

Yoga and Weight Management

Weight Management

Preoccupation with weight control is reaching new heights as the obesity crisis is approaching epidemic proportions. The prevalence of adults who are officially considered to be overweight is at an all-time high. Approximately 65% of American adults are overweight, and around 30% are officially obese. The danger in being overweight comes from the complications of carrying excess weight, which include increased risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. People often look toward fad diets or quick solutions in order to lose weight, but it is often long-term lifestyle changes involving sensible dietary changes and exercise that help to support lifelong weight management.

As weight control becomes an ever-larger concern, more attention is being directed toward the effects of yoga on long-term weight management. When people begin taking up yoga, they often notice that they are able to lose weight through a regular practice.

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Most of the evidence for the effects of yoga on weight loss is anecdotal or experiential. Yoga teachers, students and practitioners across the country find that in their own bodies, or with their students, yoga helps to support weight loss. Many teachers specialize in yoga programs to promote weight management and find that gentle yoga practices often help support weight loss. People do not have to practice the most vigorous forms of yoga to lose weight. Many teachers find that yoga encourages development of a positive self-image, as more attention is paid to nutrition and the body as a whole. The positive effects of yoga on weight may also have to do with reducing stress.

Stress is a significant factor for many people in an effort to maintain healthy weight. Current research shows that chronic exposure to stress hormones stimulates weight gain, particularly in the abdominal area. One of the benefits of a yoga practice in weight loss is through reducing stress. Although this is an effect that has not been directly studied in experimental research, yoga practice, especially techniques which focus on reducing stress, can be an important component to a long-term weight management program.

So far, there has not been much research directly examining the effects of yoga on weight loss. But a recent paper was published in the journal *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* which investigated the relationship between yoga practice and weight management. In a lifestyle study of 15,500 adults in their 50s, researchers collected information about 10 years of participants' weight history, physical activity, medical history and diet. The authors of the study found that regular yoga practice was associated with decreased incidence of age-related weight gain; this was even more notable in people who were overweight. This finding warrants further investigation of the issue, but provides some motivation for teachers, students, and scientific researchers to continue to explore yoga as part of a weight-management program.

Study citation: Yoga Practice is Associated with Attenuated Weight Gain in Healthy, Middle-Aged Men and Women. By Alan R. Kristal, Alyson J. Littman, Denise Benitez and Emily White. Published in *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, July/Aug 2005, 11(4), pgs 28-33.

