Drop Those Pounds With Yoga—Studies Show Yoga Stimulates Weight Loss By Jennifer Van Pelt, MA Today’s Dietitian Vol. 14 No. 3 P. 18

Author's Note: This article is the last in a three-part series on the health benefits of yoga. In this final installment, I’ll discuss how yoga can help promote weight loss and general health.

Most people practice yoga to improve flexibility and balance, relieve stress, and reduce aches and pains. But yoga also can help your clients lose weight.

While yoga generally doesn't burn as many calories as cardiovascular exercise, it does have a positive influence on the mental aspects associated with successful weight loss and weight maintenance.

Yoga can increase body awareness; counter negative, self-judging eating habits; and foster a sense of self-control, according to several articles published in the 2011 Yoga Journal weight loss special issue. The exact mechanism that produces weight loss isn't known, but it's likely a combination of physical exertion from mental benefits derived from relaxation breathing and mindful meditation.
For yoga participants who also practice yoga philosophy, such as the Yoga, benefits may result from a focus on honesty, contentment, and letting go outside of yoga class. Physical poses associated with weight loss involve twists that encourage digestion, standing poses that strengthen larger muscle groups, and forward bends that stimulate abdominal organs and the thyroid gland.

**What the Studies Say**

A large public health study that included 15,550 adults aged 53 to 57 activity, including yoga and weight change over several years. Practicing more years was associated with a 3-lb lower weight gain among normal-weight participants (BMI of less than 25) and an 18.5-lb lower weight gain among overweight subjects. Regular yoga practice was associated with less weight gain, especially in those who were overweight.1

Recently, yoga has been incorporated into programs for eating disorders and weight management for obesity. In a small randomized study of yoga for obese women, those practicing yoga for 16 weeks had significantly decreased body weight, body fat percentage, BMI, waist circumference, and visceral fat area compared with those who didn't exercise.2

Other researchers examined 20 personal journals of obese women with binge eating disorder undergoing a 12-week yoga treatment program. Qualitative analysis showed that the women's perspectives about eating changed for the better. They suggested the yoga program developed physical self-empowerment, encouraged a healthy reconnection with food habits, and cultivated awareness of the present moment. Program participants reduced the amount of food they ate, decreased their eating speed, and improved their food choices during the program. Overall, the women reported feeling “more connected and positive about their physical well-being,” which translated to better eating habits.3

**Fat-Burning Yoga Styles**

Certain types of yoga can serve as low-impact cardiorespiratory exercise alternatives for clients who may have stress injuries from high-impact activities such as running or need variety in their exercise program. Athletic and active clients may enjoy Ashtanga or Bikram yoga that involve a progressive series of poses designed to generate internal heat and a purifying sweat, facilitated by a heated room. Yoga, a faster-paced flowing series of yoga poses. Clients also can practice sun salutations, a series of 12 poses that can elevate the heart and breath rate to the higher end of the participant's target heart rate range. A study of the energy expenditure associated with sun salutations found that performing the series of poses produced a cardiorespiratory training effect and an energy expenditure of 230 kcal—a足够的 amount of calories to burn off the calories from eating a candy bar.

Overweight and obese clients may feel self-conscious or discouraged to participate. For example, heavier clients will require modifications in many poses. And while yoga instructors are trained to provide modifications for beginners and inflexible people, modifications for heavier individuals are different because of anatomical and range of movement limitations due to size rather than inflexibility.

Nonetheless, the yoga community is evolving and classes such as “Fat Yoga for Real People” are now emerging.5 These types of classes are taught by instructors who are heavier themselves. If clients can't locate such classes, several instructional books and DVDs are available.

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DVDs
• *Yoga: Just My Size* with Megan Garcia
• *HeavyWeight Yoga: Yoga for the Body You Have Today*
• *HeavyWeight Yoga 2: Change the Image of Yoga*
• *Yoga for the Rest of Us* with Peggy Cappy

Books
• *Plus-Sized Yoga: Beginners Yoga for People of All Sizes*
• *MegaYoga*
• *Yoga for Fat Guys: From Lumpy to Limber in Just Six Weeks*
• *Big Yoga: A Simple Guide for Bigger Bodies*

References


