

Medical benefits of Yoga explored

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Yoga

(ABC 4 News) - Yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi, they are all alternative exercises that have grown popularity in the last couple years. But how effective is this path that's detouring exercisers from the traditional cardio and weight regimen?

Cheryl Kain is the first to admit her very personal struggles with health, mood, and a deeply personal battle with her weight. But it came to a head two and a half years ago when she was diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Cheryl turned to Doctor Mark Pettus, who runs the "Health for Life" program at the Kripalu Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Pettus says, "If someone were to hand me a blank piece of paper and say, 'Mark, you know, put down something on that paper that would have an impact more than anything on potential to reduce disease risk, to improve health and vitality': it would be yoga."

Medical studies show the combination of the poses, along with meditation and specific yoga breathing techniques reduce stress responses, which significantly impacts health. Bir Khalsa, Assistant Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School says, "There are specific areas of the brain that have been shown to change with advanced yoga and meditation practitioners. These areas of the brain are those areas that deal with the control or the ability to self- regulate emotion, the ability to maintain attention."

Yoga has been shown to help insomnia, relieve chronic pain conditions. In Kripalu's program, Cheryl began to cultivate meditation and study nutrition and food preparations. Throughout her time there, she felt something happening. She says, "It's one of those stealth things that creeps up on you." She surprised herself - who was this woman, practicing yoga daily... meditating... going on four mile hikes! Cheryl says, "If one can't do anything else, learn take a deep breath. and your life will begin to change from then on."

According to doctors, other benefits of yoga include delayed aging, muscle toning and increased flexibility.

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