

# The Benefits of Yoga for Runners



**Runners can benefit greatly from yoga's effects on strength, flexibility and balance. Many of the problems runners face, including sore knees, tight hamstrings and lower back pain, can be resolved by practicing yoga asanas -**

## **How Running Affects Your Body**

Running is a repetitive exercise that can create excessive tightness in the leg muscles, which makes your body unstable. If you don't stretch properly before and after a run, your muscles will become shorter and tighter. In short your body will become more unbalanced and unstable. Your body will try to compensate for this instability by putting unnecessary pressure on the muscles, joints and bones of the legs and back.

## **How Yoga Increases Flexibility and Strength**

Yoga can be of immense benefit for runners seeking a cross training method. Yoga helps loosen and lengthen all the muscles of the body, to reverse the muscle tightness caused by running, and to make your body more flexible and stable. Yoga helps align the muscles and bones, so that your body functions more efficiently, you experience less stiffness and you're at a lower risk for injury. Yoga's focus on alignment can help correct the postural and gait problems that often lead to knee, hip and back pain.

Yoga also offers a full body workout that can greatly increase your overall strength and stamina. Yoga's emphasis on controlled breath helps

to strengthen the respiratory system. Yoga also teaches an awareness of breath and body that can relieve the tension of competitive running and make runners more aware of possible injuries. Yoga works the muscles of the whole body, and many runners have found that a regular yoga practice can take the place of other forms of cross training.

## **Yoga Helps Runners Recover from Workouts**

Yoga can be an intense aerobic workout, or it can be a restorative practice as in Yin Yoga. Practicing relaxing, restorative poses can help runners recover faster after long races and hard workouts.

## **How Yoga and Running Are Similar**

Dedicated runners will find that yoga is similar to running in some ways. Yoga offers an intense aerobic workout, especially if you choose to study a style like Vinyasa or Flow Yoga.

Both running and yoga teach the practitioner to focus on the present moment. Mindfulness is a key part of running, as runners find themselves focusing on the task at hand, without worrying about the problems of their daily lives or past, present and future. Many runners find that the breath awareness they learn in yoga class helps them pace themselves and run more efficiently. Others find that quieting the mind while stretching and strengthening the body relieves the pain of muscle tension caused by long runs and daily stress.

## **Yoga Stretches Can Make Running Safer**

Performing a few deep yoga stretches before and after runs can be a great way to make your muscles loose and flexible before a workout. If you don't stretch before a run, you risk injuring your cold muscles. Stretching after a run keeps your muscles long and loose and can prevent the soreness caused by a build up of lactic acid.

Having a regular physical yoga practice that involves bodyweight-bearing poses will build strength as well as flexibility. Yoga poses involve stretching creating more flexibility. Yoga also involves balancing that flexibility with strength. You achieve positions using your muscles holding your own body weight against gravity.

## **Benefits**

In yoga, many poses are held statically or isometrically, and when transitioning between poses many of the contractions are eccentric or lengthening in nature. This means that you lengthen as well as contract the muscles.

## **Considerations**

The poses in yoga involve using the body as a whole; as opposed to isolating certain muscles the body becomes strong in ways you may really use them as opposed to isolated positions that do not necessarily simulate a real movement that one would do in daily life. For example, many yoga poses require use of functional abdominal muscles. This is different from crunches, because your body gets used to actually using the muscles to stabilize and support the body as a whole. The strength of the muscles is balanced by their flexibility. Strength without flexibility creates rigidity. Flexibility without strength creates weakness and instability. A regular, consistent yoga practice provides this balance to create a strong, flexible, proportional musculature.

## **Significance**

Whether yoga can replace resistance training depends on your goals. A regular, consistent physical yoga practice would be ideal if you are seeking overall body strength and flexibility. Yoga can increase muscle strength when done regularly and with good alignment. However, you may need to isolate specific muscles while strengthening in certain situations, such as in *Yoga Sports Coaching*.