

Does Yoga Equal Fitness?



As the popularity of yoga soars, the question of whether yoga provides enough physical activity for total fitness is asked more and more often. The answer is not as straightforward as you might expect. The fitness benefits you get from yoga depend on what kind of yoga you do, how often and for how long you do it.

Hatha yoga is the most popular style of yoga practiced in the United States. It emphasizes stretching, breath control and meditation. **Ashtanga yoga** moves hatha routines along at a brisk speed; when performed by well-conditioned practitioners, this style can resemble an aerobic workout. Most yoga enthusiasts, however, do not take their routines to this level.

Good fitness programs strive for three things:

- **stressing the cardiovascular system to improve stamina and strengthen the heart and lungs,**
- **increased muscle strength** and
- **improved flexibility.**

There is no doubt that yoga has health benefits. It improves flexibility and posture, reduces stress and provides a low-impact workout. But what about the other two elements: increased strength and improved aerobic capacity? A 2007 study by the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University found that **a typical hatha yoga session for intermediate-to-advanced participants** raised heart rate and energy expenditure to a level equivalent to walking on a treadmill at a rate of just under two miles per hour, which **does not meet current cardiovascular health recommendations.**

Although some yoga experts might disagree, we suggest that for total fitness you add some strength work and increased aerobic activity to your exercise routine at least twice a week. To boost your cardiovascular health, for example, you might replace a couple of yoga sessions weekly with some time on an elliptical trainer. We will be glad to help you evaluate your fitness goals and design a program that incorporates other activities to supplement your yoga routine.