

The **MENTAL** & **PHYSICAL** Benefits

of **YOGA** for Children

by Ally Ford



As a busy mom with two teenagers, I continue to notice and grow concerned about the heightened stress they face in this ever-changing world. A study by the American Psychological Association reported that stress levels in teens rival that of adults, where teens reported their stress level was 5.8 on a 10-point scale, compared to adults who said their stress level was at a 5.1. Naturally, I am seeking tips and tools to share with my children to help them stay balanced, centered and healthy. One of the go-to tools I encourage my children to practice is yoga.

YOGA AND MINDFULNESS

Oftentimes, when people hear the word yoga, the first thing they think of is flexibility. However, yoga is more than just “stretching.” Yoga encompasses a multitude of practices that address health, body and mind. The benefits of mindfulness practices like yoga for humans in general – and especially for children – are numerous:

- Stress relief
- Increased focus
- Reduced feelings of stress and anxiety
- Increased feelings of emotional well-being
- Better sleep
- Better physical health
- Increased strength

For these reasons, more parents and schools have started incorporating yoga into their daily routines.

THE **PHYSICAL** BENEFITS OF YOGA

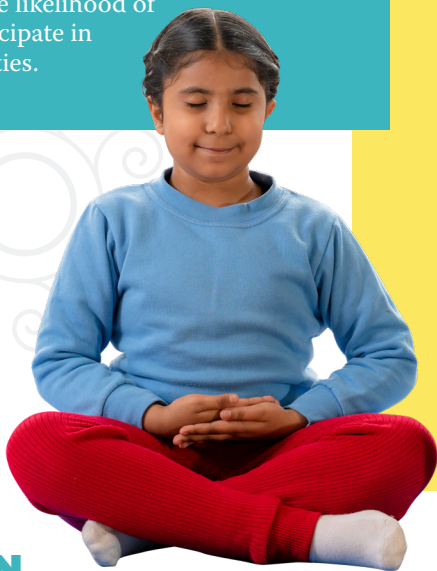
Yoga includes physical poses or postures combined with a deep, controlled breath. These two components together are what make yoga exercise unique. From a physical standpoint, the poses can range from extremely relaxing to extremely challenging and can increase physical strength and flexibility.

Physical Strength

Yoga can focus on poses that realign the spine by re-educating our awareness of correct posture. These exercises are usually defined as more relaxing, but can help immensely in straightening your back. The more physically difficult yoga poses are those which build immense strength as we support the weight of our body on one leg, or solely on our arms. Many yoga poses also help strengthen the core.

Flexibility

At the opposite end of the spectrum, yoga helps increase flexibility over time, with poses that keep the body bending and stretching in new ways. By increasing your flexibility, yoga can also increase your range of motion and improve circulation into and through joints and muscles. Yoga is also one of the only exercises with a focus on exercises for the back, designed to improve the strength of the spine. A relatively healthy level of flexibility in the body helps decrease the likelihood of injury as children participate in other sports and activities.



CONCLUSION

I know from personal experience that yoga and other mindfulness practices like meditation and slow, deep breathing can be immensely helpful in keeping a calm demeanor and clear mind, especially during stressful times.

If you are interested in resources for your children, there are a number of free online resources that are available today. You can also reach out to your local yoga teachers and studios for support. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "The only thing that is constant is change," and as a parent, I feel one of the best gifts I can give my children is a technique that helps them feel rooted in today's rapidly changing world.

About the Author:

Ally Ford is a veteran yoga teacher of over 20 years and the author of a yoga book for kids called "Garuda, The Eagle Who Soared With Ahimsa," available on Amazon. She lives in Florida with her two children, husband, golden retriever and an adopted shelter cat. For more information, follow her on Instagram @AllyFordYoga.

THE **MENTAL** BENEFITS OF YOGA

One of my favorite things about yoga, especially when doing it with children, is that it benefits them both mentally and physically.

As children are growing and going through different stages of life, it's important they take time to focus on their mental health and learn concentration, acceptance and awareness.

Concentration

Methodical yoga movements combined with controlled breathing require a lot of concentration, and this is where incredible transformation becomes possible. Kids may not realize that while moving and breathing in this specialized way, they are actually also training their mind to focus in the moment on the activity at hand, and this by definition is mindfulness.

Mindfulness involves training the mind to single-task instead of multi-task, helping children develop the ability to hold their concentration on activities for longer periods of time. A growing body of evidence shows that mindfulness has a number of positive effects on reducing feelings of stress.

Acceptance

However, there is another important component of mindfulness built into yoga, and that is a certain attitude – one of acceptance and non-judgment. Yoga teaches kids to try their best and release thoughts of perfection that they may push on themselves. Yoga encourages kids to instead practice acceptance and get in touch with their emotions.

As this acceptance develops, children learn to redirect negative thoughts into positive thoughts, an incredible skill to thread into every aspect of life which can be immensely helpful for school, personal life, and even the choices kids make around food.

Awareness

Yoga helps kids develop an immense awareness of themselves. Kids can become aware of how they feel emotionally and physically as well as how food makes them feel. Yoga can help kids realize how different foods affect their energy levels and become more in tune with feelings of fullness and hunger. This heightened awareness can help increase self-regulation, which can help reduce obesity in children and increase health.