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Yoga is best for back pain sufferers

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21 December, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Yoga is best for back pain sufferers

New research from the United States suggests that the millennia-old therapy of yoga could benefit millions of people who suffer from back problems. In an article published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* on December 20, researchers concluded that yoga was a more effective treatment for back pain than conventional therapy. A study conducted at the Group Health Cooperative in Washington State required 101 adults to follow a choice of remedial treatments – a 12-week course in yoga, 12 weeks of standard therapeutic exercise or the same period following instructions in a self-help book. The results showed yoga both expedited relief from pain and had longer lasting benefits. Lead researcher Dr. Karen Sherman said this was because “mind and body effects” were in collusion.

The article states that: “Most treatments for chronic low back pain have modest efficacy at best. Exercise is one of the few proven treatments...however, its effects are often small, and no form has been shown to be clearly better than another. Yoga, which often couples physical exercise with breathing, is a popular alternative form of ‘mind-body’ therapy...[It] may benefit patients with back pain simply because it involves exercise or because of its effects on mental focus. We found no published studies in western biomedical literature that evaluated yoga for chronic low back pain; therefore, we designed a clinical trial to evaluate its effectiveness.” Millions of people worldwide swear by yoga to improve their mental and physical health.

WARM-UPS

1. ACHES 'N' PAINS: Are you a pain-free person or do you suffer from aches and pains? In pairs / groups, talk about how often you get headaches, toothaches, stomachaches, backaches, muscle pain and other discomforts. What do you do for pain relief? Do you know anyone else who frequently complains about their aches and pains?

2. THERAPIES: Have you tried or would you try any of the therapies below to relieve pain? Talk with other students to make sure you know what they are. What do you think of them? With your partner(s), rank them in order of which you think is most effective.

- Yoga
- Acupuncture
- Herbal medicine
- Reiki
- Hypnotherapy
- Standard medicine
- Aromatherapy
- Homeopathy

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

New research / ancient therapies / yoga / back pain / exercise / self-help books / pain / mind and body / couples / mental focus / clinical trials / swearing by things

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. THE BACK: Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about our back and how to look after it. After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. Will you do more to look after your back from now?

5. YOGA OPINIONS: Ask your partner(s) if they agree with these opinions:

- a. Yoga will become a much-used treatment around the world.
- b. Yoga classes should be taught to children in schools to provide mental balance.
- c. Yoga is only for vegetarians and weirdoes.
- d. We have a lot to learn about yoga and other ancient therapies.
- e. Yoga looks really boring.
- f. I don't want to waste 30 minutes of my day in the lotus position.
- g. I'll wait for more proof from scientists that yoga works.
- h. All the people I know who do yoga are very relaxed and laidback.

6. YOGA: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with yoga. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Yoga is around 800 years old. | T / F |
| b. A study says yoga is better for back pain than conventional therapy. | T / F |
| c. Adults chose between yoga and a self-help book in a back-pain study. | T / F |
| d. A doctor said a collision of mind and body effects brought pain relief. | T / F |
| e. Exercise is hugely effective in relieving chronic low back pain. | T / F |
| f. Yoga encourages couples to exercise and breathe in unison. | T / F |
| g. Western medical literature is full of articles about yoga and back pain. | T / F |
| h. Millions of yoga practitioners worldwide swear a lot. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| a. millennia-old | hastened |
| b. annals | research |
| c. remedial | severe |
| d. expedited | archives |
| e. collusion | links |
| f. chronic | effectiveness |
| g. efficacy | ancient |
| h. couples | depend on |
| i. literature | remedying |
| j. swear by | cooperation |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| a. the millennia-old | pain than conventional therapy |
| b. published in the | physical exercise with breathing |
| c. a more effective treatment for back | the few proven treatments |
| d. follow a choice of remedial | by yoga |
| e. yoga both expedited relief from pain | at best |
| f. have modest efficacy | treatments |
| g. Exercise is one of | Annals of Internal Medicine |
| h. Yoga, which often couples | western biomedical literature |
| i. no published studies in | therapy of yoga |
| j. Millions of people worldwide swear | and had longer lasting benefits |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

WRONG WORDS: In pairs / groups, find the eight incorrect words in each paragraph. Replace them with a correct alternative.

Yoga is best for back pain sufferers

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The article states that: “Most treatments for chronic low back pain have modest efficacy at best. Exercise is one of the few proven treatments...however, its effects are often small, and no form has been shown to be clearly better than another. Yoga, which often couples physical exercise with breathlessness, is a popular alternative form of ‘mind-body’ therapy...[It] may benefit patients with back pain simply because it involves exercise or because of its effects on mental focus. We found no published studies in western biomedical literature that evaluated yoga for chronic low back pain; therefore, we designed a clinical trial to evaluate its effectiveness.” Millions of people worldwide profane by yoga to improve their mental and physical health.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Yoga is best for back pain sufferers

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The article states that: “Most treatments for _____ low back pain have modest _____ at best. Exercise is one of the few proven treatments...however, its effects are often small, and no form has been shown to be clearly better than another. Yoga, which often _____ physical exercise with breathing, is a popular _____ form of ‘mind-body’ therapy...[It] may benefit patients with back pain simply because it involves exercise or because of its effects on mental focus. We found no published studies in western biomedical _____ that evaluated yoga for chronic low back pain; therefore, we designed a _____ trial to evaluate its effectiveness.” Millions of people worldwide _____ by yoga to improve their mental and physical health.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'back'** and **'ache'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. WRONG WORDS: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "ACHES 'N' PAINS" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about aches and pains and treatments.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| • suggests | • modest |
| • concluded | • small |
| • conducted | • couples |
| • choice | • focus |
| • expedited | • clinical |
| • collusion | • swear |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of yoga?
- c. Have you ever tried or would you ever try yoga?
- d. What's the difference between an ache and a pain?
- e. Which is worse, stomachache or heartache?
- f. Do you think scientists will find a cure for all aches and pains one day?
- g. What's the worst pain you've ever experienced?
- h. Do you think scientists will unravel why yoga is good for us?
- i. Are you open-minded about alternative therapies?
- j. Are there any remedies or treatments that you stand by?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you often suffer from aches and pains?
- d. Are you good at knowing what to do for aches and pains?
- e. Which is worse, an ache or a pain?
- f. Would you rather suffer from physical or mental pain?
- g. Do you think focusing your mind on your body can help alleviate pain?
- h. Why do you think yoga isn't more accepted, especially as it is thousands of years old?
- i. Do you think yoga is too sedate to fit in today's fast-paced life?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

ACHES 'N' PAINS: In pairs / groups, agree on the best remedial treatment for the following aches and pains. Decide whether yoga could be of use in relieving the pain.

ACHE/PAIN	TREATMENT	WOULD YOGA HELP?
Backache		
Toothache		
Stomachache		
Muscle pain		
Hangover		
Heartache		
Financial pain		

Change partners. Compare your treatments. Argue and agree on which of your treatments is best.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on yoga. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. THE BACK: Make a poster about the back – it's anatomy, how to injure it and how to look after it. Show your poster to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all include similar things?

4. PAIN: Write an essay describing a time you were in great pain. What happened to bring on the pain? What did you do for pain relief? Might yoga have helped? Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did anyone have the same problem?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. F e. F f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| a. millennia-old | ancient |
| b. annals | archives |
| c. remedial | remedying |
| d. expedited | hastened |
| e. collusion | cooperation |
| f. chronic | severe |
| g. efficacy | effectiveness |
| h. couples | links |
| i. literature | research |
| j. swear by | depend on |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
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| a. the millennia-old | therapy of yoga |
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| d. follow a choice of remedial | treatments |
| e. yoga both expedited relief from pain | and had longer lasting benefits |
| f. have modest efficacy | at best |
| g. Exercise is one of | the few proven treatments |
| h. Yoga, which often couples | physical exercise with breathing |
| i. no published studies in | western biomedical literature |
| j. Millions of people worldwide swear | by yoga |

WRONG WORDS:

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The **article** states that: “Most treatments for chronic low back **pain** have modest efficacy at best. Exercise is one of the few proven **treatments**...however, its effects are often small, and no form has been shown to be clearly better than another. Yoga, which often **couples** physical exercise with **breathing**, is a popular alternative form of ‘mind-body’ therapy...[It] may benefit patients with back pain simply because it **involves** exercise or because of its effects on mental focus. We found no published studies in western biomedical literature that evaluated yoga for chronic low back pain; therefore, we **designed** a clinical trial to evaluate its effectiveness.” Millions of people worldwide **swear** by yoga to improve their mental and physical health.