

Fitness Trend: Yoga

What they say: Yoga is a form of meditation originating from India. Yoga as a fitness trend most likely refers to Hatha yoga, in which posture, breathing, and core strength are all targeted. Yoga practitioners assume various poses all while focusing on proper breathing techniques and relaxation. The biggest physical gains from yoga are improved flexibility, core strength, and posture.

What others say: While practicing yoga may improve one's flexibility, this does not imply one is healthy. Some of our joints need to be trained for more mobility (hips for example), while others are better suited in improving stability (lumbar or lower spine). Therefore, improving the flexibility of the lumbar spine, which many yoga poses do, may actually lead to back problems. Yoga does not seem to make the distinction between which joints benefit from increased mobility and which do not. Another aspect not considered in yoga is that for a joint to be healthy, it needs to be stable in its full range of motion. This is accomplished by strengthening the muscles in their full range of motion with resistance training. The increase in yoga's popularity has led to a new counterculture in fitness. Many people who believe in the benefits of yoga become wrapped in very healthy lifestyles which include other activities such as rowing, running, cycling, and resistance training.

Bottom line: Yoga can be a great benefit to those who have flexibility issues preventing them from safely strengthening their muscles and joints. Unfortunately, it is usually not women with flexibility issues but men, and yoga is almost exclusively practiced by women. Yoga complements resistance training almost perfectly, as one can increase his or her mobility and then strengthen their muscles in the newly established range of motion. However, either one is less effective towards overall health when practiced exclusively.

