

## Yoga can improve health and fitness

Yoga is an ancient mind-body practice originally developed as a way to reach spiritual enlightenment. Today, an estimated 15 to 18 million US adults use yoga for a variety of health conditions and to achieve fitness and relaxation. Yoga in its full form combines physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and a distinct philosophy. There are numerous schools of yoga with differing areas of emphasis. Hatha yoga, the most commonly practiced in the US and Europe, emphasizes postures and breathing exercises. Styles of hatha yoga include Ananda, Anusara, Ashtanga, Bikram, Iyengar, Kripalu, Kundalini, and Viniyoga.

It is not fully known what changes occur in the body during yoga and what their influences on health might be. There is growing evidence that yoga has positive effects on health including reduced heart rate and blood pressure, increased lung capacity, improved muscle relaxation and body composition, improved overall physical fitness, improved balance, strength, and flexibility and reduced pain. Yoga may help with weight loss, and positively affect levels of certain brain or blood chemicals. Other benefits include enhanced mind-body awareness and ability to cope with stress, improved mood and sense of well-being, help with conditions such as anxiety and depression, and improved sleep. The

health benefits of yoga are more likely to be seen after long-term use (a year or more), rather than in the short term. Yoga does not appear to improve physical fitness as well as other forms of exercise. To improve your physical fitness, be sure to include other forms of exercise in your routine in addition to yoga. More research is needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn about yoga's use for specific health conditions.

Yoga is generally considered to be safe with few side effects. If you are pregnant or have an ongoing health problem, check with your health care providers to see if you should avoid any yoga positions. If you are interested in taking a class or working with an instructor, ask about the physical demands involved, as well as the training and experience of the yoga teacher. Look for published research studies about the effect of yoga on any health problems you have. Finally, tell your health care providers if you are practicing yoga or using any other complementary and alternative approaches. Giving them a full picture of what you do to manage your health will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, NIH.

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>

### Recipe of the Week: Rainbow Slaw

serves 8

from Weight Watchers New Complete Cookbook

3 Tablespoons reduced-fat mayonnaise  
3 Tablespoons light sour cream  
3 Tablespoons red wine vinegar  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt  
black pepper  
3 cups thinly sliced green cabbage  
3 cups thinly sliced red cabbage  
2 large carrots, grated  
1 large orange, yellow or red bell pepper, chopped  
2 scallions, thinly sliced  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped fresh parsley

1. In a large bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, sour cream, vinegar, salt, salt and pepper until smooth.  
2. Add all remaining ingredients. Toss until evenly coated. Cover and refrigerate at least an hour or overnight. For the best flavor, let stand at room temperature about half an hour before serving.

#### Nutrition information:

Calories: 56    Total fat: 3g    Saturated fat: 1g  
Cholesterol: 4mg    Sodium: 292mg    Protein: 2g  
Total carbs: 4g    Dietary fiber: 2g

**Tip of the Week:** Want to eat less Halloween candy? ♦ Wait till October 31 to buy candy.  
♦ Buy candy you don't like. ♦ Buy 20% less candy than you think you will need and have a supply of quarters handy in case you run out of candy. ♦ Give the latecomers extras to deplete your supply. ♦ Don't have a wide variety of choices available. ♦ Buy small size bars or candies. ♦ Don't bring leftovers to work with you. *—from The Boston Globe and Mindless Eating by Brian Wansink.*