Yoga and Your Mental Health ? The Surprising Connections

What?s your primary reason for practicing, or considering, yoga? For many people, they?re looking for a way to get in great shape. After all, yoga is known for its ability to build strength, endurance, and flexibility. It aids in weight loss and because there are so many styles of yoga, it?s available to almost everyone regardless of your current fitness level.

Many people don?t realize, until after they begin taking yoga classes, that the mental benefits are just as profound as the physical benefits. Let?s take a look at a few of these mental health benefits in detail.

Live in the Moment

One of the things many people strive for is an ability to focus on right now and to let the past and the future fade away. It?s in this moment that we feel most calm and joyful. Yet with so much going on in daily life, it can be extraordinarily difficult to live in the moment. If you?re like many, then you have appointments and bills to remember and a schedule to keep. Living in the moment may seem impossible.

Yoga forces you to be completely present. All thoughts about the mistakes you made yesterday and the things you have to do tomorrow fade away as you try to hold a pose and focus on your breathing. It?s meditative. When you live in the moment, even for the short duration of a yoga class, you?ll feel more positive about yourself, your day, and your life. This positive attitude boosts your overall mental health in a powerful way.

Stress Reduction

There are many facets of yoga that also cause your overall stress to be reduced. The focused breathing alone has been shown to reduce cortisol, stress hormone, levels and lower blood pressure. Additionally, when you exercise endorphins are released. These endorphins help boost your mood and facilitate better stress management.

Emotional Balance

A Harvard School professor conducted a study amongst 11th and 12th graders in high school. Keep in mind that during these developmental years emotional balance is a large challenge. Teens often battle with depression, anger, and feelings of overwhelm. The study found that teens that took a yoga class instead of a traditional physical education class reported feeling more balanced and in control of their emotions.

It may go back the first two benefits discussed ? yoga reduces stress, increases your body?s ability to manage stress, and forces you to be in the moment. These lessons of living in the moment and approaching problems with a clear head can be embraced throughout the day, thus providing a stronger sense of control, balance, and mental wellbeing.