

Yoga and Qigong

Yoga and qigong are mindful movement practices. They can help improve your overall health and well-being. In healthcare, they are considered complementary and integrative medicine. “Complementary” means they are not considered part of conventional medicine, such as a visit to a licensed healthcare provider, regular medical tests, and the wide range of medications prescribed for health problems. On the other hand, “integrative” refers to practices in addition to conventional medicine, such as practicing yoga and seeing a therapist for a stressor-related condition (traditional medicine).

Whether it’s yoga, qigong, or another mindful movement practice, they may be done with a trained teacher’s assistance or learned by watching a video or reading a book and practicing at home or a place that works for you.

Yoga

People have practiced yoga for thousands of years. It’s believed to have originated in India. The overarching goal of yoga is to unite your mind and body in a way that promotes health and well-being. There are many different schools of yoga. However, some key elements cut across most of them, including focused attention, breathing, movement, and relaxation.

Besides being a physical exercise program, yoga has been applied to trauma- and stressor-related conditions, anxiety, depression, pain, and attention problems. Research shows that yoga can increase awareness of mental, emotional, and physical states, increase the frequency of positive emotions, and increase acceptance of negative emotions and bodily pain. These effects could potentially produce meaningful cognitive (e.g., improved problem-solving skills), physical (e.g., enhanced sense of health and physiological condition), social (e.g., increased social connections), and psychological (e.g., improved optimism) changes.

In this education, there are two video-assisted yoga practices by health psychologist Dr. Lynn Rossy, who guides you through the practice of mindful hatha yoga, which consists of “...gentle stretching and strengthening exercises, done slowly, with moment-to-moment awareness of breathing and of the sensations that arise as you put your body into various postures,” says Dr. Rossy. In the videos, Dr. Rossy provides some education about yoga and mindfulness. There is also the option to practice while sitting in a chair.

Qigong

Qigong is an ancient form of tai chi that dates back over 3,000 years. Its movements are designed to help increase energy and improve the flow of blood in the body. Qigong movements are simple exercises that you can practice alone and without special clothing or equipment.

Research shows that qigong can improve balance and reduce blood pressure. It can also help improve pain, fatigue, and mood in people with fibromyalgia. This education includes two video-assisted practices by Lee Holden, a well-known qi gong teacher and practitioner. In the videos, Mr. Holden explains qigong and how it can increase energy and vitality.

Mindful Movement

There are a variety of exercises in this education that combine breathing, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques with gentle stretching, strengthening, and flowing movements done slowly. Loosening up your body, anchoring it, and staying flexible while moving can prepare you to work with painful thoughts and feelings when they show up in a situation (Gallo, 2017). When you're able to move flexibly with your thoughts and feelings,

1. physical flexibility can become psychological flexibility;
2. psychological flexibility can show up in a body that moves flexibly and holds itself confidently in strength and readiness, and
3. physically and psychologically, you can face painful thoughts and feelings squarely, be with them, and move with them.

The alternative might be they knock you over, you run away from them, or you try to control them.

Stretching, strengthening, and flowing movements can also help improve your overall flexibility, balance, posture, and neuromuscular condition, reduce muscle tension, and prevent muscle injuries. Here are some tips that can help keep the exercises safe and effective:

- Complete the breathing, mindfulness, and relaxation education before practicing mindful movements.
- Warm your muscles up before stretching, such as walking or moving around.
- Practice in an area with sufficient space to move.
- Breathe normally when stretching or moving.
- Stretch gently, slowly, and smoothly, only to mild discomfort. Don't bounce. Don't aim for pain. If it hurts, you've gone too far and should stop.
- Listen to your body to discover what version of a stretch or movement works best for you.
- Modify movements or skip them as necessary to meet your abilities.
- Get advice from your physician or another qualified healthcare provider before starting a new practice of physical activity.
- Engage whatever arises in your mind and body with kindness and acceptance.
- Use practice aids as necessary, such as a pillow to support your head and neck while lying on the ground or under your knees to reduce back strain.
- Maintain a good posture when standing or sitting.
- Practice as often as possible, 2 to 3 days per week.

References

Gallo, F. J. (2016). *A practitioner's guide to using the acceptance and commitment therapy matrix model*. Frank J. Gallo.

Gallo, F. J. (2017). *Bouncing back from trauma: The essential step-by-step guide for police readiness*. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

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