



EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OF YOGA FOR RUNNERS

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ABSTRACT

Runners are often reluctant to try yoga; their most common fear is that they are not flexible enough. Yoga is suitable for every body type. It can be started at any age regardless of physical condition, and those who are the stiffest have the most to gain.

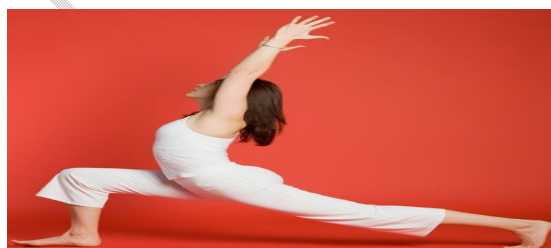
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INTRODUCTION

Runners, specifically, have a tremendous amount to gain from adding yoga to their fitness regimens. 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. According to Yoga Journal, regular yoga practice improves flexibility, increases muscle strength, improves joint flexibility, Balance and encourages healthy blood flow. Through flowing movements and poses, not only can you become a more balanced runner physiologically, you'll also discover a subsequent mental centering

A). Physical Effects

1). Increase Flexibility and Range of Motion (Veerasana):- Yoga routines incorporate slow, steady flexibility exercises that are ideal for athletes. Frequent yoga training may increase flexibility, and range of motion while relieving muscle tension. Improved range of motion can often help improve performance and prevent injuries.



2. Increase Core Strength (Navasana):- A strong core provides the stability, power and endurance that one needs for powering uphill's, sprinting to the finish and maintaining efficient form mile after mile. Yoga poses are all about building core strength. Many think of our core strength as only our abs but the back and pelvis are also a part of our core. A strong core improves running posture and speed.



3. Improve Balance (Bak Asana, Crane Posture, Crow Pose):- Balance exercises are often overlooked by athletes, but are one of the most effective ways to correct muscle imbalance or body mechanic problems. Yoga places special attention on symmetry in the body thus it allows us to balance out the areas we are compensating in.



4. Develop Deep, Relaxed Breathing (Trikonasana):- Deep, relaxed breathing is the foundation for reducing performance anxiety and improving concentration. Yoga will help you develop a habit of breathing correctly. Because of the deep, mindful breathing that yoga involves, lung capacity often improves.



5. Less stress and more calm (Paschimottanasana):- With its quiet, precise movements, yoga draws your focus away from your busy, chaotic day and toward calm as you move your body through poses that require balance and concentration. Through our yoga practice we become aware of our body, breath and state of mind through the practice of stillness, breath and movement we are able to manage our nervous system and release stress.



6. Improved fitness (Mayurasana):- With regular practice, yoga can improve balance, range of motion and strength. So if you want to become and stay physically and mentally fit, make sure your yoga practice includes a balance of poses that build strength, stamina, and flexibility, along with breath work and meditation to help develop body awareness. In particular, include a series of standing poses in your practice.

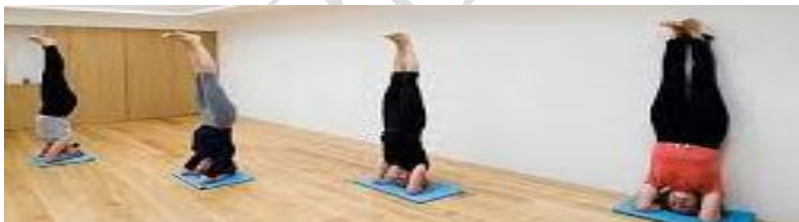


7. Better sleep (Shavasana):- Regular practice of yoga can help people relax making it easier to turn off at the end of the day. When we sleep our body repairs on a cellular level. It removes toxins, and lends attention to sustaining us in a way that ordinarily is not possible during waking hours. Very experienced yogis are more at rest in meditation than most are in their deepest sleep. This is one reason they tend to live so long. If you habitually do not get a good night's sleep, in addition to not feeling well or thinking clearly, chances of aging faster than you could be.



B). Mental Effects

1). Mind-body (Sirsasana):- The effects of running have significant parallels to the meditative aspects of yoga. Yoga practice teaches you to stay in tune with your body and connected to the breath. Running, especially longer distances, requires this same discipline. It is easy to see that the aware calm and in tune with your body during challenging runs.



2). Body awareness:- As a runner, you understand your body in relation to running. Yoga demands awareness of the entire body, from head to toe and large to small muscles. As yoga students quickly discover, no part of the body is untouched by yoga. As your awareness increases through yoga, you will be able to control smaller movements of your body or even feel the movement inside your body while simply being still.

3). Calmness (Padmasana):- Yoga asana practice is physically demanding and requires mindful concentration in the body. This brings a sense of calmness to the mind. Yoga classes typically include at least a few moments of sitting quietly and simply breathing. The simple act of sitting and observing the breath while eliminating the stream of thoughts that otherwise permeate our mind is the foundation of meditation.



4). Stress reduction (Viparita Karani):- All forms of physical activity are good for relieving stress and this is particular true of yoga. The practice provides a much needed break from the source of stress. Concentrating on the movement and the breath seems to melt away the daily issues that cause stress. A yoga practice provides the mental clarity to put things into better perspective, and problems often diminish in intensity.



5). Mindful eating:- Yoga is a health system that encompasses far more than physical movement and breathing. The strong mind body connection during a yoga practice, you may become more mindful of the effects your food choices have on your body and mind. The yamas and niyamas described in the yoga sutras related to universal morals and personal observances, and many of these can be applied to food. Eg:- the first yama is ahimsa or non harming, which raises the notion that what we eat should not be harmful to us or to other beings.



BENEFITS OF YOGA FOR RUNNERS:-

Many runners experience tremendous benefits even after just one yoga class, often expressing that they feel taller, their lower backs feel better, and they have greater body awareness during runs and daily activities. Following a yoga class that focuses deeply on the hips and hamstrings, many runners are surprised at the greater fluidity and ease they feel in their stride the next time they go for a run. The following benefits of yoga are:-

1). Better running:- One of the biggest benefits of yoga for runners is better running. Yoga stretches and lengthens muscles so they become more supple and able to react during a run. This decreases muscle

stiffness and increases range of motion in joints namely:- the hips, shoulders, ankles and spine. Specifically longer hamstrings and less restricted hip joint mobility create a longer and more fluid running stride. In addition the strength and length gained by the muscles help to stabilize the skeleton, resulting in faster running



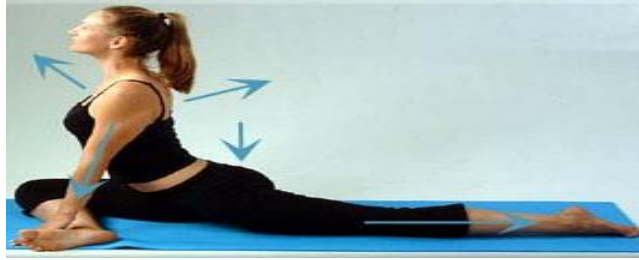
2). Healing and avoiding injuries:- Improved symmetry, alignment and balance through yoga prevent new injuries from occurring while healing stubborn, chronic and recurring injuries. Yoga postures help aligns the knee joint while strengthening the arches of the feet for better shock absorption. This reduces the weight bearing impact of running.



3). Post race recovery:- A yoga practice after racing helps to eliminate the stiffness caused by lactic acid build up in muscles tissue. Runners who attend a yoga class the day after the competition are often amazed at the speed of their recovery; they are able to go up and down the stairs without pain and stiffness in short order.



4. Pigeon Pose (Kapotasana):- This pose stretches a lot of important muscles for runners that can be prone to injury – the gluteus, hip rotators, and the hamstrings group of muscles, it just feels great after a long run. To get into the pose, start on your hands and knees, and then put your left knee behind your left hand and your left foot in front of your right hip.



5. Bridge Pose (Setu Bandhasana):- Have you ever found yourself hunching forward at the end of a particularly hard run? That may be because your back muscles need strengthening. Repeating this pose several times will work your gluteus and hamstrings as well as the muscles in your back, leaving you balanced and stronger for your next run.



6. Downward-Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana):- This stretch feels incredible for your hamstrings. The pose will also help stabilize and strengthen your shoulders, arms and back. Improves mobility of your digestive system, relieves back pain, headaches and fatigue. Start on your hands and knees. Spread your fingers wide and lift up so that the balls of your feet are pressed into the floor and straighten your legs. Try to align your back, neck, and arms. Try alternating the stretch between your legs by relaxing one calf at a time, while you press the opposite heel to the floor.



CONCLUSIONS:-

The numerous physical and mental benefits and effects of yoga help to broaden and round out the one dimensional aspect of running. Furthermore, with the high risk of injury related to running, practicing yoga helps runners remain healthy and maintain their running routine and actually improves their running. "Yoga helps runners balance their bodies, right to left, top to bottom, and front to back to prevent injury", sage Rountree, a runner, triathlete, coach and author of *The Runner's Guide to Yoga*.

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