mean that you won't get the same benefits that you would if you were in a class. You would still be able to

enhance your health and get your heart and lungs strong, lose weight and be able to reduce stress.

Even though you are at home, you should do aerobic exercises starting at three times a week, 30 minutes a day and work your way up. You can increase the intensity of your sessions as you feel you are ready.

You can use a treadmill to work out. You can probably find one that is on sale. Treadmills don't cost a lot either.

You can also use aerobic exercise videos to get you started. You may have to watch it once or twice to get the hang of what's going on. There is step aerobics, dancing, kickboxing and other different styles of aerobics. Start out at the level that you feel most comfortable with. For many people, that would be the beginning level.

Videos can be bought from retailers such as Wal-Mart or Target. Or if you don't want to go out, you can order them online. They videos usually come in a series, so you would get the benefit of doing several different aerobic exercises.

If you are one of those people that is not disciplined enough to do this on your own, see if you can get a partner to join you. It could be your spouse, a friend or your children, provided that they are old enough.

Having a partner can help you with that support that you need to keep going when you want to quit. Even if you're not thinking about quitting, a partner can help you to the next level.

Try and do your aerobic exercises when there are not other people around. That way you won't be interrupted.

## **Step Aerobics**

This style of aerobics uses a platform that is elevated. This aerobics is very popular with a lot of people. You will exercise with music that has a fast beat along with steps that coordinate with the beats. You will find this kind of aerobics exercise performed at health clubs and gyms as a class. However, you can purchase a step aerobics package and do it on your own at home.

The platform raises no more than a foot off the ground. The sessions are usually no longer than an hour. However, there are some half-hour sessions as well. How it works is you will step on and off of the platform according to the beat of the music. There are different ways of stepping where you have to use the platform.

You can burn calories using step aerobics. Your muscles will also get strong and your metabolism will increase. The oxygen in your body will increase. Your heart will beat faster and build up stamina. Once your heart gets up to speed, more blood will be able to flow to your body.

This is a low impact exercise. You have to make sure that you are doing it right, otherwise you could hurt your knees and joints. Whether you are following a video or an instructor, pay attention to every step. You should be wearing shoes that are comfortable and made to perform exercises of this kind. They should have rubber on the bottom that is not slippery.

If you have never done step aerobics before, please consult with your physician prior to starting.

## **How To Get Ready For Step Aerobics**

Using these precautions before you start your step aerobics workout will help you to get the best out of it. It will also help prevent injuries that can be inflicted if you don't do it correctly.

Before you start, make sure that you are in good enough shape to start this aerobic exercise. Otherwise, you will find yourself out of breath before you get into it good enough.

Your foot should be on the step. It should be the entire foot, not part of it. You need to be able to balance well when you are stepping on and off. If you don't you could lose your balance and possibly fall or injure yourself. This is crucial if you are stepping to fast music.

The knees should measure up over your ankles. Don't do lunges as you are stepping up on to the platform. You want to make sure that the knee stays over the ankle each time you step up.

Only use so many risers with the step. Two or three risers should be the recommended amount, depending on your height. The stepper needs to be comfortable enough where you won't endure stress with your back and your knees.

Keep a straight posture as you step up and down. Do not bend your back or hips forward. When you are doing step aerobics, skip the hand or ankle weights. Using weights while you are stepping can cause injuries to your knees, shoulders and ankles. You are already moving fast and having weights is an extra burden that can stress out the joints.

## **Running**

Running is one of the best and cost effective ways to get fit. This aerobic exercise can benefit young and old people. When you run, you are doing so at a measured pace. It's faster than a jog, but slower than a complete run. You should run in moderation and don't look to do a hard run. A hard run is not considered aerobic exercising.

Depending on how you function during the day, you can choose to run in the morning or in the afternoons or evening. Everyone does not respond the same when it comes to running.

Before you start, you would have to check out the weather and the environment you would be doing this in. All places are different and there may be some that are not conducive for running. So check out the area before you decide to commit.

You have to prepare yourself for the weather at hand. If it's cool, you will need clothing that will keep you warm. If it's warm, you will need clothing that will keep you cool. You will also need the right kind of shoes to wear when you start running. You will need to be comfortable so that you can get the best fitness workout.

## **Where To Go Running**

There are different places where you can go running. You can do it in your neighborhood, on a park trail, or anywhere that you feel safe doing this. Make sure that you are running on flat ground or a flat surface.

Don't take the chance running on slopes that are difficult, rough areas or slippery areas. There's a greater chance that you would get injured. The last thing that you need is a sprained ankle or a pulled muscle.

If you are more experienced, there are some slopes and inclines that are made for running. Check out the areas first before you commit to running. Stay near areas where you can get immediate help if needed.

The area where you will be running should not have any obstacles. You need to be free to run so that you can stay on course.

If you find areas where you can run, but they are far away from where you live, find alternative places that are closer and just as good. There may be times when you will not be able to go to those far away spots when you want to.

It's not a bad idea to have a running buddy run with you. They can give you great support.

Always try to go to an area where there are not a lot of other runners. This can throw off your exercise regimen and make you not want to run.

## **Warming Up**



There's no doubt-you must warm up before you start running. Make it a habit every time you run to warm up. It is an important part of your aerobic exercise. You can prevent unnecessary injuries. Many sports athletes know that they have to do this before every game or else they can risk being injured. You are no different in that aspect. Your muscles need to be loose before you start moving.

You can warm up your muscles for about 10 - 15 minutes and make them flexible. If your muscles are cold and you don't warm them up, you will not get the output that you desire. You could also pull a muscle in the process.

You can do light cardiovascular exercises in order for the blood to flow through your body. Light jogging is another way that you can warm up before you start running. Whatever you use for warm up exercises, they should be low impact and light, such as lunges.

Don't rest after you have warmed up. Do some stretches so that you will keep your momentum going. You want to be ready to run right after you're finished. Don't overstretch your joints and muscles or you could cause injury to those areas.

Then you can start running and get into your exercise.

## **Hydration**

It's important to stay hydrated while before and during your running exercise. This can prevent you from suffering heat related illnesses. If you don't drink enough, you can get tired, uncoordinated and your muscles can start to cramp.

You can also pass out, especially in warm weather.

You can also experience a heatstroke, exhaustion from the heat. When you are running, you need to know how much you are drinking through the entire process.

Prior to you running, you should drink at least 24 ounces of water. This should be done at least an hour before you start. If not water, drink something that does not contain caffeine. Twenty-four ounces of water should be enough to get you started. Having more than that can stop your exercise regimen and force you to go to the bathroom.

While you are running, drink at least eight ounces of fluids that don't contain caffeine. This should be done at least every 20 minutes. If you are running for more than an hour and a half, include a sports drink to replenish sodium and minerals.

Have a water bottle or something similar that you can carry your fluids in during your running exercise. This is for those who don't have access to water on their route while they are running.

After you have finished running, you will need to replenish the fluids that you sweated during your exercise. Check the color of your urine afterwards. If the color is dark yellow, drink more fluids. Your urine should be a light yellow.

These tips will help you to stay hydrated and able to run the course. The last thing you need is to pass out while you are out and about.

## **Running Tips**

When running, you can't just do it any kind of way. There are things that you need to know in order to have an effective workout.

\* When you are running, don't look at your feet. You need to look ahead because you need to see what's coming in the event you need to get out of the way of danger.

\* When you land, use the center of your foot and go to the front of your toes. Don't land on your toes. If you do, you will get tired quickly. You can also injure your shin and cause tightness in your calves. Don't land on your heels because you can get injured.

\* Keep your hands at your waist. Use a 90 degree angle for your arms. You get tired quicker if your hands are up by your chest. Your shoulders and neck will tighten.

\* Keep your hands relaxed. They can be cupped as though you were holding something. Your fists should not be clenched because it can tighten your shoulders and arms.

\* While you are running, keep our back straight and your head up. Take a look at your posture to see that everything is in place. Poke out your chest when you are feeling slumped over.

\* Keep your shoulders in a square position and make sure they are relaxed. They should not be stiff or hunched. Don't bring your shoulders too far to the front. Your chest can tighten and you won't be able to breathe well.

\* Swing your shoulders towards the front and back using the joints from your shoulders.

## **Bouncing**

As you run, try to avoid bouncing. If you move up and down too much, you have used up energy that you did not need to use. The lower portion of your body can be affected by this movement. The higher up you are, the more shock that is sucked in as you land on the ground. This results in you and your legs getting tired faster than they need to be.

In order to cut the bouncing down to a bare minimum, do some light running and when you land, land on your feet softly. Your feet should be low to the ground level and using brief strides. Your arms should still be at a 90 degree angle and bent. When you swing them, the swing should be shorter and lower.

Don't run on your toes. Running on your toes can contribute to bouncing.

## **Keep A Log**

In order to keep up with your progress, have a log where you can write down the information. Keeping up with this log will help you to see where you are and where you could be. It can be considered as a motivational tool to keep you going. Make sure to keep up with all dates, times and miles. Also, write some comments about that day's exercise.

## **Start Out Slow**

When you start running, don't try to be like the NASCAR drivers and take off running. Start off slow and work your way up. Starting out fast does nothing for you except giving you exhaustion and soreness that you don't need. When you do too much in the beginning, you can also incur unnecessary injuries. Do everything gradually and you will get to your destination. Running will be more fun to you if you don't get ahead of yourself, ending up with stresses and injuries.

### Weather

If you are used to running whether it's hot or cold, make sure that you are properly dressed. Having the right clothing makes a difference when you are exercising. You need to feel comfortable while you are running. If the weather is so rough where you can't do it outside, then find an inside gym where they have running facilities.

### Running For Fun

Even though you are running to get fit, don't make it as though it's such a dreadful chore. You want to have fun and be able to release some steam from people or events that rattled you. You also want to improve your health. If you are running outdoors, take in some of the scenery that you would otherwise may not get to see.

## **Walking**

Walking is one of the easiest aerobics that you can do. Not only does it not cost you anything, but to get up and go, anyone can do it. Whether the pace is slow or fast, walking is good for everyone.

It only takes 30 minutes a day to complete an effective walking workout. You can start walking three days a week and produce some results. Once you get accustomed to walking, it will be time to do it with more intensity.

Aerobic walking helps to increase your heart and breathing rate. When you start walking every day, you will start to get more fit. You will also be able to avoid some health risks such as cancer, heart ailments and diabetes.

Other benefits of aerobic walking include:

- \* Having control of your weight
- \* Muscular fitness
- \* Being able to balance your body
- \* Lowers blood pressure
- \* Less chance of having a stroke or other kinds of cancer

Being injured by walking is not common. It is one of the safest, if not the safest aerobic exercise that everyone can do.

It is recommended that you do at least two and a half hours of aerobic activity every week. That means you can do aerobic walking for 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Even though it may not start out that way, you will eventually work your way up to that point.

Start out by determining how many times a week you will do the aerobic walking. You will need to know how long you will do it for each day that you go out. If you are rusty and have not walked in a while, take your time when you start out.

Some people may do exercises in 10 minute intervals, which is a great idea for the ones who haven't been exercising in a while. Gradually, you will add more time and intensity to your walk. The key is to start out gradually and don't rush to get to the next level.

Before you start, see your physician to get approval for doing this. Not having walked in a while may cause some issues if you don't know what you are doing. Unless you have some type of physical limitations, your physician will probably give the green light.

## **Walking Equipment and Accessories**

In order to enhance your aerobic walking exercises, you will need:

Apparel - Whatever your wear should be comfortable and lightweight. You don't want to wear anything tight where your skin cannot breathe. Clothes that are made from cotton are good to wear.

If you are a night walker, wear light clothing and use reflective tape if you are sharing the road with vehicles. They will be able to see you. Not too many people walk at night, but if you do, have a partner. It's dangerous to walk by yourself when it's dark.

Walking shoes - When you start walking, you want to feel comfortable. Your walking shoes should be lightweight and durable. Get a pair that have a round heel and are breathable. Water resistant shoes are good if you will be walking in various kinds of weather.

Using a pedometer will help you to measure your walking distance. It's easy to use. You just program it and attach it to your belt or waistband. Once you have finished walking, you will know how long you have walked for that time period.

While you are walking, you should find out what your target heart rate is. It's important to know that so that you can either increase or decrease how fast you are walking. There are several accessories you can use for that purpose:

- \* Ankle weights

- \* Hand weights

- \* Wrist weights

In order to calculate your heart rate, you would take your age and remove that number from 220. Then you would take the difference and multiply it by the percentage you are looking to shoot for.



## Increasing Aerobic Walking

The more that you walk, the more that you will get fit. So this means you will have to eventually start walking every day. Make it a habit and gradually work your way up to that point.

Stick with the 150 minutes or so per week. As you continue at that pace, you can work your way up to 45 minutes or an hour per week.

Keep up with your progress. Take daily readings of your aerobic walks. You will see how far you have come since you started. Once you see your numbers looking the same, you will know that it is time to make some adjustments to your fitness routine.

Once you start making strides, reward yourself. Some people go out to eat when they have reached an achievement. Some say you should skip the food. If you're not careful, you can overeat or eat the wrong foods. More rewarding things that you can do is go shopping for yourself, going to a movie, or getting your nails done or a massage. These are things that are worthy of rewards.

## **How To Get More Benefit From Your Aerobic Walks**

Add more distance to your walking routine. If you walk more, your heart and breathing rate will increase tremendously.

Add more days to your walk. When you get accustomed to walking three days a week, step it up to four or five days. Once you get accustomed to that, step it up to six or seven days.

Start walking faster. You will get more benefits from doing that. You will also gain more speed and be able to walk for longer periods.

You can use hand weights during your aerobic walking. You can start off by using 1/2 pound weights. Using weights can help you to burn calories while walking at the same time. Once you get used to those, increase the weight size.

You can also use ankle weights. Ankle weights are designed for your legs. They help to provide increased strength to your leg muscles. They also work to sculpt and tone your muscles along with burning calories. You will get a lot of benefit of using them while you are walking.

Include a short run in the middle of your aerobic walking. Start out running with about 100 steps or so. When you run, your heart rate will increase and your breathing will be faster. After seven days, increase the steps by another 100. Doing this can help you to get out of the same walking routine every day. It's always good to add a twist in your exercise so that you won't feel bored.

Eventually, you may want to have a change of scenery. Make some changes and walk different routes. If you can walk in your neighborhood, do that. If there is a nearby park, go there. Walking trails are always great places to do your exercise.

Don't continue to walk the same distance. There will be some days where you can have shorter walks and on other days have longer walks.

If you can deal with inclines, try walking on some hills. Doing this can be a challenge, so make sure that you are ready for it. Alternate between hills and flat

ground from time to time.

You can also listen to music while you are walking. If not music, then you can listen to audio books. They can put your mind at ease. However, if you decide to do this, be sure to be aware of your surroundings. You may not be able to hear or see everything that is going on around you because your focused on listening to the audio.

Aerobic walking can be more fun if you have a buddy to go with you. Get a friend, neighbor or relative to join you. Having someone go with you can give you that motivation and push that you need to go forward. Not everyone can get pumped to exercise on their own.

During inclement weather, find an indoor facility such as a recreational center, shopping mall or if you have a treadmill at home, you can use that.

The sooner your start your aerobic walking, the sooner you can start getting fit. Once you start walking every day, keep going. Don't stop walking for a period of time unless you have become ill where you can't do it at the time. When you get better, start back again and don't give up!

## **Bicycling (or Cycling)**

You can get several benefits from cycling. Not only will you be able to see the

sights from the outside and get some fresh air, but you can also get fit. In addition to that, you will burn calories and fat.

Riding a bicycle is a great way to enhance your cardiovascular system. It also allows you not to deal with the pollution coming from other vehicles.

On a bicycle, when you are going uphill and riding at a high intensity, you will be able to gain muscle and burn fat from your body. Your small and large muscles will develop more and get even stronger. When your muscles get more developed, your body will look fit, lean and strong.

This aerobic exercise can also increase your metabolism. You will burn more calories when your metabolism is higher. Even after you have finished for the day, you will still burn more calories.

The core of your body will gain strength, including the muscles in the back and your abdomen. With that, bicycling helps you to have good posture and be able for your body to have a balance.

This is good for activities and tasks that require the weight of your back. Bicycling can help you to increase the capacity of your aerobics, reduce risks of certain illnesses, such as blood pressure, cholesterol and cancer.

Riding a bicycle on a regular basis can help your muscles to get oxygen easier. So when you are doing strenuous tasks or exercises, you won't feel long winded.

There are people who ride bicycles that use them to increase their cardiovascular system. If you are one of those who have a crippling ailment such as arthritis, you may not be able to do activities because of your knees. While toning the leg muscles, bicycling is also used to tone the backside.

There are people who will a stationary bicycle, but that does not help as much as one where you can ride around the park and around town for your fitness workout. When you are using one where you can move around more, you can shift your weight to your legs. You have to be careful that you don't overdo it for fear of damaging your knees.

There is an increase in people that are bicycling in order to stay fit. Because they are concerned about their health and how they look, this aerobic exercise has emerged as one of the more popular activities that people like and want to do. Plus, since you don't use gas, there's no reason why you can get fit and burn calories with a bicycle.

Cycling outdoors is good to do when:

- \* The weather is presentable
- \* If you have time to ride your bike
- \* If you can ride on a cycle path
- \* If you like to ride outdoors
- \* If you don't mind the vehicles and possible traffic

You can also go cycling on tracks, forests and beaches. Whatever way that suits you should be ok, as long as you are getting in a fitness workout.

## Check Your Bicycle Before You Start Riding

- \* The height of the seat should be comfortable and high enough for you. If it's too low, let it up. If it's too high, let it down.
- \* Check the handle bars to make sure that they are comfortable enough for you and that you can reach them.
- \* Your seat should also be comfortable enough for you to sit down.

## How To Start Riding Your Bicycle

Just because people own a bicycle does not mean that they know how to get started riding it. It is not difficult to get started on your journey to aerobic fitness.

Start out with short rides. Don't overdo it or overwhelm yourself for trying to break a record by going for longer trips. Starting out, shoot for at least an hour's ride up to 15 miles. Of course, you can do less than that, depending on your strength.

It's easier to start riding your bike in the park. While you're riding, you can go sight seeing at the same time. You will see areas that you had not seen before or just passed by without giving it a second look.

Once you start, you won't want to stop. This is a great way of getting a workout while being able to see lovely views on the outside.

## **Injuries And How To Prevent Them**

Some people think of cycling as dangerous. That's because some of the bicyclists may not adhere to the road rules and can incur injuries.

One thing that you must do when you are on a bicycle is to wear a helmet. You want your head to be protected in the event of an accident. The brain is very delicate and once it gets injured, the recovery process could be lengthy.

It is very common to find out that bicycle injuries can affect your knees. The knee injuries can affect anyone that rides a bicycle.

Other bicycle injuries can be caused by:

- \* Not being prepared to ride for long stretches

- \* The gear you using is too high for where you are riding

\* You are not fitting on bicycle correctly and the saddle is not adjusted for your height

\* Trying to ride too many inclines in the beginning stages of riding your bike

Make sure that the height of your saddle on the bicycle is not too high when you are riding. It should be at a height where you are comfortable as you use your pedals. If you are too high on the saddle, you can experience knee pain at the posterior. The height of the saddle should not be too low, either. The knee's anterior will be affected.

The saddle should be fitted correctly so that you can sit on it right. If it is not, your muscles could go out of balance. To avoid an injury where you overuse your muscles while riding, set the saddle at an angle between 25 - 35 degrees.

If the ride is uncomfortable for you, then you won't be able to get very far with your aerobic bicycling. You can end up with other "overuse" injuries by overdoing it on the bicycle.

\* Chronic nerve damage - riding you bike for long periods of time without resting

\* Palm damage, carpal tunnel syndrome - overuse of bike riding

\* Bicycle seat neuropathy - numbness, pain in the groin area; can lead to erectile or sexual dysfunction



## **How Bicycling Can Help You**

Once you start cycling at least four times a week, your body will start to look different. You will look more fit and toned than you ever have before. You will start to feel different and have a better outlook on life. You don't have to overdo it by riding on your bike for long periods of time. Up to a half hour several days a week will help you out a lot.

Once you get used to riding on a bicycle, you can increase the intensity and how long you are going to ride. You will be able to burn plenty of calories once its all said and done. During this process, your body will still be intact. Even if you are training for a race, bicycle exercise is a great way to get in shape. So when that day comes, you will be ready to roll.

There are plenty of trails where you are allowed to ride your bicycle. You will be able to get in a nice aerobic workout unless the weather turns bad. Bicycling is a great fitness workout and can benefit your entire body.

You don't have to be a professional to ride on a bicycle in order to get in shape and get fit. Bicycling is for anyone that is willing to take the time and do what they need to do to have a better body.

In fact, it is one of the best outdoor aerobic exercises that you can do without having to go through a lot of changes. If you want a healthier cardiovascular system, bicycling will do the trick. It also strengthens your legs as the pedals go up and down while you're riding.

If you are one of those who has a bicycle but has not used it in a while, crank it up and get into shape. Using elbow grease to lubricate it, you will be able to take it on a spin. Some people say that bicycling is better than walking.

It depends on how you feel about each aerobic exercise. Plus, bicycling is another exercise where you won't have to come out of your pocket a lot. As you are getting your workout in, you are also helping the environment by not adding to the pollution that is already there.

Just remember to take your time when you first start out and gradually increase when you are ready. Before you know it, you will start to look fit and buff.

### **A Few Tips To Remember**

- \* Consult with your physician before starting any aerobic exercise program.
  
- \* Once you get the all clear, start off with aerobic exercises at least three times a week  
and work your way up.
  
- \* Work to increase your heart rate so that you get more oxygen to breathe. Also, your blood will start flowing properly.
  
- \* Stick to realistic goals during your journey of getting fit.

## **Final Thoughts**

No matter what kind of aerobic exercise you get into, it's important to stick with it. You must be consistent for however many days you are committed each week. It's important to stay committed because you will eventually see results.

Don't look for that quick fix where you can lose so much weight quickly. Take your time and allow it to come off on its own. When you start out fast, you can risk injuring yourself, which will slow things down.

Don't be in a hurry to start the first one you see. Evaluate yourself and know what you can and cannot do. Once you keep at it, you will see results that you will approve of.

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