

Ashtanga Yoga for General Well Being

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I. INTRODUCTION

Yoga is an Indian philosophy systematized in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali approximately 2000 years ago as a global life style approach consisting of eight interrelated components. The first component consists of ethical behavior prescriptions toward others (e.g. non-harming) and the second consists of rules of conduct toward the self (e.g. discipline). The third is the practice of physical poses or asana. The fourth is a controlled breathing practice. The fifth consists of controlling sensory input. The following three components are increasingly more advanced levels of meditative practice. Specifically, the sixth component consists of practicing sustained concentration or focused attention on one object. The seventh is a state of absorption in which the entire perceptual flow is directed toward the object. The eighth and final component is a state of integration in which the object is seen as indivisible from the self. The goal of regularly practicing these eight components is to calm the restlessness of the mind so that mental activity can be directed into productive channels and mental pain can be alleviated (Iyengar 1966). Contemporary yoga practices primarily focus on asana, controlled breathing and meditation, with various degrees of emphasis on each of these components (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health 2016). Yoga incorporating asana, or asana-based yoga, includes traditional practices such as Hatha, Iyengar, Sivananda and Ashtanga.

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