

Yoga Matters

Ya YogaAlliance
Integrity. Diversity. Community.

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"If you want to be happy, practice compassion. If you want others to be happy, practice compassion." Dalai Lama



"The practice of yoga fills up the reservoirs of hope and optimism within you."

— B.K.S. Iyengar

B.K.S. Iyengar said, "The practice of yoga fills up the reservoirs of hope and optimism within you. It helps you overcome all obstacles on the path to perfect health and spiritual contentment. It is a rebirth."

Eleven years ago I almost died. The anniversary of my own rebirth is coming up on March 10th. Yoga - and my mom who originally introduced me to this science when I was four - brought me back to health and taught me how to live. The practice strengthened me physically, mentally and spiritually. It was my therapy.

Around the world, more and more people are turning to yoga as a means of healing. Whether it is a back injury, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, asthma, insomnia or anxiety from a busy life, they are being led to this ancient wisdom by doctors and others in the health profession. Studies have now shown how the asanas, pranayama, and meditation can positively affect respiratory rates, circulation, stress hormones and even help reverse heart disease. And, there is a greater understanding that Yoga is more than just a physical form of exercise. Although certain styles can surely tone the muscles, strengthen the bones, improve flexibility and increase energy, the

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Yoga Alliance on the Road
(Please stop by and say "Hi!")

**The Second Annual IAYT
Symposium On Yoga Therapy
and Research (SYTAR)**
March 6-9, 2008 – Los Angeles

**The Yoga Journal Boston
Conference**
May 16-19, 2008 – Boston

ya survey

Please take part in our survey on classes for seniors. Thank you!

essence of the practice goes much deeper into the cells and into your soul. After all, it starts with *spiritus*, or breath.

The beauty of yoga is that it is truly for every *body* – no matter what the shape or size. With consistency of practice, you can overcome physical limitations and move toward self-awareness which is the anchor of all healing. The practice is also irrespective of age. My youngest student is three-years old and the oldest is 83 – sometimes in the same session! One of my teachers, Tao Porchon-Lynch, will be turning 90 years old this summer, and she is still as vibrant as ever teaching, dancing and traveling the world.

In January, I had the pleasure of attending the Integrated Healthcare Symposium in New York on behalf of Yoga Alliance. It brought together the latest thinking in integrative healthcare and complementary and alternative medicine, including yoga. We heard similar messages of healing at the *Yoga Journal Conference* in San Francisco. YA staff member Jeannine Frest was there at our booth to answer questions and I had the honor of moderating the continuing education panel, entitled "Handle With Care: Ahimsa in Asana." I also had the opportunity to participate in the "Yoga as Medicine" intensive workshop.

Yoga Alliance is once again delighted to be among the distinguished sponsors of the International Association of Yoga Therapist's second annual Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research (SYTAR), March 6-9, 2008 in Los Angeles. This professional gathering is designed for yoga teachers, yoga therapists, yoga researchers and health professionals who use yoga in their work.

The SYTAR program and registration pages are accessible through www.iayt.org. Yoga Alliance registrants receive a \$100 SYTAR 2008 registration discount, and hotel room rates at the newly renovated Los Angeles Airport Hilton are just \$119 per night. SYTAR offers up to 21.5 contact hours in Yoga Alliance approved continuing education credits. A few of our YA Board members will be in attendance so I hope you can join us. There will be a host of workshops designed to enhance your knowledge of therapeutic approaches to teaching.

As a teacher, see how you can make the practice accessible to as many people as possible - not just to the students who can mold their hips into Padmasana, but those who can find solace in a supported Sukhasana. Think about how yoga has been a form of therapy for your own journey and how your personal lessons can be translated into an empathetic voice for your students. Since February is Heart Health Month, seek to extend compassion and love to all who come into your presence. Whether it is chair yoga for seniors or modifications in a vinyasa flow, find options which are inclusive to all in your community.

As Sri Swami Satchidananda said, "Health is your birthright, but not disease; Strength your heritage, but not weakness; Courage, but not fear; Bliss, but not sorrow; Peace, but not restlessness; Knowledge, but not ignorance. May you attain this birthright, this Divine Heritage,



Yoga For Life

Yoga, the Elixir of Life

It looks as though Baby Boomers know what's good for them. As more and more Boomers hit their 50's and 60's, they are looking for ways to stay youthful and healthy. Many are finding that yoga helps them to feel as though they have turned back the clock.

More and more fitness professionals who once spoke only of aerobics and weight lifting also are singing its praises. Recently on NBC's *Today* show Bob Harper, a trainer on that network's *Biggest Loser* program became the latest to refer to yoga as "the fountain of youth." "It just makes sense to be more in touch with your body," he said "the more agile you are, the easier it is to grow old gracefully."

Many have gravitated to yoga classes on their own and still more are finding that their doctors are recommending yoga for its broad range of health benefits from helping to maintain strength and flexibility to keeping the mind nimble.

Yoga teachers and studios are seeing students not just in their late 50's and early 60's but well into their 70's and 80's. Of course, the needs of the latter group are very different and the demand for gentle classes designed just for seniors and chair yoga classes is rapidly growing.

While classes may vary widely, from a gentle flow to an active chair yoga class with modified asanas, to deep breathing combined with stretching backs, arms, shoulders, legs, necks, knees, fingers and toes from sitting position, seniors say they wouldn't miss their classes and find them very relaxing.

to shine as fully developed Yogis, radiating joy, peace, and knowledge everywhere." And, as always, every day find a reason to say, "Jai!"

Teresa Kay-Aba Kennedy,
Ph.D., MBA, RYT, CHHC

seva sightings

The Wellness Initiative Enriches Life for Colorado Kids

Colorado's Wellness Initiative is helping to make yoga a part of the daily routine for students from Kindergarten through high school. The mission for this innovative non-profit organization is to "improve the physical, mental and emotional health of children and young adults through integrated yoga, nutrition and stress reduction wellness programs."

Founded in January 2006, TWI has come a long way in just two years thanks to the vision of its founder and executive director, RYT Debbie Huttner. She is certified in Yoga Ed, Yoga Kids and Radiant Child Yoga. Debbie can't do it all alone though and she is supported by Deputy Director Jennifer Wert, over a dozen enthusiastic teachers and a board of directors and advisory board composed to outstanding yoga teachers and community leaders.

Using the Yoga Ed curriculum, TWI offers classes for more than 800 students in three school districts, through the YWCA and the I Have a Dream Foundation, among others. About 70% of classes are included in the school day for class credit while 30% are after-school programs.

Jennifer said the yoga classes are designed to compliment existing athletic programs and to address the needs of the whole child. The Yoga Ed curriculum offers benefits for all of the children, regardless of their physical or mental abilities.

Classes increase concentration, flexibility, coordination and teamwork – a combination that helps the kids to succeed in not only in academics but also team sports, relationships and decision making.

The stress-reduction classes focus on using a variety of breathing techniques. The training allows the students to use the techniques on their own to better channel their energy and to practice mindfulness. Students are able to use what they have learned to help them with everyday issues such as test taking and conflict resolution.

On the nutrition front the kids learn about foods and what will best fuel their growing bodies. TWI is hoping that the training will help to stem the rising tide of childhood obesity and diabetes.



Veteran chair yoga instructor Lakshmi Voelker, RYT 500, leads one of her regular classes for seniors in Palm Desert, CA. Photo by Susan Evans. Provided by Lakshmi Voelker.

Just 20 minutes of deep relaxation with a focus on breathing can vastly improve mental attitude. "My yoga keeps me motivated," said one senior. "It helps me want to go further and do more."

Yoga Alliance would like to hear from you about your experiences in working with seniors. What are the rewards and pitfalls you have encountered? What advice can you share with teachers who are just beginning to work with seniors? What style or techniques have you found most effective?

Please share your comments at share@yogaalliance.org. We'll share the results with you in a future issue of *Yoga Matters*. We look forward to hearing from you.



Call for Wisdom

Add your wisdom to our Yoga Alliance library. We are continuing to build our library for both our website and *Yoga Matters*. You can help by sharing tips and information to help others become better yoga practitioners, teachers and business people.

Our photo library also is growing and, as always, we welcome your photo contributions as well. Please remember that a professional photo is not required for any submission.