

## **Don't Practice Yoga For Weight Loss: What Yogis Can Teach Us About Healthy Living**

If I said you should not practice yoga for weight loss, would you turn to aerobics or the boot camp at your local gym? I hope not (unless you enjoy those activities), because if you need to lose weight, you probably will if stick with your yoga practice.

Yoga is a lifestyle. It doesn't just force you to burn more calories than you expend. It teaches you to be in your body in a healthy way. And if you're overweight, that means you will lose weight. If you don't need to lose weight, it will put you in touch with that truth as well.

Most people focus on diet and exercise—that is reducing calories and increasing physical activity—when they try to lose weight. While that approach can work, it can also lead to new problems such as overexertion, injury, malnutrition and sometimes even eating disorders. Often that's because the goal of thinness becomes more important than the journey toward a healthy body and healthy life.

Of course, yoga isn't the only way to tune into yourself and improve your well-being. Anyone can use the principles that make the yoga lifestyle effective.

### **The Journey to a Better Body (and Mind)**

Yoga is a practice of effort and surrender. It focuses on staying on the path without focusing on the outcome of our efforts. This practice of non-attachment is liberating.

Non-attachment doesn't mean we don't have healthy goals. But yoga offers tools for focusing on our entire being, not just how our bodies look in our yoga pants. With such a rich practice, we're bound to have positive results.

In other words, the principles of the yogic lifestyle contribute to weight loss indirectly while enhancing the experience of living in other ways.

Here's how to use yogic teachings to help you lose weight (if you need to), even if you never think about the number on your scale:

- The loving kindness practice known as *ahimsa* can teach us to be kind to our bodies. When we're kind to ourselves, we're less likely to overindulge in unhealthy food.
- The practice of restraint known as *brahmacharya* helps eliminate the desire to overindulge as well. At its core, *brahmacharya* is focus on our divine nature. The more we do that, the less we look to food or other excesses for temporary fixes or to numb ourselves from pain.
- Through *saucha*—the practice of purity—we also attend to our bodies in a positive way. For example, we may focus on pure and healthy foods as a source of nourishment.
- The physical practice, of course, can help us burn calories, especially if we practice challenging styles like power or vinyasa yoga.

- The physical practice can also help build a strong core and strong muscles. Since muscle burns calories more efficiently than fat, fit yogis have better metabolisms.
- Through the practice called *pratyahara*, yogis learn to withdraw from sensory overload and go within. There we may find out we don't really need to eat all that tempting food. We may discover those cravings are a sign that something else is going on that we need to pay attention to.
- Meditation, especially the practice of mindfulness, helps us gain clarity on what we need to maintain good health. When we're mindful of our eating habits, it's more likely we'll notice when we're eating for reasons other than nourishment. And when we're mindful of our emotions and thoughts, we can take better care of ourselves overall.
- Faith in a higher power, the goal of classical yoga, can help in situations where eating disorders and food addictions interfere with the ability to lose weight.

So, rather than making weight loss the goal of your yoga practice, focus on a healthy lifestyle. You'll end up with much more than a thinner body. You'll have a healthy body you love, and that love will empower you to live the life you were created for.