

YOGA



KAIUT YOGA



THE POWER OF FOCUS

and a state of presence



In today's fast-paced society, we are bombarded by distractions and daily demands that make it increasingly challenging to access a state of awareness and inner connection necessary for our well-being, our health, and our quality of life. In this context, mental focus and a state of presence are powerful tools for achieving the inner balance we so long for.

Rediscovering and rescuing this ancient ability is a way to evolve into a part of ourselves that cries out to be understood. We have all the necessary inner mechanisms to integrate mind and body to have a balanced life both physically and emotionally. Yoga, an ancient practice that reaches beyond physical activity, is a pathway to redeeming this potential. The practice of yoga invites us to tune into our essence, to understand the needs of our body and mind to achieve a state of wholeness. By accessing our available internal resources in an integrated manner, we operate from a natural potential, resulting in deeper levels of body perception and a reorganized nervous system. With a consistent yoga practice, quality classes, and dedicated time, it becomes possible to notice subtle changes in the body while practicing the postures. To perceive these changes, it is necessary to develop mental focus and a state of presence. Developing these is a gradual process, but occurs at an ideal speed to educate our nervous system and build solid results.

Understanding how our nervous system works helps us lay a groundwork for achieving a state of presence. The more we connect with the sensations in our body during our practice, the more we expand our neurological awareness. It is a journey of pure perception, without analysis. When we start to feel sensations in our body, it is very common to analyze, but analyzing can generate an unwelcome avalanche of thoughts and doubts. Feeling is a phenomenon that occurs through perception, not intellect. However, as we are not taught to understand the full potential of our body, we often assume that we need to understand or analyze everything we feel. We need to learn instead to feel deeply by silencing the chattering rational mind.

When practicing yoga, the stimuli produced in the joints are perceived by the body through different levels of perception. We feel every movement, every forward bend, or every challenge of a new position. Our body is an intelligent system that allows us to experience both external and internal perceptions. Exteroceptors, located on the outside of the body, identify light, smells, temperature, pain, and sounds, while the interoceptors, distributed throughout the viscera and blood vessels, bring us sensations such as hunger, thirst, and changing blood pressure. Another level of perception is our proprioception, related to the body's spatial orientation and balance. The nerves and the semicircular canals of the ear are responsible for perceiving stimuli, and when stimuli are not recognized or trusted, they can cause imbalances. Because of these sensory perception mechanisms, we have the ability to receive, analyze, and understand the information captured by our senses.

Regular yoga practice helps to enhance these other senses by strengthening neural pathways and improving sensory perception. Each new yoga class contributes to the consolidation of positive body memories. Since our muscles have the ability to memorize stimuli, our yoga practice helps restore the natural way our movements flow. Practicing yoga brings us into a state of gentle, effortless presence. Even when we seem to be inert, the brain remains active, expanding levels of perception.





The more we dedicate ourselves to our practice, the more the postures feel natural and the more our brain begins to recognize them as beneficial. The state of presence is the ability to live fully in the present moment, not just by paying attention, but by being aware physically, mentally, and emotionally. Presence is a state that comes from being completely involved in an action without internal distractions. When we practice yoga we embark on a journey of self-discovery and transformation, rescuing a forgotten potential. Through focus and an expanded state of both presence and perception we can begin to harmoniously integrate body and mind. A consistent yoga practice allows us to explore and cultivate this innate human potential for growth and self-realization.

In this e-book, we will explore the concepts of mental focus and the state of presence with the perspective for how the practice of yoga can help us in this immersion of self-discovery. A review of scientific studies will highlight proven benefits that regular yoga practice can generate for an improved quality of life and health.

Allow yourself to enter this path with me. Together, we will explore the connections between mind and body and unlock the benefits of a yoga practice that can bring us toward a state of conscious presence and continuous focus.

Good reading,

Francisco Kaiut



"[...] REDISCOVERING AND RESCUING THIS ANCIENT ABILITY IS A WAY TO EVOLVE INTO A PART OF OURSELVES THAT CRIES OUT TO BE UNDERSTOOD..."

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUS AND A STATE OF PRESENCE

for a balanced and productive life

I would like to ask a provocative question: When was the last time you experienced performing a task or action in your day in a centered and fully present way? Stop for a moment to reflect on this. If you are not a regular practitioner of yoga or meditation, I would venture to say that you probably move through your daily routine without cultivating a state of presence. You are not alone.

We are pressured to multitask in our increasingly digital society. Many of us are immersed in daily tasks with demands for productivity that throw us in different directions. These demands can put us in constant mental turmoil, where a true connection with the present moment is a rarity. We are always worried about the next appointment or the next task to be completed. The worries and anxieties that fill our minds take us away from giving any moment our full attention.

As a consequence we feel fragmented, as if occupying several places at once but never really existing in the here and now. Instead, we can find ourselves living in an automatic mode, wasting opportunities to experience the fullness of life. These cumulative daily pressures can result in stress and illness.

" [...] CORPO E MENTE SE UNEM EM HARMONIA! "

Developing a state of presence or full attention means to be fully aware of and engaged in the present moment with all our focus. When we experience this type of presence, our everyday experiences become richer and more meaningful. We are able to enjoy each moment with renewed intensity by finding pleasure in simple activities and genuine interactions. The quality of our relationships improves as we become more present for and attentive to the needs of others. A full awareness allows us to develop self-knowledge and self-mastery. When we are aware of our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, we become more compassionate and effective in the face of life's challenges. We are able to make more thoughtful decisions, deal with stress in a healthier way, and find a sense of inner balance.

Achieving a state of presence is so important for our lives that in recent years it has aroused the interest of scientists from many different specialties. In April of 2023, the renowned Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health opened the Thich Nhat Hanh Center for Mindfulness in Public Health, entirely dedicated to mindfulness. The Center's mission is to enable students around the world to live with purpose, peace of mind, and joy through the practice of mindfulness; to seek evidence-based approaches to improving health and well-being; and to educate and train the public in mindfulness. To this end, the Center has plans to work with projects in the areas of nutrition and the environment.



Interestingly, the Center is named after a Zen master, scholar, and peace activist recognized around the world for his teachings on mindfulness, global ethics, and peace. Thich Nhat Hanh, who died in 2022, was a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who founded a movement for engaged Buddhism and worked tirelessly during the Vietnam War spreading the principles of non-violence. Exiled from his country, he became a traveling teacher of mindfulness around the world. He founded the Plum Village monastery in France, which has become a place of pilgrimage for thousands of people in search of mindfulness practices.

One of the reasons for the creation of a center dedicated to mindfulness by a recognized educational institution is that, as of early 2023, there were nearly 25,000 studies on the topic in academic publications. The growing scientific interest in mindfulness has already generated evidence that a state of presence or strategies related to meditation can reduce chronic pain, lower blood pressure and the risk of heart attack, improve attention in students, aid in the treatment of eating disorders, overcome the effects of stress, and improve sleep quality.

"Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, without judgment," says Jon Kabat-Zinn, a physician and researcher who has become a noted reference in the practice of mindfulness. One of the studies he conducted applied a technique, which he called the Relaxation and Stress Reduction Program, over 10 weeks to patients with chronic pain. A meditation practice can facilitate

a mindfulness posture toward proprioception, known as detached observation. According to Kabat-Zinn, detached observation seems to separate the sensory experience of pain from the emotional and evaluative reaction to that pain, reducing the experience of suffering through cognitive reappraisal.

The data presented by Kabat-Zinn's study was based on 51 chronic pain patients who did not respond to conventional medical treatment, most of whom reported pain in the lower back, neck, shoulders, head, and other areas. After 10 weeks, 65% of the patients had a 33% or greater reduction in their Total Pain Index (Melzack), and 50% had a 50% or greater reduction. A general improvement in their reported medical symptoms was also observed, in addition to a significant positive evolution in their mood and psychiatric status, which remained stable until a follow-up at a later date. This study leads to the conclusion that mindfulness can be an effective behavioral program resource for achieving self-regulation in patients with chronic pain.

The state of presence, or mindfulness, has a centuries-old tradition originating from the practice of Buddhist monks from about 3,000 years ago. Monks used mindfulness as a way to find enlightenment, but today the practice has no religious connotation. Inspired by the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program

created by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979, the technique is offered in schools, prisons, on sports teams, and the US Army, who has adopted the practice to increase resilience in soldiers. Mindfulness helps soldiers cope with the psychological impact caused by stress during a military operation. It is not enough for a soldier's physical body to be trained. The mind needs to be fit and ready to cope with stress as well.

A study conducted by the University of Miami revealed that practicing mindfulness helps them to train their minds to better prepare for high-stress combat situations. There were also developments noted in soldiers' resilience and overall cognitive performance.

Called Project STRONG (Scheelite Barracks Training and Research on Neurobehavioral Growth), the study recorded soldiers' brain waves to investigate the effects of resilience training on mindfulness, situational awareness, and the ability to manage and recover from stress. Three groups of military personnel were analyzed. Two groups received mindfulness training and one did not. One



of the groups received a specific type of mindfulness-based mental fitness training that emphasized active participation during the lessons. The other group received a type of training that focused on instructional information and discussions related to resilience and stress. Both groups reported greater awareness of their state of attention, demonstrating that mindfulness training is effective in preventing distractions and mental wandering.

Just as daily physical fitness is important for the overall health of the body, researchers have found that regular mental exercise is important for the overall fitness of the brain. Research shows that the more mentally fit a person is the faster they recover from stress and solve complex problems. They also perform better in highly demanding environments.

The book *The Power of Now*, by Eckhart Tolle, explores the importance of living in the present and achieving a state of presence by arguing that most people are trapped in incessant thought patterns and past and future



worries, which prevents them from experiencing true happiness and inner peace. Tolle argues that to understand presence is to be present, but without thinking about it or letting the mind understand it. To enter an intense state of presence is not thinking and not intellectualizing about what one is doing. Contrary to what many people imagine, the act of not thinking is actually to remain attentive and very serene.

Tolle explains that presence is about being fully aware of the present moment, without getting caught up in thoughts about the past or the future. He encourages us to observe our thoughts and emotions without judging them or identifying with them, and

he stresses the importance of accepting the Now exactly as it is, even if we are facing challenges or difficulties. Resistance to the present moment is the root of human suffering, and acceptance of the moment we are in is the path to inner transformation. Tolle claims that it is only in the state of presence that the individual can recognize that beauty, majesty, and sacredness—beyond external forms—is a deep, inner, divine essence. As we live our lives in our highly mind-controlled culture, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to be serene and present in our own everyday experience, preventing us from getting in better touch with the depths of our inner self where true creativity and beauty is born.



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Jon Kabat
physician and researcher who
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How a STATE OF PRESENCE acts on THE BRAIN

Even though a state of presence or mindfulness has been (and continues to be) widely studied, researchers question how the mechanism works in the brain and whether measurable changes actually occur. In search of answers, researchers at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia investigated what impact mindfulness practice has on our ability to concentrate. They analyzed data from 81 healthy adults over the age of 60 who participated in a randomized control study. The goal was to evaluate the immediate (eight-week) and long-term (six-month) effects of a mindfulness intervention on participants' attention and brain physiology.

Results of the study revealed that the participants who received the mindfulness interventions showed improvements in concentration and maintained that improvement during the follow-up visit held six months later. Positive changes in brain physiology related to attention were also observed using electroencephalographies (EEGs), allowing researchers to accurately measure the specific brain activity associated with attention.

These Australian researchers found that mindfulness enhanced two types of brain processes. The first process increased the efficiency of brain pathways responsible for processing sensory information, resulting in greater accuracy in perceiving information. The second process increased the brain's ability to direct attention to relevant information, enabling greater concentration on the task and a better ability to ignore distractions. By cultivating mindfulness and directing attention



to the present moment, body sensations, and breathing we can improve our brain's ability to focus and perceive the world more accurately. The researchers found that practicing mindfulness can actually cause changes in the mind, brain, and even IQ scores, debunking the previously accepted notion of immutability of brain function. Studies like this refute the outdated idea that cognitive abilities such as attention are fixed and determined only by brain function.

Another study conducted by scientists at the University of California investigated the efficacy of alternative approaches for reducing stress. One of the most relevant approaches is mindfulness achieved by focusing on the present through meditation. Published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, the study demonstrated that mindfulness acts as an antidote to what is called rumination (repetitive thoughts about the past) and worry (repetitive thoughts about the future), both of which are known to be unpleasant and detrimental to health and well-being. The study involved 150 college students who had been waiting for the results of a test for four long months. During this period, they completed questionnaires and practiced 15 minutes of audio-guided mindfulness meditation once a week. At the end of the experiment, those who followed a mindfulness meditation practice showed lower levels of stress and greater tranquility.

The researchers found that while meditation is already known to be a great way to reduce stress in everyday life, there is a need to investigate whether meditation can also help deal with the stress of waiting for significant news for a longer period. They identified that

even brief, non-regular meditation can be beneficial in mediating long-term stressors. This finding has important implications, especially in situations where people are anxiously awaiting results for consequential things such as medical exams or selection processes. Mindfulness practice can provide relief and well-being during these uncertain times with a simple and accessible strategy for dealing with the stress of waiting.

Brazilian researchers, in partnership with Canadian and Dutch researchers, studied in depth the effect of mindfulness on undergraduate and graduate nursing students and its impact on the quality of their lives. Their results indicated a significant reduction in stress levels after intervention, as well as an increase in quality of life for the students.

Through the practice of mindfulness, it is possible to develop skills to deal assertively with stressful situations by decreasing anxiety and other negative thought patterns that can lead to mental health problems. Research shows that being aware

of the present moment and accepting life's experiences without judgment can decrease stress and increase quality of life, as mindfulness allows the individual to deal consciously and less reactively with life's situations and concerns. A mindfulness practice also helps students to find new responses to stressful situations, to be more resilient to stress, and to improve academic performance. Mindfulness-based intervention programs can be considered effective strategies for promoting students' mental health and well-being. With this research, scientists believe it is possible to encourage educational institutions to consider implementing similar programs as a strategy to reduce stress and increase quality of life and academic performance for students.

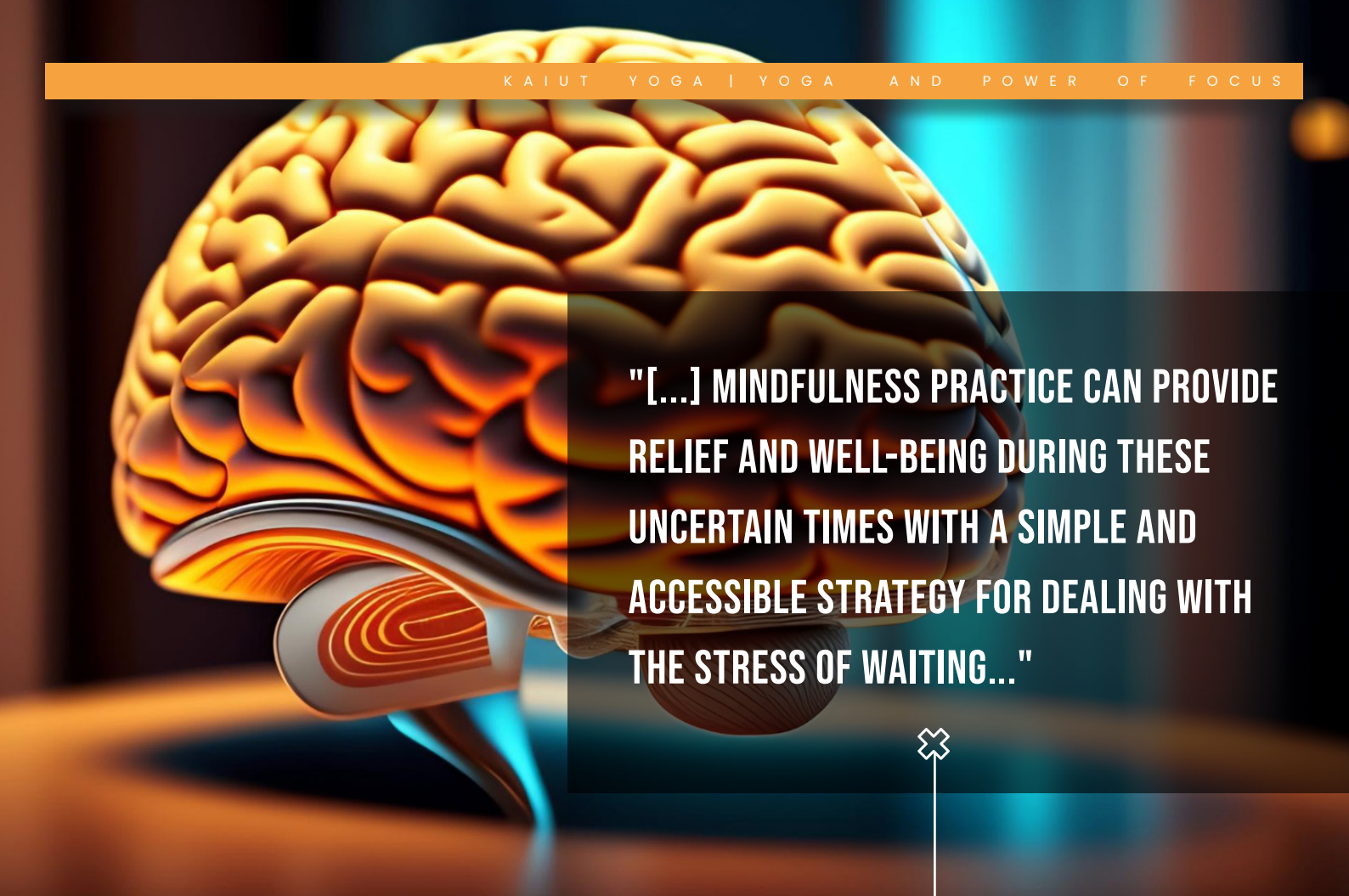
Dealing with stress is a necessity for students. The ability to cope with stressful situations in the best possible way is also essential for participating in modern society. We live much of our lives under pressure from demands that are exhausting emotionally and physically. But stress does not have to be always a bad thing in our lives. When stress is a positive input, it is called eustress.



As a natural response of the body to challenging situations, eustress can motivate and drive us to adapt to new situations such as taking on a new job, a romantic encounter, or participating in a sports competition. Negative stress, called distress, is the stress that makes us feel threatened and overwhelmed.



The way we interpret and deal with situations determines whether the stress will be positive or negative. Both types of stress can trigger physiological, emotional and behavioral reactions with varying intensities. In threatening situations, we may fight, flee, or even become paralyzed. These reactions are triggered by different chemicals in the brain, such as noradrenaline, dopamine,



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serotonin, or cortisol. The main purpose of these brain chemicals is to ensure the survival of our body in challenging situations. Negative stress occurs in situations that provoke a roller coaster of emotions, such as significant losses or traumatic events. Even though negative stress causes us suffering, it can be an ally by making us more alert and readier to face these situations.

Both eustress and distress can have harmful effects on the body and mind, depending on the intensity and duration of the stressful event, leading to a state of chronic stress when the body does not return to its natural state of balance. Chronic stress causes physical symptoms such as chest pain, headache, stomach problems, insomnia, changes in appetite, or increased blood pressure. It also triggers emotional issues such as anxiety, depression, irritability, apathy, or loss of mood. Chronic stress is cumulative, meaning the more tension, the less efficiently we deal with stress, and the greater our negative experience will be. By negative experience I mean a lower quality of life, a loss of productivity, less pleasure in our daily lives, lack of motivation, and compromised health. It is possible to get used to a state of suffering and not realize that you are living with chronic stress. Chronic stress is not resilience, rather it is a silent illness.



MODERN LIFE IS STRESSFUL,

but there are effective strategies to reduce its impact on our health.

It is essential to recognize the signs of stress and seek healthy coping strategies to maintain balance and well-being. As the Hungarian endocrinologist Hans Selye says in his book *The Stress of Life*, "It is not stress that kills us, but how we react to it." We need to use the effective resources we have to deal with stress, such as yoga, tai-chi, and other body-mind therapies, as well as the art of staying present.

Perhaps one of the greatest burdens of modern life is the increase in chronic stress and its impact on our daily lives. The topic has been addressed as a public health issue, with numerous studies dedicated to understanding how stress occurs and what the most effective tools are to shield ourselves from its negative effects. A BBC News Brazil article, published in the magazine *Época Negócios*, describes how in November of 2017 eye surgeons at a hospital in Beirut, Lebanon identified that new advanced surgical techniques have pushed the physical limits of surgeons and are generating enormous mental strain. This is a real example of how the stressors of modern society can impact quality of life. After long intense days in the operating room, one surgeon developed blurred vision and received a diagnosis of central serous chorioretinopathy (CSR). The cause of this condition, according to experts, is stress. The shift from physical work to work requiring more intense mental activity has contributed to chronic stress in many professions. New skills required of professionals in all areas are creating worrying effects. According to data from the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), 57% of absences from work in 2017 and 2018 were related to stress, depression, or anxiety.

Interest in the topic of stress has increased every decade since Hans Selye defined the term stress in the 1930s as the relationship between physical stress and its resulting tension. Subsequent studies have shown that acute stress triggers a complex network of processes in the body. According to the HSE report, the autonomic nervous system plays a crucial role in the stress response. During periods of fear or anger, sympathetic activity (responsible for the "fight or flight" response) temporarily increases and parasympathetic activity (responsible for the "rest and digest" responses) decreases.

While experiencing dangerous situations, our reaction to stressors can be beneficial. But chronic, frequent, and intense stress responses lead to psychological and physiological changes that can be detrimental to our health. If a chronic pattern of stress response continues, even when we do not experience stress, it can lead to hypertension and other diseases. Similarly, while the temporary emotional reactivity of acute stress helps us to anticipate danger, a continuous change in the dynamics of emotional regulation can lead to mood disorders.

Studies have shown structural changes appear in the brains of people with chronic work-related stress. One such study was led by Professor Ivanka Savic and her colleagues at the Karolinska Institute and Stockholm University, both in Sweden. Using MRI techniques, they

found a difference in the regions of the brain active in attention allocation, decision making, memory, and the processing of emotions. In stressed patients, the prefrontal cortex appears thinner, the amygdala thicker, and the caudate nucleus smaller. This thinning in the prefrontal cortex is related to impaired emotional regulation. To try to reverse thinning, the researchers tested a three-month stress rehabilitation program based on cognitive therapy and breathing exercises.

At the end of this period the thinning of the prefrontal cortex in participants had reversed, attesting not only to the connection between chronic stress and brain structure changes, but also to the effectiveness of these therapeutic practices. According to the researchers, there is a need to recalibrate the basal state of the brain to increase productivity and efficiency. In a work environment that demands focus and complex decision-making, a lack of emotional regulation and a decline in memory can compromise team productivity.

American researchers, including Lynn Clemow of Columbia University Medical Center have discovered an association between chronic stress and hypertension. They conducted a small study to investigate the effects of stress management training on blood pressure and depressive rumination in patients with hypertension. They observed that a cognitive behavioral workshop-based approach was effective in reducing blood pressure and

rumination activity in participants. The scientists' concluded that mind-body interventions, such as yoga, breathing techniques, and meditation can help in stress control by improving the patients' emotional regulation, reducing stress reactivity, and accelerating their recovery from stress. These findings show how complex chronic stress is and that

"[...] YOGA IS AN ALLY FOR GENERATING THE STATE OF PRESENCE ESSENTIAL TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING. ..."

in order to control it, personalized approaches need to be considered. Understanding the interaction between a patient's perceived stress, their stress management techniques, and their individual characteristics help develop effective interventions tailored to individual needs.

It is very important to understand that it is possible for us to better cope with the stressors of modern life. Look for an approach that involves awareness, nerve regulation, and adequate ongoing support. Recognizing the signs of chronic stress both in the mind and in the body can help minimize its negative impact. You can turn to the regular practice of activities that promote well-being, such as yoga, meditation, or favorite hobbies, all of which are shown to be beneficial for reducing stress and promoting mental health.

TIPS FOR CONTROLLING STRESS

HEALTHY DIET: A balanced diet helps keep the immune system healthy and repairs damaged cells. It also provides the extra energy needed to cope with stressful events. Some research suggests certain foods such as those rich in omega-3 fats and vegetables help regulate cortisol levels.

MINDFUL EATING: Practice mindfulness while eating. Focus on the meal by chewing your food slowly and making thoughtful menu choices. Mindful eating can help you notice when psychological turmoil causes overeating.

REGULAR EXERCISE: Include regular physical activity in your daily life to help lower blood pressure and stress hormone levels.

MEDITATION OR DEEP BREATHING TECHNIQUES: Breathe slowly and deeply to calm your mind, lower your heart rate, reduce muscle tension, and activate your parasympathetic nervous system. Practices such as yoga and tai-chi reinforce deep breathing and focusing your mind.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE: Take time for yourself. Find time for hobbies and take vacations to reduce stress, avoid burnout, and increase productivity

GOOD SLEEP HYGIENE: When we are stressed, we are on alert, which impairs the quality of sleep. Slow down before bedtime and create an environment conducive to a restful sleep. Try to sleep seven to nine hours a night.

These tips can help control stress. Try incorporating them into your daily routine as well as maintaining a consistent yoga practice to promote relaxation, better balance, and a greater awareness of the present moment.

from the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard

Using yoga to **EMPOWER** your **STATE OF PRESENCE**

The ability to be present in the moments of our life is often undervalued, otherwise we would be more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and patterns of behavior. I believe a mindfulness practice allows us to choose our responses to challenges we face in everyday life, especially in stressful situations.

Yoga is an ally for generating the state of presence essential to physical and mental well-being. The physical, mental, and emotional environment of the yoga studio environment helps lead students into a state of deep concentration, presence, and relaxation that will naturally lead to a pre-meditative state. While practicing the Kaiut Yoga Method, students learn to enter into a meditative state to benefit from its full potential. Both pre-class preparation and the environment of the yoga class work to gradually pattern positive experiences, allowing the practitioner's brain to establish connections with enjoyable experiences and storing them in cellular memory. Over time, the ability to be present moves beyond the yoga mat, reaching into other aspects of your life.

It is also possible to train our focus by acting in a precise and directed way. When practicing yoga, we should concentrate on dedicating our full attention to the postures. Focus is especially important for maintaining balance during the postures, helping to find a center and establishing a deeper connection with our body.

In the Kaiut Method, we use a wall to support our body and neutralize the need for balance. Focusing while practicing the postures helps us expand body awareness, while the wall provides necessary support and prevents an activation of our natural balance mechanisms, consolidating in the brain the feeling of security and allowing us to consciously stay on the central axis. Jon Kabat-Zinn writes that yoga is

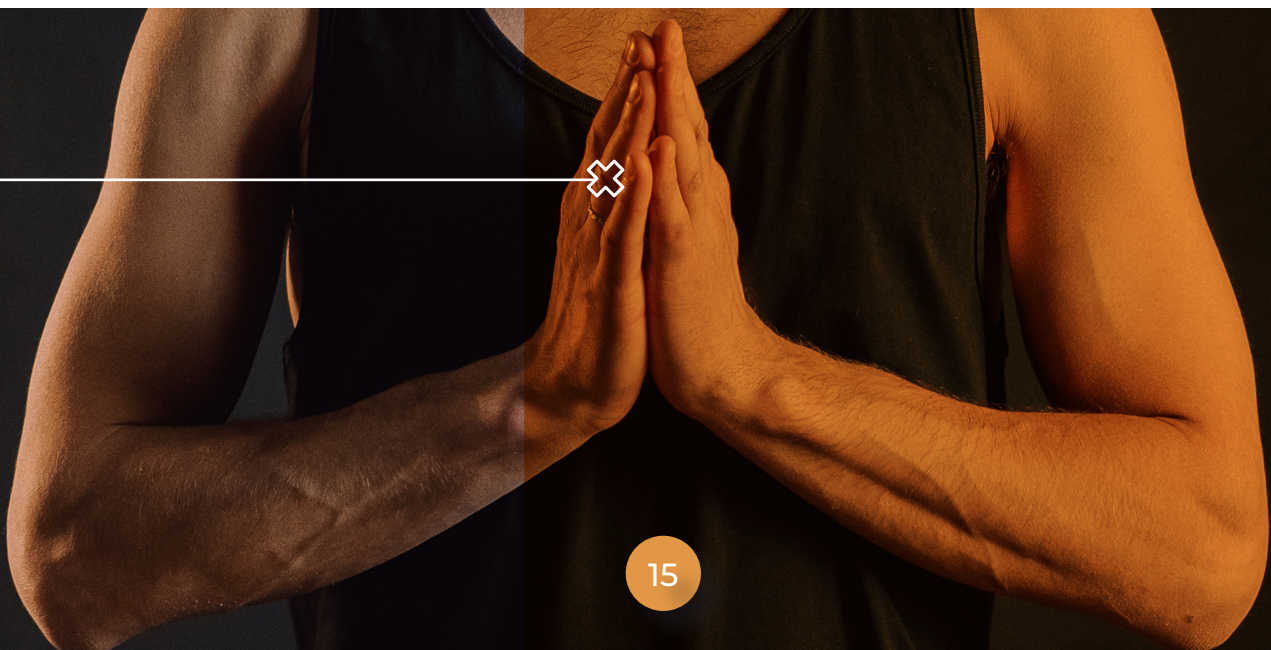
not just a physical exertion. It is critical, he argues, to accept our bodies as they are in the present moment. As we stretch, lift, or seek balance, we learn to work within our own limits, maintaining full awareness, moment by moment. According to Kabat-Zinn, in this way we create an "island of well-being" in the midst of the whirlwind of constant activity that normally permeates our lives.

Yoga combines postures (asanas) with breathing exercises (pranayama) and mindfulness (state of presence). Scientists at the Trauma Research Foundation, an institution devoted to research on traumatic stress, found that a yoga practice can significantly reduce the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The regulation of emotions and impulses is fundamental to overcome PTSD but not all available treatments are effective. Faced with this challenge researchers selected 64 women with chronic treatment-resistant PTSD and randomly divided them into two groups. One group participated in weekly yoga classes for 10 weeks, while the other group participated in health education classes. Assessments were conducted before, during, and after treatment including measures of EFA level, affect regulation, and depression. The study showed the effectiveness of a yoga practice compared to receiving supportive therapy and education. The effects observed from the control group participating in a yoga practice were comparable to the effects

of psychotherapeutic and pharmacological approaches already well established as treatments. While the control group taking health education courses showed an initial positive response with an improvement in mood, these improvements were not sustained and patients' symptoms returned. The difference in results between the two groups suggests that the physical and interoceptive aspects of yoga, rather than the social factors experienced by the control group, are responsible for the improvement in patients experiencing symptoms of PTSD. Finding alternatives for the treatment of PTSD is important for patients because many are unable to progress with pharmacotherapy methods. Body awareness plays a central role in the regulation of consciousness and emotions. When we are unable to have an awareness of our bodies, pathology sets in. Learning to perceive, tolerate, manage, and reinterpret bodily sensations can considerably increase our emotional tolerance levels.

The components of yoga—postures, breathing, and full meditation—have been shown to influence neurobiological functioning. Altering breathing patterns can positively affect the autonomic nervous system including heart rate variability and cardiac vagal tone. Yoga postures help us to observe and tolerate new physical sensations, disconnecting them from emotional reactions associated with past traumas. The Trauma Research Foundation study showed that yoga can benefit



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PTSD patients as a complementary approach to other treatments, especially for chronic and treatment-resistant cases. **A yoga practice proved effective in reducing symptoms of PTSD, increasing the patients' emotional tolerance, and improving their affect regulation while mindfulness produces positive effects on symptoms related to stress, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, immune function, blood pressure, cortisol levels, and telomerase activity.**

One of the great benefits of yoga is that it makes our brains stronger and more agile, a characteristic fundamental to treating mental health conditions. An article published in Harvard Health Publishing titled "Yoga for better mental health" explains that yoga develops new connections between brain cells resulting in improvements in cognitive skills such as learning and memory. Yoga has the power to strengthen areas of the brain responsible for information processing, memory, attention, awareness, thinking, and language. In a simple analogy, yoga triggers a kind of brain muscle training.

The article references studies done with MRI and other brain imaging techniques revealing that yoga practitioners have a thicker cerebral cortex (the region of the brain responsible for processing information) and hippocampus (an area related to learning and memory) compared to those who do not practice yoga. These areas also tend to shrink with

age, however, with a yoga practice the shrinkage is less compared to those who do not practice yoga. This revelation suggests that yoga may help counteract age-related decline in memory and other cognitive abilities. Combining a yoga practice with meditation may improve executive functions such as reasoning, decision-making, memory, learning, reaction time, and accuracy on tests of mental abilities. Another important point highlighted in the article is that the practice of yoga raises levels of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a brain chemical associated with positive mood and reduced anxiety. Meditation decreases activity in the limbic system, the part of the brain related to emotions, so that emotional reactivity is reduced and a more balanced response in stressful situations is possible.

Knowing how to deal with stress is key to undermining the progression of some diseases. A review of 15 studies published in the journal *Aging and Mental Health* examined the effect of various relaxation techniques for depression and anxiety in older adults. In addition to yoga, interventions included massage therapy, progressive muscle relaxation, stress management, and music. Although all techniques provided some benefit, yoga and music were shown to be more effective for both depression and anxiety, as well as having longer-lasting effects.



CONCLUSION

Yoga is the key to focus and a state of presence

In our society, where stressful situations dominate everyday life, it is common to find ourselves engrossed in our own thoughts. We are in the habit of thinking all the time, even when it is not necessary. What we need is to be present without intellectualizing. Not everyone can develop this ability. In the Kaiut Yoga Method, teachers use words and descriptions, not conventional demonstrations, to explain to the student what to do and how to do it. Our teachers encourage students to tune in to a state of active listening to help them stop listening internally to repetitive speech, which can be at times anxious or attached to the past. Through active listening in the yoga classroom environment, students are operating in the present and learning to feel what is going on in their bodies. This technique expands natural mechanisms of perception in students instead of analysis and questioning.

By conducting yoga classes through active listening techniques, teachers are both gentle in their approach to guiding students and at times humorous. Changes in direction are given subtly, stimulating students toward active listening first in the yoga classroom then in the other parts of life. While teaching, I notice students becoming more present and focused, actively listening to their neighbors and instructor. Students learn to develop an intimacy with the nuances of their bodies and their particular limitations.

What matters is not that the student is able to meditate while practicing the postures. I have seen many experienced meditation practitioners have the same nervous regulation problems that much of the common population has. What matters is that the student is gradually accustomed to familiarity with the yoga positions they are learning. First a state of presence is cultivated through active listening. Then it becomes possible to experience a deeply meditative state while doing the yoga postures. Each Kaiut Yoga class has the potential to be an hour-long meditation for students with moments of deep presence, and of action, and of passivity.

Through the Kaiut Yoga Method, it is possible to achieve a true connection with the present moment and with those people who are around us. This classroom experience of active listening lays a solid foundation for more authentic relationships and a fuller life. Its therapeutic benefits go beyond the yoga classroom. The ability to listen actively without analysis or judgment has profound effects

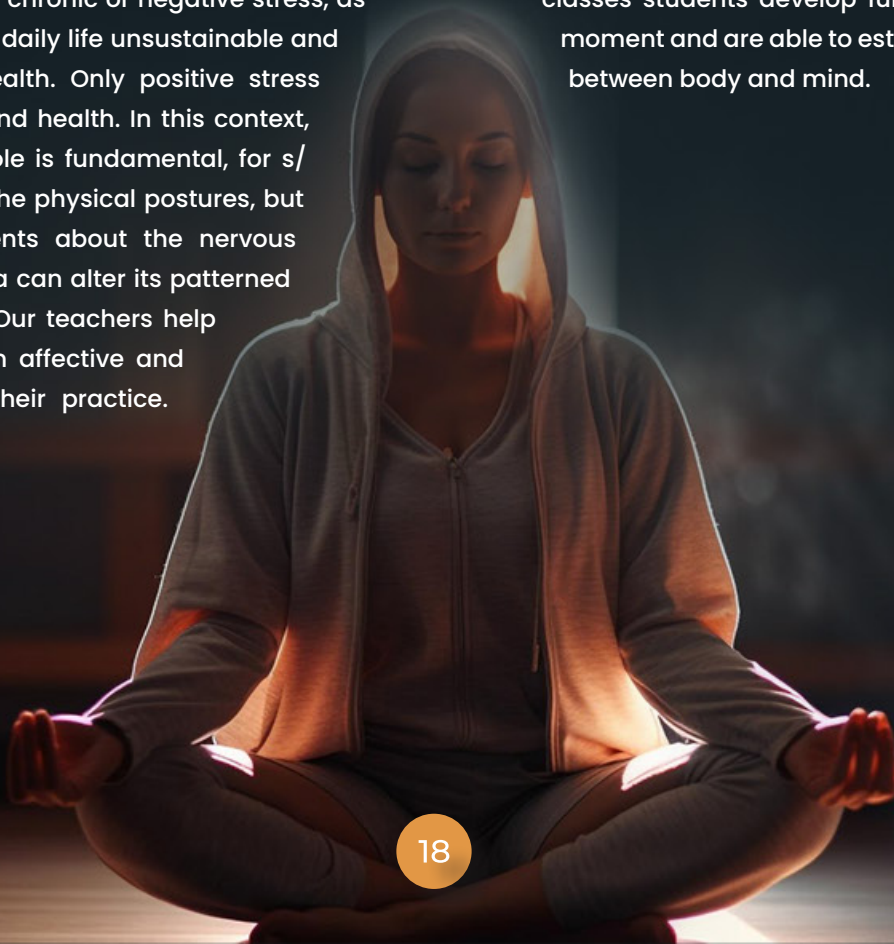
on all areas of our lives. Active listening not only regulates our nervous system, it also has a direct impact on our general and metabolic health.

In the Kaiut Yoga Method, the purpose of particular posture combinations is to help students discover that they can enter a non-reactive state of constant presence. The method uses postures that reinforce safety, create a strong brain connection, and facilitate entry into a premeditative state, allowing the practitioner to move into a physical and mental space of unshakable calmness. In this state, regardless of physical or mental challenges, students learn to observe their situations and seek an effective solution to challenges by acknowledging them and moving on. Existing stressful situations won't harm or block a yoga routine. A consistent yoga practice brings us to a state of lasting tranquility, enabling us to deal with everyday challenges without increasing stress levels. By regularly exercising our state of presence, we learn to operate with greater self-control.

It is important to recognize that human development does not benefit from chronic or negative stress, as chronic stress makes daily life unsustainable and compromises our health. Only positive stress can benefit our life and health. In this context, the yoga teacher's role is fundamental, for s/he not only teaches the physical postures, but also educates students about the nervous system and how yoga can alter its patterned responses to stress. Our teachers help students establish an affective and trusting bond with their practice.

Yoga instruction guided by the heart proves to be more effective in providing the yoga practitioner with experiences of change in their bodies, their health, and their lives.

We all have the resources to take care of ourselves. Self-care is a powerful medicine for our lives, and each of us has the choice to adopt a self-care habit. Living in a state of presence is a conscious choice that takes education, practice, and dedication. While at first glance it may seem challenging, it is important to remember that losing what we already have—health and mobility—can be worse. We are a combination of factors that include our personal history, genetics, and our personality. It is not possible to determine exactly when the benefits of yoga and self-care manifest, but they do arise when we abandon expectations and give ourselves over to the process. While many people claim that a yoga practice can be difficult, it is even more challenging to live with pain, helplessness, and deep stress. A yoga practice is a continuous process of focusing on the present. Through the postures, and breathing and relaxation techniques presented in the Kaiut Yoga Method classes students develop full awareness of the moment and are able to establish a connection between body and mind.



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