



# yoga

Although yoga includes physical exercise, it is also a lifestyle practice. The exercise is just one component. Through training your mind, body, and breath, as well as deepening your spiritual awareness, yoga offers much more than just exercise. Maintaining this lifestyle can be a real challenge, but is a worthwhile commitment.

## breathe out those blues

by Sunnah Rose and Dr Radhika Shah

Depression and anxiety disorders are the most common form of mental health problem encountered today. One in ten people will have to deal with one or the other in any given year. Yoga is a unique technique for dealing with these disorders.

The ancient tradition of yoga is a practice that has always been devoted to the synthesis of physical and mental health. This holistic approach recognises that 'physical states affect mental states, mental states affect bodily states and all actions can affect the body and mind'. This is where yoga comes in! It is a union between the body and mind. Postures and breathing keep the mind focused, the body supple and fit, and create mental harmony.

### Overcome your fears

Yoga does not offer a cure for depression and anxiety, but it is a powerful tool for symptomatic treatment. Yoga, focusing on asana (postures), pranayama (breathing) and meditation, helps to develop a stronger state of mind. This, in turn, will help overcome fears leading to anxiety.

By practicing asana, we maintain a healthy body and nervous system. The approach into postures, the hold and the release, all help create a sense of calm. They strengthen muscles and increase core strength. The postures also improve one's mood. They move energy around the body into places where feelings of anger or grief may be buried. This allows tension to be eased out and redistributed. Asanas work on any physical symptom that may be caused by the mental state. Something as simple as releasing the tension in the shoulders, helping relieve postural pain and headaches, will have a knock-on effect to mood, pain management and mental outlook.

Breathing properly is essential for good health. In contemporary lifestyles, shallow breath is all too common. This in itself is a recognised symptom of panic attack sufferers. Yoga uses breathing techniques to develop controlled breathing called pranayama. Prana is the word for the vital energy of the universe and Ayana generally means to expand.



### Regular practice

Many sufferers of depression and anxiety disorders find themselves withdrawing from society, lethargic, miserable, unable to concentrate, ailing from appetite problems and insomnia. When yogic principles are incorporated into your life the symptoms become far easier to control. The increased awareness of the body allows sufferers to be more in tune with their inner states. The social aspect and routine of regular yoga classes can also help with some of the isolation issues that these disorders can provoke.

So, whether you're the 'one in ten' or not, yoga is well worth a try. Maintaining regular practice ensures optimum benefits to everyone. It opens us to a way of life brimming with ancient wisdom that can offer support and nourishment in today's challenging times.

Sunnah Rose and Dr Radhika Shah are directors of the Butterfly Yoga Trust, Community Interest Company. [www.butterflyyogatrust.org](http://www.butterflyyogatrust.org)

