

AIS and Yoga

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How is yoga stretching different from Active Isolated stretching?

Yoga

The first point to consider is the motivation behind yoga. Yoga originated as a meditation for cultivating energy. There are many different forms of yoga practice depending on the teacher and the idea behind what is proper positioning to achieve the desired change in the energetic body. It was not created ancient times as a means to attain flexibility. It was created as a means of discovering your true inner self; it is physical meditation. In modern times, however, this purpose is often overlooked and yoga has evolved into a practice of physical exercise. Yoga today is touted as an excellent means to achieve flexibility and strength. Frequently one of the beneficial side effects of yoga in a *healthy* body is an increase in flexibility. Another great benefit a healthy body is strength, especially in a lengthened position. This is *eccentric* strength, which is very important to your overall health. It allows the body to maintain integrity even in an elongated (stretched) position. Keep in mind, however, that most injuries occur when a muscle is in a lengthened position. For example, if you bend over to pick something up and your back “goes out”. Many of us have experienced this at least once in our lifetime. Some people experience back pain regularly!

In the previous paragraph the effects of yoga in a *healthy body* are presented. It is important for optimal health and healing to understand under which conditions one exercise modality is indicated over another. It is not uncommon for individuals with a muscular condition or joint problem to find themselves sore following yoga practice. Soreness is an *injury*. It is that simple. Occasionally health and fitness exercises cause some soreness. This should be short-lived and disappear quickly. Even more common perhaps, is to hear someone say that they have been practicing yoga for years but are not realizing the gains they thought they would such as being able to touch their toes. It may seem unlikely, but it is surprisingly common. You may even have had this experience yourself in your yoga practice.

There is a clear physiological reason for this. The muscles are trying to relax, to stretch, and are unable to relax in the positions that yoga demands. Right about now you might be thinking, “Why would that be?” Here it is, in clear scientific terms. The positions in yoga very often place the muscle in an *eccentrically* loaded position. Do you remember I mentioned that in an earlier paragraph? In this position the muscle is stretching *and* contracting at the same time. Imagine that you are asking the muscle to stretch at the same time you are also asking it to hold up your body weight or stabilize one joint or another. Does that sound like a good way to achieve flexibility? If the muscles are already compromised due to injury, tightness or weakness, they may not be able to do all that you are asking of them without breaking down. Another reason an individual may struggle to realize results has much to do with blood and lymph flow. When a muscle is stretched the circulation is pushed *away* for the duration of the stretch.

It is deprived of everything it needs to be healthy, strong and supple. Under these conditions can you begin to understand why Yoga may not be right for you?

In the November 2011 issue #107 of the International Yoga Journal “Asana”, there is a list of *common injuries* that can occur from the improper practice of yoga. The most common injuries include wrist sprain and strains, broken hand and wrist bones, repetitive injury strains, carpal tunnel syndrome, and muscle or tendon inflammation. Can you imagine that? This is what the yoga masters are saying! They make it very clear this comes from improper instruction and application. However they call these injuries *common*.

The “Asana” journal makes other points, which are *very* important and should not be overlooked when beginning a yoga program. First and foremost, make certain you have a one-on-one consultation with your instructor before you start. This is an absolute requirement. If your teacher does not know how to appropriately deal with your specific physical condition, try another studio. Do not try a class that is above your level. If you are new to yoga, begin at the most basic level, even if you are flexible and strong. It is always best to begin *any* new program at the easiest stage. Advance from there instead of jumping into what you think you should be able to handle. Leave your ego at the door. This applies to *all* exercise programs. Do not think you should be as flexible as your instructor or the person next to you; listen to your body above all else.

I am not suggesting that yoga is “bad” and you should avoid it. On the contrary, yoga practice can have tremendous value. However, it is important to determine if yoga is the right thing for you at your current level of fitness. In the next section I will explain why investing your time in a specific stretching and strengthening program utilizing Active Isolated Stretching (AIS) and Strengthening exercises will prepare you for yoga.

AI Stretching-

Active Isolated Stretching (AIS) changes the playing field completely. First, it is designed scientifically as a flexibility program; that’s its entire purpose. AIS takes fully into account the physiological laws governing our bodies. The stretches are designed to avoid *eccentric* loads, the primary pitfall in gaining flexibility and one of the major causes of injury. Stretching without this *load* allows the muscle to stretch without the creating tension.

The movements are very gentle and rhythmic. Positions are not held for a long time. The gentle repetitions not only create a greater range of motion but also sedate the nervous system due to the gentle rhythmic movements. Deep relaxation occurs throughout your muscles and fascia. As your tissues relax, blood, lymph, water etc. are able to circulate deeper into the cells and tissues previously restricted. Furthermore, the repetitive motions create a strong pumping action of blood, lymph, water and vital nutrients needed for life and healing.

Dr. Wolff recognized an important fact about the body long ago. He realized that the body adapts to the repetitive stresses placed upon it. The repetitions used in AIS are done for this very reason. Precise movement sequences will undo the adaptation that has been caused by destructive and long-held patterns. As a result proper joint function is restored, pain and impairment decrease or disappear altogether.

Active Isolated Stretching, as the name implies, is also very specific. It isolates muscles through basic joint movements one plane at a time. This is another way in which AIS differs from yoga, which uses complicated postures crossing several joints at one time. In AIS the concentration is usually on a single joint and all the tissues surrounding it. There is no more accurate method for developing flexibility.

The combination of gentle assistance and specificity makes AIS a unique modality to develop and maintain flexibility. It can be used effectively both to prepare the body for activity as well as to heal and flush out the damaging by-products of strenuous exertion. Its main objective is to promote proper functioning of the body rather than to transcendence of the mind.

AI Strengthening-

Active Isolated Strengthening focuses on the body one piece at a time to create a foundation of complete joint health, stability, endurance and power. This exacting system of strengthening, combined with AI Stretching will create a solid foundation for promoting optimal function in your life.

Look at it like this: When you have a specific weakness, much like a specific tightness, you need to take care of it specifically or your body will adapt to functioning in a weakened and dysfunctional manner. In time the problem is likely to come back. Or worse, as your healthy muscles take up the slack for the weak ones, they begin to break down, leading to more complicated problems.

Specific strengthening (much like the stretching) will stabilize your weak areas so that your practice of yoga can be done safely without causing strain to your body.