

Yoga for Scoliosis

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Yoga

Yoga is a portable adaptable practice from India that is over 5000 years old which works on a spiritual, emotional and physical level. It helps body, mind and spirit to work in harmony, so life can be enjoyed and we can face whatever life brings with equanimity. Hatha Yoga includes the use of Physical asanas (postures), Pranayama (breathing techniques) and Savasana. (deep relaxation).

Yoga for Scoliosis

As everyone's curve/ curves are unique. Yoga for Scoliosis is taught One to One with a fully qualified Yoga for Scoliosis teacher, in order that the student's history of Scoliosis and spinal curvature can be assessed . An evolving Yoga practice is then devised and monitored by the teacher so that the student can learn a short empowering, daily sequence to practice at home. Yoga asanas (postures) are practised to 'brace' the spine, lengthen the spine, help to de-rotate the curvature, to defy gravity as well as help the practitioner feel more centred.

Yoga for Scoliosis can help to improve the student's posture and potentially help to decrease their spinal curvature, as well as help to halt the progression of a curve. It is suitable for everyone, any age as well as those who have had spinal fusion.

Yoga for Scoliosis remaps the Physical body.

'The body with Scoliosis has developed a highly sophisticated compensatory 'act' and it can also learn a more refined symmetrical 'act' with proper instruction. ' Elise Browning Miller
This can be done by stretching muscles that have become tightened and strengthening muscles that have become weak .. There are specific Yoga asanas (poses) that help to align the hips over the ankles and bring the pelvis into a neutral position. Yoga can also create balance in the pelvis and lower back muscles by working the abdominal muscles, as well as realign the shoulder blades and shoulders, (as sometimes one shoulder can be higher or one shoulder blade protrudes).

The asanas (poses) that are practised first are the ones to help to lengthen the spine – as they will help to release tension in the back muscles, along with creating more evenness in the spine and ribs. They help to, defy gravity and to encourage the practitioner to feel more centred and in less pain. This stretching will also help to create more space between the vertebrae.

This is particularly important for a thoracic curvature as due to the lateral rotation of the ribcage the muscles on the concave side of the back can become tightened and this will also stretch the muscles on the convex side of the curve. The use of these asanas will bring more feeling and look of more overall balance , thus providing more ease, freedom and greater sense of wellbeing throughout the body.

Then asanas (poses) can be included in the sequence to strengthen the back's muscles. These strengthening practices have a 'bracing' effect on the spine and help to prevent someone's Scoliosis from becoming worse... Abdominal strengtheners are also a good idea to help to bring a sense of balance to the back and pelvis , if belly muscles are strong they will help to support the lower back and ensure that the back muscles are not over used.

Standing asanas are practised in order to strengthen the practitioner's legs in order to support their back and improve their posture, for example a modified Warrior II or Triangle pose. These will help the person with Scoliosis to look and feel straighter, and they can also help to address the lateral rotation of the spine too. Improved posture can help alleviate back pain. Better posture uses the body's bone structure rather than over using muscles to stay upright. Then balance can be found so that the spinal curvature can exist along with gravity, activating the body's more natural plumb line.

Twists can then be practised as they help to de-rotate the lateral curvature of the spine and take the pressure off compressed over stretched muscles, bringing a sense of release and freedom. They can help to improve the shape of the curve (or more rounded part of the back) These Yoga practices are included in order to help to align the hips and shoulders as well as the shoulder-blades.

Use of Props

As the practitioner with Scoliosis can have some physical restrictions props can help make the poses easier, more achievable, as well as more comfortable. They also provide traction, so a deeper stretch is more achievable, which can also help to lengthen the spine.

Props can help to remap the body, and in Savasana (relaxation pose) these can allow the back muscles to relax and realign more fully.

The use of props can help to give encouragement to the student, as they can perhaps achieve more than they thought they would be able to.

Emotional and Physical balance and freedom -

As Yoga for Scoliosis begins and ends with breath awareness (Pranayama) it helps the practitioner to feel more emotionally balanced. Pranayama (breath control) - is also used when practising Yoga asanas providing a link between breath and movement.

It can also be practised on its own or along with meditation as a way of accessing deep peace and joy. Pranayama has a calming effect that can help the practitioner cope with the possible physical and emotional discomforts and challenges that Scoliosis can cause, as it is the bridge between the body and the mind. It helps to balance the Parasympathetic and Sympathetic nervous system (the body's fight or flight mechanism) which when out of balance causes stress. Yoga works from the inside out.

Deep relaxation

This is important at the end of the Yoga for Scoliosis so that the remapped muscles can rest in their new position during Savasana (relaxation pose). Props can be used to aid deeper relaxation into the overstretched muscles that Scoliosis can cause. It is also a time when someone with Scoliosis can become more accepting of their condition, as it can provide space where they can let go of any worries or fears, replacing them with love and awareness.

Acceptance

It is important for the Yoga practitioner not to expect perfection of themselves or the asanas (poses), but to find acceptance of themselves. A short, committed daily Yoga practice with inner awareness will help the practitioner to ease pain, feel straighter, more confident and more empowered.

‘As there is beauty in the straight alignment of a palm tree, there is also beauty of an oak tree with it’s many twists and turns. Psychologically, doing yoga is very empowering. It gives hope that we can do something to improve our condition and quality of living’ Elise Browning Miller

Gill Henderson

Has been teaching Yoga for 15 years. She was diagnosed with an 'S' shaped structural , idiopathic Scoliosis at the age of 14 , which she found emotionally very difficult to deal with. It was not until her 20's that she found Yoga which instantly gave her a huge release of physical and emotional tension. A car accident in 2008 left her with a whiplash injury to her thoracic spine. She had tried all types of Yoga over the years with many teachers , but it was not until during her Yoga for Scoliosis teacher training with Elise Browning Miller, in California, that there was a huge release in the stuck muscles in her middle back. The pain which she had due to the injury went and she was able to straighten up completely. There was a feeling of lightness and a great deal more symmetry and alignment in how her back looked and felt. She is extremely grateful for the huge change that this release in her mid back has brought to her life and for Elise's method of teaching. She continues to practice Yoga for Scoliosis daily and share it with her students.

For further information on Yoga for Scoliosis please go to www.yogawithgill.com

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