

# WORDS ABOUT WELLNESS

Today's "Words About Wellness" is brought to you by:

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## Developing a Yoga Practice

When I was 10 years old, my aunt completed training as a yoga teacher, and decisively introduced yoga practice into the culture of our family. When Hannukah rolled around a few months later, everyone was gifted a yoga mat, a yoga strap, and a set of blocks. Every time my aunt would visit, we all gathered in my grandparent's living room for yoga class. My grandparents started practicing yoga every day at her instruction, and soon issues of the magazine 'Yoga Journal' began appearing around the house. Twenty years later, I completed my own yoga teacher training, and have worked on multiple research studies examining therapeutic uses of yoga. And yet—develop my own regular yoga practice has been quite challenging.

While the research on yoga is vast and complicated\*, what sticks out is this---yoga practice can help address perceived stress, pain, and quality of life in people with a wide range of physical abilities and underlying conditions. In other words, **YOGA IS FOR EVERYBODY**. During this highly unusual and stressful time, now is the time to try yoga if you haven't before, or commit to a regular practice if it's something you've been wanting to do.

So what prevents us from practicing yoga?

### *Lack of Representation*

In a qualitative study I conducted in 2015 at a hospital where patients were offered yoga relaxation therapy, one participant shared, "The only people I see, they're petite. That's why I thought it wasn't for me. I'm not petite." Another patient said, "You know some people are so advanced with yoga and I'm thinking "I'm going to look like an idiot." I heard similar comments from other



patients in the study, and those comments reflect a broader theme I hear a lot--that yoga is only for certain kinds of people. Namely, people who are fit, slim, young, and flexible. Given what has been represented in the media, these beliefs are not surprising.

Increasingly, there is conversation in the yoga community about representation, equity, and accessibility. I'm encouraged to see this shift. The same patients I interviewed who had shared their skepticism about whether yoga was 'for them,' went on to share how powerful they found the benefits of yoga to be when it was presented in an accessible way.

### *Developing a Sustainable Routine*

For years I tried to practice yoga by myself at home, and over and over again, I would fall out of a routine. Eventually I realized—I'm a highly extroverted person, and I *need* to practice yoga with a group. Now I practice yoga with my family members or in a class (all via video platforms), and I've found that works for me.

The great and complicated thing about yoga is that there isn't one right way to practice. Finding a practice that fits for you will likely be a journey of trial and error. It could be helpful to try practicing alone vs. with a group, and to see what you prefer. You could also try different styles (flow vs. restorative) and teachers to find what works for you.

I feel lucky to have been introduced to yoga in the context of my family, getting to see my grandparents adjusting different postures, and taking away the intimidation factor that can come with practicing yoga in a studio. During this time, when many of us are spending more time at home than usual, or working long shifts at the hospital, yoga can be a beneficial practice both physically and psychologically. I encourage you to explore the world of online yoga offerings, or support a local studio that's moved online for the time being!

\*To read more about the research on yoga see:

McCall, M. C., Ward, A., Roberts, N. W., & Heneghan, C. (2013). Overview of systematic reviews: yoga as a therapeutic intervention for adults with acute and chronic health conditions. *Evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine : eCAM*, 2013, 945895. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/945895>

<https://www.cochrane.org/news/cochrane-library-special-collection-yoga-improving-health-and-well-being>

