

Wisdom Art: Mind, Body, Spirit

for a Healthier Mind, Body and Life

5 Anatomical Ways Yoga Strengthens the Joints

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1. Yoga increases your range of motion

Each joint or group of joints has a range of motion measured in degrees. For example, your lower back, your lumbar spine, has a range of motion about 30 degrees backwards (extending) and about 70 degrees forwards (flexion).

These numbers will differ based on the source. The point is, yoga can help you to regain more of those numbers to do useful and daily things like bending over to tie your shoes.

Another example is the wrist joint (which is made up of many bones coming together at one place) that has a normal range of motion of flexion up to 90 degrees and extension up to 70 degrees. By practicing yoga asana, you may be able to increase your normal range of motion and find that your wrists are now more capable of raking up those dreaded fall leaves, or having a better golf swing.

2. Yoga strengthens muscles that support the joints

Remember that one of the components of a joint is a tendon. If you were to follow a tendon away from the joint it would “turn into” a muscle. Strengthening muscles with yoga asana will ultimately create healthier joints, as stronger muscles will support the body, relieving stress and strain on the joint.

Weaker muscles means that the body relies on the joints for stability. You may be locking out your joints due to weakness in the surrounding muscles.

3. Yoga increases bone strength

Bones are living breathing tissues and because bones, or the ends or edges of the bones are a major component of a joint, then it makes sense that healthy bones help to promote a healthy joint.

Activities that are stress-bearing, such as yoga asana, provide signals to the bone cells to increase bone cell production. Conversely, a lack of activity signals to the bones that they do not need to work on building bone material production, and can also signal that minerals may be deposited elsewhere.

A solid, strong, built up bone, provides the groundwork for a solid joint.

4. Yoga keeps joint cartilage healthy

Staying mobile keeps joint cartilage healthy, so any exercise helps. Cartilage may be lost by immobilization. Have you ever heard the phrase “Move it or lose it.”?

5. Yoga circulates synovial fluid in the moveable joints

Staying mobile and keeping hydrated keeps synovial fluid in the joints healthy. The right amount of synovial fluid means that the ends of the bones, which are covered in cartilage, will slide easily when you move a joint, as opposed to the alternative of grinding.

If the fluid decreases in amount, there is not a way to increase its production with diet or medication.

If you struggle with joint pain and joint health, know that yoga has been found to be an appropriate option for those suffering from disorders that specifically affect joints such as osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis. When yoga is combined with typical medical care, both psychological and physical benefits are felt by participants to help deal with both pain and disability.



What are the experts saying?

Fact: Yoga is gentle and less stressful on joints, but studies show it offers both physical and psychological benefits. Practicing yoga regularly can improve muscle strength and joint flexibility, while boosting mood and controlling stress. www.arthritis.org

JOINTS

Healthy bones and strong muscles make for happy joints. If your bones and your muscles are both strong, the stress and strain that causes pain will be taken off your joints. As your whole joint becomes stronger, your flexibility and range of motion will increase along with your stability. Staying active also keeps the cartilage in your joints healthy, which can be lost through immobilization. When yoga is combined with treatment from your orthopedic surgeon or physiatrist, it can be a great choice for those struggling with joint pain and joint health. Be sure to practice more complex poses in moderation. www.thecenteroregon.com