

Yoga for Athletics

by Tony Bishop, E-RYT



Jeremiah Mitchell in Suryasana -- photo by Sean Marshall

Performance is the indicative trait of the successful athlete or sportsperson, the element that ultimately separates the athlete who "makes it through" a sporting activity and the one who flourishes and has a great time advancing skills while taking one's unique physical abilities to the highest level possible. The "fun" begins when the performance ability reaches and then exceeds our expectations.

Conditioning is of utmost importance to any athlete — walker/jogger, serious runner, occasional tennis player, softball player, bowler, golfer, all the way to the triathlon athletes, who push the limits further into the stratosphere. We must condition in order to perform. But which conditioning regimen is right for our chosen sport or activity?

You may have tried many varieties of conditioning and fitness programs, and been left with a feeling that "something is missing." That's natural, and it's usually true! Most fitness routines are bits and pieces of other programs, with something left out. But let's consider the one activity which leaves nothing out, and brings everything in: yoga. Yes, yoga! Yoga is a union of mind, body and spirit, an activity that brings truly amazing and positive results. Almost anyone can practice it, and anyone from a grandparent — one whose highest heart rate of the week is during the "Dancing with the Stars" results! — to the most hardcore athlete, receives great benefits... by doing and experiencing what you need individually. Yoga is the most adaptable overall activity ever devised. Facts in point, shared from my friend and trainer Brandon Hartsell's research:

Let's take a quick glance at why yoga works successfully as a path to fitness and conditioning.

Muscles metabolize calories when they are stimulated. One pound of muscle metabolizes 35 to 50 calories every 24 hours. However, the more muscle is used, the greater the stimulation, and in turn the more calories required. In running, you use approximately 25 percent of the body's muscles. That 25 percent is only put through about 15 percent of its range of motion. That is: 15% X 25% = 3.75 percent of the body's many muscle cells

being stimulated by running. Calories are burned with the duration and repetition of that exercise.

In contrast, a typical yoga practice uses the muscle's full range of motion, and the muscle is almost completely stimulated. With practice, a yogi or yogini is contracting, stretching and placing resistance upon a large percentage of the body's muscles through nearly 100 percent of their range of motion. Thus, the typical yoga practice is a much more efficient use of muscle tissue and higher caloric expenditure results.

More intense forms of yoga, such as Hot Yoga, work to stimulate the cardiovascular system in the same way. The more muscle cells involved in the activity, the more oxygen required, and the greater the effectiveness of the exercise. In general, oxygen consumption over time depends on four things: Muscle mass involved in the exercise; Percentage of muscle cells involved, or the range of motion through which the muscle mass is taken; The number of times the muscles must make the movement; The resistance on the muscles during the movement. Increase any of these elements, and the time required to get the same cardiovascular results is decreased.

It's easy to see why yoga takes anyone's body to a new and better condition every time it's practiced. Many folks think yoga is simply stretching and breathing, and while those things are definitely important, they are a very small part of the many benefits in a yoga practice. The mental focus and calming, "centering" of the mind is responsible for motivating the athlete and for allowing proper rest and recovery. Any exercise scientist will tell you that rest and recovery are every bit as important as the actual exercise. We call it the healing feeling."

Are you ready for a spring and summer of sports? Is your body conditioned and your mind motivated to get better? Are you truly prepared to have fun while remaining injury-free? Let's check ourselves out in this yoga-preparation list!

Ways yoga works for you:

Runners, walkers, hikers, cyclists –
Endurance, lung capacity, flexibility, joint strength/healing, breathing, posture, bone density, injury prevention, healing of existing injuries, healthy cardiovascular conditioning.

Golfers, baseball, softball & tennis players –
Core strength, flexibility in hips and shoulders, mental focus, arm and chest strength, rotator cuff conditioning, breath control and improvement, lung capacity and leg/joint strength. Overall power.

Weight lifters/body builders –
Flexibility, injury prevention, healing, better circulation, sculpting and creating more "cut" in muscularity, overall strengthening.

Swimmers, rock climbers, cavers –
Lengthening and strengthening, breath control, upper body/core/lower body strength and union of function, mental focus/awareness.

Martial artists, offseason athletes (football, basketball) –
Maybe the best addition to your regimen for improving flexibility, balance, speed and agility, lung capacity, endurance, injury prevention, mental focus and toughness, and calming/rest.

New mothers –

Brings your body back, only better than ever. Relaxation, stress relief, and sleep!

Senior citizens –

Endurance, balance, cardio (safely), strength & flexibility.

And now, join us for the

May Pause for a Pose:

Suryasana (Sun pose)-pictured on left
Stand with feet wider than shoulders. Arms out 90 degrees, bent at elbows. Come up to tiptoes, flex every muscle group in the body, concentrating on core strength. Breathe.

Until next month, God bless and namaste.

About the author:

Tony Bishop, E-RYT/RYT/CYT is director and chief instructor with Hot Yoga Bowling Green. He is certified in Hatha Yoga instruction, yoga teacher training, yoga personal training, yoga coaching, PowerHouse Pilates instruction, Spinning, Sil Lum Kung Fu, Tai Chi exercise, and is experienced in many other forms of exercise training. He is registered with the Yoga Alliance, is a graduate of Sunstone Yoga Schools teacher training programs, and has more than 2,500 hours of yoga teaching experience. For more information, visit hotyogabowlinggreen.com, email hotyogabg@yahoo.com, or contact Tony at (270) 793-0011, 730 Fairview Ave, Suite C-2, Bowling Green.

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