

# Yoga

Yoga is defined by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) as a “meditative-movement practice,” an exercise of both the mind and body, which originated in Indian philosophy (Butzer et al., 2015, p.2). Yoga involves four elements: physical postures and stretches, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, and meditation practices (Butzer et al., 2015). Yoga is beginning to gain popularity in school programs, for the many benefits it has on wellbeing. Hagan and Nayar (2014) identified seven possible benefits of yoga for youth. With school and parental support, yoga practices can lead to improvements in: 1) concentration and memory, 2) respect for self and others, 3) self-regulation, 4) self confidence, 5) general sense of wellbeing, 6) emotional regulation and balance and 7) physical fitness for children and youth (Hagan & Nayar, 2014, Figure 1). In a recent literature review of yoga interventions for high school students, Caldarella and Lulla (2022) found that yoga interventions improve various aspects of adolescent wellbeing, including physical and mental health, social relationships, and academic performance. It has also been shown to reduce stress, anxiety (including test anxiety), depression, substance use, and school dropout rates (Caldarella & Lulla, 2022). Currently, most school-based yoga programs either include short, classroom yoga breaks, or full yoga programs incorporated into physical education classes or after-school activities (Butzer et al., 2015). Brief classroom yoga breaks can be a great way to increase classroom physical activity.

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**Grade Level:** All

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**Materials:** Yoga mats or blankets, yoga training for PE teachers (optional but recommended)

**Duration:** 10 minute daily yoga break in classroom; 30-50 minute PE class a few days weekly

**Implementation:** 1. Take a brief yoga break with your students during class.

1. As the teacher, participate in a brief yoga training, or use guided videos with your students such as the ones found [here](#). Sesame Street has also created a series of brief yoga pose videos found [here](#) that you may wish to try with young students.

2. For additional yoga break ideas with step-by-step instructions, consider purchasing Louise Goldberg's book *Classroom Yoga Breaks: Brief exercises to create calm* [here](#).

2. Implement yoga into physical education classes or as an extracurricular activity

1. Have physical education teachers participate in a yoga training program OR hire a trained yoga teacher.

2. Determine how often to include yoga in regular physical education classes, or if you have the resources to create a separate yoga class during or after-school hours.

3. Recruit students to the class or extracurricular activity

4. Classes should be held a few days a week, for 30-50 minutes, and include all four basic elements of yoga: physical postures, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, and meditation practices.

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## Does it work?

One study evaluated a yoga program with about 400 7th grade students enrolled in physical education (PE) classes (Butzer et al., 2017). Students were randomly assigned to the yoga class intervention or regular PE for a period of 6 months. Each yoga session

was about 35 minutes long, 1-2 times per week. The sessions included centering/breathing exercises, warm-ups, yoga poses, a didactic/experiential activity (social/self-discovery games and activities such as students leading poses, holding poses longer than comfortable to build resilience), and relaxation. Students were interviewed following the completion of the intervention. Students reported that the intervention decreased stress, and improved sleep and relaxation. Some students reported that yoga informed their performance in other sports, particularly in flexibility and balance. Some students also shared that they believed the yoga intervention could have indirect positive effects on substance abuse, specifically by encouraging students to think before they act and be more mindful of their decisions. For some students, the yoga intervention was positively correlated to academic performance(Butzer et al., 2017).

A similar study was completed in a rural secondary school in Massachusetts, U.S. with 7 classes of 11-12th graders(Khalsa et al., 2012). Students randomly assigned to yoga class or normal PE. Students in the intervention group attended 2-3, 30 min yoga classes per week. Teachers were trained in the YogaEd program and had previously received 200-h of yoga teacher training. Classes included opening relaxation, warm-up, yoga poses, and closing relaxation. Each session had a talking point addressing yoga philosophy/methodology, mind-body awareness and other mental/emotional health themes (stress, positive self talk, etc.). Students were asked to take a variety of surveys measuring mental/emotional wellbeing before and after the intervention. Most outcome measures (stress, anger, coping skills, resilience) showed slight improvements in the yoga group (Khalsa et al., 2012).

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