



Yoga Tips *for* Runners

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Many health and exercise experts agree that yoga practice is beneficial to runners.

It is not uncommon for runners to experience back or knee pain, tightness in hamstrings, hip flexors or IT bands, and a number of other injuries or areas of chronic pain. The act of running itself doesn't usually cause these issues. However, running can cause imbalances within the body that lead to pain or injury. A runner performs very specific actions over and over in one plane of motion, focusing on external techniques that often pull the body out of structural alignment. Yoga can combat this misalignment, and has been shown to help increase range of motion, agility, flexibility, endurance, and strength. The list of yoga poses, or asana, recommended for runners is long. I will give you a few examples below, but first it is important to understand some of the other aspects of yoga.

Yoga isn't just about being able to get your foot behind your head or balance all of your body weight on your forearms. In yoga, health is not solely determined by or created in the physical body. The Sanskrit word for health translates to "established in the self." True health is already within you, it is just a matter of uncovering it.

One way we uncover this is through awareness. If we hold the body in a position for a length of time, concentrating on a number of points of alignment, the mind starts to become more focused. There is less room in the mind for random thoughts with this level of focus. In this quiet mind, you can become more cognizant of the state of your body. From this point of awareness, you can work to reduce tension in both the mind and the body.

How you breathe is an integral part of the practice of yoga. Your body will breathe whether you are paying attention to it or not. However, when we do pay attention to the way that we breathe, we can get the most out of every breath. This can improve circulation, improve athletic performance, aid in injury recovery and soothe the nervous system. Ujjayi breath is said to help the mind rise above its typical restless state. With a mind that is free from restlessness and anxiety, it is easier to navigate the mental and physical challenge of completing a long race.