

S-T-R-E-T-C-H



Staying fit is not just about hitting the treadmill or sweating it out at the gym.

Healthy & Heartwise talked to Charlotte Dodson, yoga teacher and trainer and asked her why yoga is a fabulous way of staying flexible and strong in a more gentle way.

Q: What are the things that yoga offers as a form of exercise that's great for older men and women?

Charlotte: "Yoga works perfectly for all levels, ages and backgrounds. That's the beauty of the practice, it meets you where you are at. Even basic yoga has a very profound effect on the human body and mind, and is a great way to maintain health. It's a fantastic way to kindly loosen up the joints of the body and free the body of any blockages. It's excellent for rheumatism, arthritis, high blood pressure, heart problems or other ailment where vigorous physical exercise is not recommended. Yoga can eliminate energy blockages in the joints and outer parts of the physical body, it works on the emotional and mental bodies as well."

Q: Why is stretching so important?

Charlotte: "Stretching is vital to release any tension held in your body. It's really important to lengthen your spine, especially after a long walk or run as these exercises shorten and contract the muscles around the spine. The

wonders of yoga is that it's far greater than a stretch class, it works with energy (feeling) on all levels, physical, mental and emotional. As we free our body up, we free our mind and release the body of any emotions."

Q: How does yoga increase core strength?

Charlotte: "It's important to maintain a strong core, especially to protect your lumbar spine. Like with life, we need strength to open and protect us so, we're not vulnerable in any situation. It's the same with the body, it's crucial to have an inner core strength that supports and protects the back body. With yoga, we aim to mirror both strength and flexibility."

Q: Is there a kind of yoga you would advise for absolute beginners?

Charlotte: If you are over 40 and never tried yoga, I'd strongly suggest the 'pawanmuktasana series', a gentle hatha class or a restorative session. There's no hurry with the practice of yoga, it's a journey and is a life-time practice. It's never too late to start and it's important to remember that 'less is more' and to build a strong foundation with the practice. Most yoga schools offer a gentle class and students can build from there. I would also recommend private classes as these tailor to the individual perfectly, to their body shape, experiences and any old injuries."

Q. Can you do yoga if you have reduced mobility or are overweight or have an injury?

Charlotte: "Yoga helps with all levels of mobility and weight. The use of props can help those with more injuries to slowly strengthen and lengthen where it's needed. Actually I got into yoga after an injury. I was working in advertising and after a weekend away on a surfing trip, I badly broke my arm, so I couldn't run or surf any more. I found yoga became a healing practice on all levels for me, physical as well as emotional."

Q: What are the other benefits that doing yoga brings?

Charlotte: "Yoga helps us all to live in the present moment, not to dwell in the past or to predict the future. It teaches us to cherish every moment we live as we anchor ourselves to our breath. It helps us to relax, be stronger, become more flexible, and find inner balance, focus and awareness with a positive mindset. It promotes us to be true and believe in ourselves and to always have gratitude in all that we are and all that we have. It's a practice of love and kindness in body, mind and spirit."

The whole point of the practice is to find inner joy and happiness, so maybe the suitable yoga class would be to sit in a comfortable position and practice a more meditative approach."



Yoga your way

Yoga is a growing trend – it's available through DVDs, TV channels and at your local gym, school or privately in your home. Charlotte recommends giving it a go, and if the class doesn't suit, to try another one. "It's a personal experience and it's important you resonate with your teacher and what they're bringing into the class", she explains.

Up your alley

There are literally hundreds of yoga classes Australia-wide. To find one go to www.yoga.net.au



For more about Charlotte please visit www.charlottedodson.com