

De-Stress for Success

Written by Shelley Lowther
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We all have varying degrees of stress in our lives. Regardless of the cause or type, stress can often be an impediment to our general wellness and success. It can cause depression, anxiety and other serious health issues. We all want to reduce our stress, and we've all heard that yoga can help. But how?

Yoga calms the nervous system, and balances the mind, body and spirit. It affects our fitness, wellness, mental and emotional health, and aids in disease prevention and relief. A regular yoga practice can reduce stress, tension and anxiety, and improve focus and concentration. It reduces the "monkey mind," which disrupts our concentration and well-being. It teaches the practitioner to put things into perspective by learning how to be "in the moment."

Now, I don't know about you, but I am a bona fide Type A control freak. I plan and organize, and I like to be in control.

But there are so many things in our lives that are beyond our control, and often, *stress* is one of them. We've all been told to dress for success, but what we really need to do is "De-Stress for Success."

One of the most important things that yoga has taught me is that while I may not be able to control the stressors in my life, I **can** manage the stress itself. Any exercise, when performed regularly, is beneficial in stress management, but yoga has the added benefits of pranayama and meditation.

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I used to think of pranayama, or breath work, as controlling my breath... but that was my Type A coming out again. I've learned to think of yoga as **managing** my breath, and through the management of my breath, I can manage my stress. Did your mom ever tell you to breathe and count to ten?? She was on to something.

Through conscious, intentional breath, we can manage how stressors affect us. When we let go and concentrate on the breath, we can manage our senses, our emotions and our stress.

Meditation seems harder. Many of us in this 24/7 world can't imagine sitting still in meditation. Consider, however, that the mere act of going to a yoga class and concentrating on your breath and poses for an hour IS, indeed, a form of moving meditation. You *can* meditate.

If you have tried yoga before and it just didn't click, consider trying it again. You may not have been ready for it. If you find yourself wound tight and always on the go... yoga may be a way to release some of that stress and tension, and help you become less stressed, more focused, more productive and more successful.