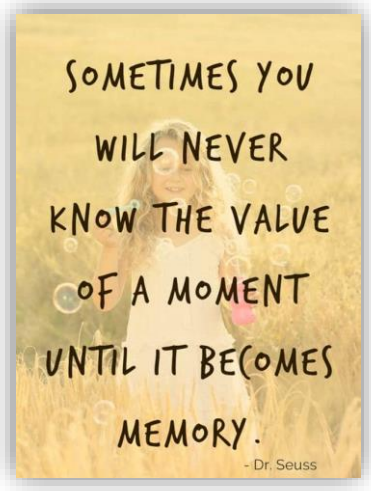
WisdomArt: Mind, Body, Spirit

Yoga isn't just good for the body; it might help your memory

What are the experts saying?

FOR DECADES, SCIENTISTS have known that aerobic exercise improves your brain function. Unfortunately, studies also show that to achieve those brain-boosting benefits, you must exercise vigorously, which, for many, is impossible.

However, new research hints that yoga may have similar benefits. This is hopeful for those who are not capable of performing vigorous exercises.



A research review published in the journal Brain Plasticity in December 2019, focused on 11 studies that examined the relationship between yoga practice and brain health – specifically improvements in memory loss and cognition. The studies showed that those who practiced yoga retained or even increased the size of their hippocampus. This is the structure in the brain responsible for memory and cognition. Typically, this region of the brain decreases in size with age. It's also a region that's first affected by cognitive aging disorders. health.usnews.com

The study involved 25 adults ages 55 and over who had mild cognitive impairment, or problems with thinking and memory that sometimes precede Alzheimer's disease. The participants were randomly assigned to complete either a three-month course in yoga and meditation, or to practice memory-training exercises, consisting of skills and tricks already known to boost memory. At the end of the study, the two groups saw similar improvements in their verbal memory, which is the type of memory used when people remember names or lists of words. But those who practiced yoga had bigger improvements in visual-spatial memory, the type of memory used to recall locations and navigate while driving.
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1. Yoga enhances memory, concentration and cognition

In healthy individuals, regular yogic practices bring about significant improvements in brain activity, concentration, stress response, cognition and memory power.

2. It protects from age-related memory loss and mild cognitive impairment

It was found that after the 6 months of yogic practice led to an increase in the hippocampus volume and thus could be useful in maintaining good memory even in the old age.

It can also help protect cognition in the elderly by improving mental health. [11]

3. It protects memory and mental health by reducing stress

Chronic stress and memory decline are found to be directly associated and some clinical studies provide evidence for this relationship. Stress can cause the release of cortisol (a hormone that participates in stress response) by the HPA axis (a stress response system) of the brain which binds to receptors in the hippocampus (region of the brain involved in memory and learning). A prolonged release of cortisol will lead to damage in the hippocampus which is the reason for memory decline. [15] Yoga helps protect mental health by lowering stress hormone levels and improving brain chemistry. This, in turn, helps sharpen memory and concentration.

4. It protects the metabolic health and prevents memory loss

A metabolic syndrome is a group of conditions such as high blood sugar, high blood pressure, abdominal fat and elevated cholesterol levels.

It has been associated with memory deficits and cognitive dysfunction. [24] This may be due to impaired brain blood flow, oxidative stress, brain inflammation and abnormal brain lipid metabolism. A study published in Translational Behavioral Research, 2018 compared the effect of yoga-based intervention with diet-related changes in the management of metabolic syndrome. [27] Yogic practices can lower blood pressure and oxidative stress levels in patients with hypertension. [29]

5. It offers neuroprotection

Higher oxidative stress and inflammation can negatively affect brain function and lead to cognitive impairment. Research suggests that yogic practices and meditation help lower oxidative stress and improve anti-inflammatory defenses. [33] [34] [35] A study published in Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 2015 reported the neuroprotective effects of long-term yoga practice. [38]It was found that a number of years of yoga practice were more correlated with the increase in the volume of grey matter in the left hemisphere. Yogic practices reduce the levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines and increase the levels of antioxidants in the blood, thereby providing neuroprotection.

It can also help in the prevention and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases. Long-term yoga practice is found to change brain anatomy in way that it results in sharper memory, better cognitive performance and increased concentration. www.salubrainous.com