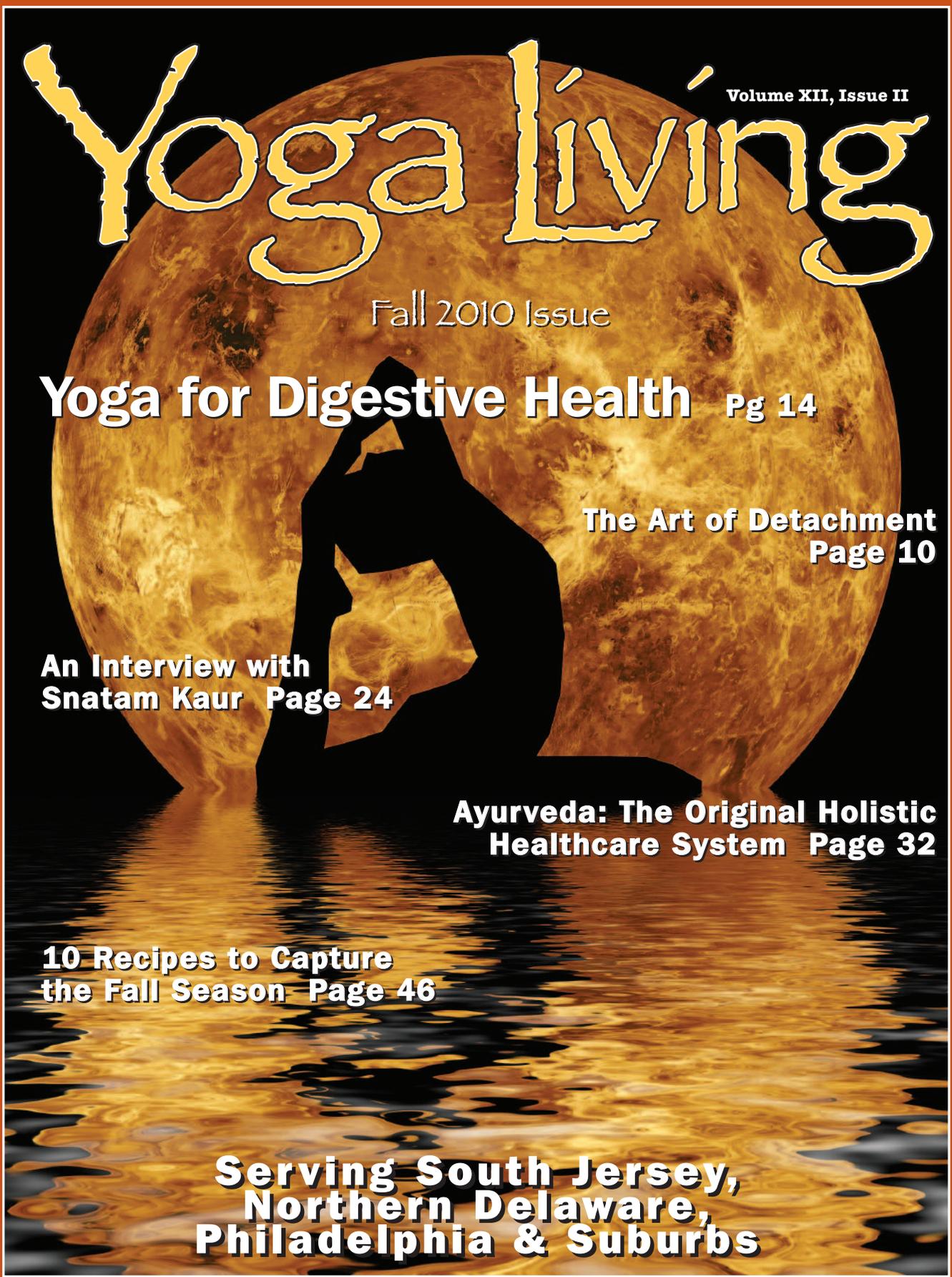


Yoga Living



Volume XII, Issue II

Fall 2010 Issue

Yoga for Digestive Health Pg 14

The Art of Detachment
Page 10

An Interview with
Snatam Kaur Page 24

Ayurveda: The Original Holistic
Healthcare System Page 32

10 Recipes to Capture
the Fall Season Page 46

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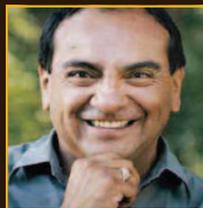
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Local Resources for Healthy Living!

Fall 2010

7 | **Contributors**

8 | **Editorial**

By Dr. Bob Butera

Yoga Theory

10 | **The Art of Detachment**

Ekknath Easwaran

14 | **Yoga Therapy for Digestive Health**

By Kristen Butera

20 | **Breast Cancer Prevention & Recovery**

By Christy Selfridge

22 | **Book Reviews**

24 | **An Interview with Snatam Kaur**



ADVERTISERS ISSUE DEADLINE:

Winter 2011

DECEMBER 1 2010

Psychology & Health

28 | **Caring for Our Species by Caring for Others and Our Planet**

By Michael Cheikin

32 | **Ayurveda: The Original Holistic Healthcare System**

By Lynda Lyng

34 | **After the Relationship Is Done**

By Joe White

36 | **Coach Thyself: Peak Intellect?**

By Michael Reddy, Ph.D.

Healthy Family

38 | **Actor and Avatar**

By Anthony Michael Rubbo

46 & 48 | **Savoring the Fall Harvest: 10 Recipes to Capture the Season**

By Kristen Butera

**YOGA =
SELF-TRANSFORMATION**

Delaware and S. Jersey

50 | **Delaware Section**

52 | **South Jersey Section**

Directories

40-42 | **Holistic Resource Directory**

43 | **Green Business Directory**
Look up businesses that support the environment

44 | **Holistic Shop Directory**

52-55 | **Yoga Directory:**
Local places by county for study/classes

56 | **Advertisers Directory**

Our listings help you find holistic practitioners for all your needs.

Events

57 | **Events Listings**

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Ayurveda: The Original Holistic Healthcare System
page 32



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Breast Cancer Prevention & Recovery
page 20



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Yoga Therapy for Digestive Health
page 14
Savoring the Fall Harvest
page 46



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After the Relationship Is Done
page 34

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(1910–1999) is known and respected around the world as a teacher and author of books on yoga, passage meditation, and spirituality. He came to the US in 1959 as a Fulbright scholar and founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in 1961. His work is carried forward through publications and programs offered in Tomales, California, and other locations around the US. To learn more, visit www.easwaran.org.

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The Art of Detachment
page 10



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Caring for Our Species by Caring for Others and Our Planet
page 28



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Actor and Avatar
page 38



Michael Reddy >> | PH.D CPC, ELI-MP

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Coach Thyself: Peak Intellect?
page 36

Letter From the Publisher



“The secret of health for both the mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, or not to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.”

- The Buddha

The psychology of Yoga teaches that the majority of human suffering is caused by the resistance to the truth that everything changes. We tend to get attached very easily and because of those attachments, resist the truth of change even though the evidence of it is all around us. Each day changes as the sun travels across the sky, the seasons change and with them we change in so many different ways. Are you the same person that you were five years ago? Probably not!

This concept of change is difficult because of the pain that comes along with it. As things change, we are forced to adjust to new situations that bring with them challenge and discomfort. At night, we have to be kept warm; our bodies feel hungry in just hours after eating. Hunger for those who have plenty of food is not a big pain, but imagine the pain associated with not having enough food. Take this change to more substantial issues like our body aging. Ultimately, death is the biggest change that we fear and avoid facing.

Conversely, change can be exciting and create an abundance of anticipation, such as new job or love interest or first signs of the leaves changing color in early Fall. In this case, the anticipation brings potential expectations that lead to inevitable disappointment as things continue to change in ways that we could not originally envision.

Yoga philosophy tells us that the key to a balanced mind and a happy life is to expect change versus trying to resist it. The popular line, “go with the flow,” has its roots in ancient philosophers. Human beings have been coping with changes since the beginning of time. One key way to understand the nature of change is to examine the things that are changing in your life and simply pay attention to the transitions. Notice your emotions, your excitements and your sadness. Don’t rush to get over change, simply savor life as it is. Try to not live in the past or dream about the future, but observe the changes as they happen and come into the beauty of living in the present moment.

Practice going with the flow as we change from warm Fall days of late September into the cooler days of early December!

Enjoy the journey,

Bob Butera, PhD, Yoga Living Publisher, Director of the YogaLife Institute in Devon, PA, writer, and national trainer of Yoga Teachers

Yoga Living

Your Healthy Lifestyle Guide

ON
TRANSFORMATION

Fall 2010

Volume XI, Issue VII



Publisher

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Partners Press, Oaks, PA

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Partners Press, Oaks, PA

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Published by:

YOGALIFE INSTITUTE, INC.

821 W. Lancaster Avenue
Wayne, PA 19087

610-688-7030

www.yogalivingmagazine.com



Yoga Living, Your Healthy Lifestyle Guide, promotes the field of Yoga as a healthy lifestyle. The practice of a Traditional Yoga program includes each facet of life. This magazine introduces readers to resources for healthy living. Please share your copy of *Yoga Living* with your friends. Contact us at 610-688-7030 or at info@yogalivingmagazine.com. Advertisers go to www.yogalivingmagazine.com for a media kit.

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The Art of Detachment

WHEN SCIENTISTS BEGAN CONTEMPLATING THE CONQUEST OF SPACE, the first problem they encountered – a problem that had to be solved before they could make any headway at all – was how to get beyond the pull of the earth’s gravity. A rocket has to build up a speed of twenty-five thousand miles per hour to escape this pull, and engineers quickly ran into a kind of “catch-22”: to attain this speed, an ordinary rocket would have to be so large that its sheer weight would never allow it to escape the pull of gravity.

Yet the human spirit delights in overcoming obstacles. Undaunted, scientists finally came up with the idea of a multistage rocket, with one or more independent boosters attached. Each booster holds fuel, which it burns in one great leap upward. As soon as its fuel is expended, its job is done and the booster is dropped, freeing the spacecraft from the burden of its great weight.

Exploring inner space confronts us with a similar problem. What makes it so difficult to turn inward in meditation is the pull of objects and experiences outside us, the attraction of the physical world. Even memories, anxieties, plans, and so on draw their power from experiences of the senses: things we have felt, seen, heard, smelled, or tasted, which we want (or fear) to experience again.

This attraction is only natural, and there is nothing inherently wrong in it – just as gravity is natural, and there is nothing wrong with staying on earth. Problems arise only when we want more: new worlds to explore, a higher reality. Then we discover that the pull of our body, our senses, and our private, personal satisfactions is what keeps us earthbound, preventing us from soaring to those heights where we can look back and see that all of existence is one indivisible whole.

To rise above this pull, we have to build up a great deal of momentum. Just as in launching a rocket, immense power is required. But where are we to get such power? Space scientists can experiment with explosive mixtures such as liquid hydrogen and oxygen, but what do we use as human beings? The mystics give the answer: the power that drives a human being is desire. Our desires are our fuel.

I am full of admiration for the world’s astronauts, who undergo such arduous training in their desire to go where no one has gone before. That desire is so great that it overrides all lesser predilections. For the sake of a few days in outer space and the thrill of seeing the earth floating free in a sea of stars, they are willing to learn all kinds of strange new skills and put up with endless deprivations.

To reach our true Self, called the Atman in Sanskrit, shining like the full moon in the depths of consciousness, requires the same measure of dedication and training – and here, too, the secret is desire. If it is the power of our personal desires that keeps us earthbound, it is that same power, when released and

harnessed, that will provide the fuel to launch us into higher consciousness.

To apply this we too need a booster rocket strategy, and the mystics of all religions have given us one, based on their own personal experience. In English it is called detachment: the art of withdrawing desire from lesser things, letting them fall away, so as to harness their power to reach the heights of what a human being can attain.

LIFE AT ITS FULLEST

This journey brings an overflowing, ever-present sense of joy. The Buddha, who almost never talked about himself, once admitted quietly, “I am the happiest of mortals. There is no one happier than



continued on page 12

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I am.” This is the joy for which every one of us is born. Not tuppenny-ha’penny pleasures, not tinsel delights or costume jewelry, but a jewel that is beyond price: the jewel hidden in the very depths of our hearts.

Detachment not only releases joy; it is also the secret of health. It is the best medical insurance in the world, and not only because it can keep us free from physical habits that sap our vitality. Most illness has a serious emotional element. While there is an important place for physical measures in the treatment of disease, a mind at peace and a heart flooded with love can release healing powers that strengthen and revitalize the physical system. Strength can be regained even after years of emotional instability. In extreme cases, I believe, recovery can be brought about even from what seems a terminal illness.

Today, of course, it is widely appreciated that because of advances in medical knowledge, we can expect to live much longer than was reasonable at the beginning of the twentieth century. But we can lead lives that are not only longer but richer, more loving, and more productive. The next steps in stretching the limits of human health and longevity, I believe, will not be in biotechnology. They will come from learning to govern the way we think and feel. Detachment is a longevity skill. Freedom from compulsive emotional entanglements is the best insurance against stress. More than that, by opening a window onto a fuller, loftier view of life than that dictated by self-interest, detachment brings a sense of purpose. Without a reason for living, the human being withers and dies inside. However paradoxical it may sound, it is detachment that enables us to give ourselves wholeheartedly to worthwhile work without ever getting depressed, despondent, or burned out – right into the last days of our lives.

Most people who work hard – which means most men and women in this country – bring their work home with them, yapping like a poodle at their heels. At the dinner table, when they sit thinking about their deadlines and responsibilities, the poodle is nestled under the chair, whining away. They curl up with it at night and dream about reports that haven’t been filed, statistics that don’t point to the right conclusions, mail that hasn’t been responded to or that has been sent out with the wrong memo attached. Detachment gives us

the capacity to concentrate completely while on the job and to drop our work completely when we walk out the door.

A detached worker is a reliable worker, a cheerful worker, a harmonious worker. And when you can drop your work completely at the end of the day, you arrive home ready to give all your love to your family and friends. You feel fresh, relaxed. You have no need to give vent to the kind of frustration that millions of good people air: “Leave me alone. I’ve had a misera-ble day!” Mahatma Gandhi worked fifteen hours a day for fifty years for all of us who want a politically free world. When he was asked, “Don’t you want a vacation, Mr. Gandhi?” he said quietly, “I’m always on vacation.” It wasn’t a flippant reply; he meant every word of it. So don’t content yourself with two weeks in July or two weeks at a ski resort in January. You deserve three hundred and sixty-five days of vacation, and that is exactly what detachment can give you.

Detachment brings this kind of protection at every stage of life. Many of the physical problems associated with old age, for example, are not at all a necessary part of aging. The fact that they are common does not mean they are inevitable. Not only senility but even certain physical problems may well have more to do with life-style and thought-style than with changes triggered by some biological clock.

As researchers have observed, we have focused so much on “ordinary aging” – what happens to the majority – that we have ignored “successful aging,” which we can observe in men and women like Mahatma Gandhi, George Bernard Shaw, and Mother Teresa, who grow in wisdom and vitality right into the last days of a long, creative, fulfilling life. I grant you that in the evening of your life you may not be able to compete successfully on Centre Court at Wimbledon. But every one of us can enjoy the vitality, resourcefulness, and unerring judgment that come from a heart full of love and a vast reservoir of experience. ▲

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“Food is, verily, the first among all that is created, therefore it is said to be the medicine for all. One who meditates on food as Brahman, surely obtains all food.” - Taittiriya Upanishad, 2:1

HAVE YOU EVER “CHOKED” IN A PRESSURE FILLED SITUATION, MADE A “GUT-WRENCHING” DECISION OR FELT NERVOUS “BUTTERFLIES” BEFORE SPEAKING IN FRONT OF A LARGE GROUP? If so, then you have had first-hand experience of some of the effects that a short bout of stress can have on the digestive system.

Ancient yogis understood that good digestion is key to radiant health and sought to understand the mind-body connection. Yoga therapists tend to view the digestive system as a very sensitive mirror of the mind and will encourage a client with digestive issues to examine overall lifestyle choices, emotions and other mental components in the healing process. Think of it like this - the mind is like a sea, the body is the land and their sphere of interaction is the shore. When the mind is peaceful and relaxed, the sea is calm. When the mind is troubled or stressed the sea become turbulent and waves beat against the shore, tearing away large sections of the land. This is the psychosomatic process that can result in digestive distress and disease in the body. Some common examples of the effects of stress on the digestive system include esophagus spasms, indigestion, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, stomach ulcers, celiacs disease, irritable bowel syndrome as well as other more severe digestive ailments.

When a human being is under stress, the body activates what we have come to know as the "flight or fight" response in the central nervous system. In a matter of seconds, most of the blood in the body gets shunted out from the digestive system and into the major muscle groups. This has a negative impact on the contractions of the digestive muscles that help move food through the body as well as the fluids and secretions that are needed for healthy digestion. While this particular response mechanism works well for a person who is in immediate danger and needs to run (like a caveman saving himself from a large predator) it also necessitates a period of relaxation and recovery afterwards. The unfortunate plight of many people is that they live in a constant state of stress and do not allow enough time for self-care and relaxation. The body does not know how to distinguish the stress of running from the proverbial tiger from the stress of a big meeting at work, a difficult family situation or even watching a scary movie – it all has the same impact. The modern American lifestyle is so jammed packed with activity that just getting out the door to scheduled “recreational” activities can be stressful.

How Yoga Poses Help

Yoga poses work on the soft tissues of the body, like a hand gently squeezing a sponge. When the organs of the digestive system are compressed in poses, stale and waste-bearing fluids in those areas are encouraged out of the tissues. Once these materials are freed up, the body is better able to eliminate them. When an area is opened or stretched out in a yoga pose, new life-giving nutrients are able to circulate into the cells. In this systematic way, yoga poses massage the vital organs associated with the digestive system, stimulate the digestive muscles and increase the wave like movements in the body that are known as Peristalsis. Yogic breathing exercises send oxygen deep into the cells of the body and help it to absorb nutrients and excrete waste products thoroughly. In essence, all of the tools of Yoga work together to reduce the stress response, rebalance the autonomic nervous system and create a powerful relaxation response that allows the healing functions of the parasympathetic nervous system to occur.

The Digestive System – A Brief Overview

The digestive tract is a series of hollow organs joined in a long, twisting tube that includes the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum and anus. Organs that help with digestion, but are not part of the digestive tract include the tongue, saliva glands, pancreas, liver and gallbladder. Parts of other organ systems, such as the nerves and blood also play a major role in the digestive process.

The chief goal of the digestive system is to break down huge macromolecules (proteins, fats and starch) which cannot be absorbed intact, into smaller molecules (amino acids, fatty acids and glucose) that can be absorbed across the wall of the tube and into the circulatory system for dissemination throughout the body. The process begins in the mouth, where food and liquids are taken in and is completed in the small intestine. There are four basic steps in the process:

- **Mastication/Ingestion:** taking in and chewing/mixing of food. Chewing food properly is important, as the enzymes in the saliva start the process of the food breaking down.
- **Digestion:** the movement of food through the digestive track in combination with a chemical breakdown of large molecules of food into smaller molecules.
- **Absorption:** nutrients become available to all cells in the body and are utilized by the body cells in metabolism.
- **Elimination:** the removal of indigestible waste in the form of urine or feces.

Better Food Choices for Better Digestion

One of the ways that Yoga contributes to healthy digestion is that the practitioner develops better observation skills along with the ability to slow down eating habits and make healthier food choices. People seeking a positive quality of mind, relaxation and good digestive health will naturally choose foods that give

continued on page 16



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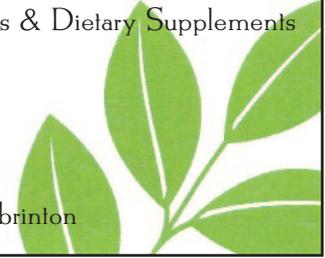
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rise to a sense of balance and harmony. The optimal diet will vary from person to person, and Yoga practices offer a way for individuals to engage in the self-discovery process and better understand the relationship between food choices and mental/physical well being.

Eating as a Meditative Practice

Come to the table relaxed and with awareness, and practice deep breathing to become more relaxed before eating if necessary. As you eat, remain aware of the body, breath and mind. Imagine sitting at the table with a favorite deity or great spiritual teacher. Stay mindful of posture and keep the spine long. Try not to cross the legs so fluids and energy can flow freely into the abdomen. Remain fully aware of the process of chewing and swallowing. Each taste, temperature and texture can be fully experienced. Once the meal is complete, remain aware that food has passed down into the stomach and the digestive process is underway.



Meditation for Digestion:

Sit in Heros pose or Easy pose and visualize the digestive tract in the abdomen, becoming fully aware of all of its movements and sensations. Use any knowledge of anatomy to visualize an ideal digestion in progress in the body. Focus on the natural rhythm of the breath in the abdomen. Utilize the visual of the sun resting

at navel center and radiating digestive power. Feel its warmth digesting the food and sending prana out to different parts of the body. Stay seated and aware for 5 – 10 min.

Yoga Breathing Exercises for Digestive Health:

Abdominal Breathing: This breath stimulates peristalsis and relaxes the abdomen. It can be performed seated, laying down or standing. Close the mouth with the inhalation, slow down the intake of breath and direct it down into the abdomen, expanding the belly out like a balloon. With an exhalation, prolong the release of air through the nose and relax the belly back towards the spine. After some practice, count the length of the inhalation and exhalation and bring them to an equal count. Repeat 10 – 20x. As practice progresses, lengthen the count of both. Practice this breath on its own or in a yoga pose practice session.

YOGA POSES FOR MAINTAINING DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Knees to Chest

From a reclining position, gently bend the knees and bring the hands to the back of the thighs or in front to the shins. With an exhalation, draw them in towards the body and focus on the abdominal breath. Hold 30 sec - 2 min.



Cat/Cow

From all fours, bring the hands under the shoulders and the knees under the hips. With an inhalation drop the belly down and tilt the tailbone upward, gently arching the low back as the heart, throat and gaze open slightly upward. With the exhalation, tuck the

tailbone under, round the upper back as the hands press into the mat to help spread the shoulder blades open and relax the head and neck. Repeat the movements with the breath, 10 – 20x.



Downward Facing Dog

From a table position, walk the hands out in front of the shoulders and spread the fingers and palms wide. Gently lift the knees off the earth a couple of inches. Keep the knees bent, press the chest back towards the thighs, draw the shoulder blades back and down the body and bring the belly button back towards the spine. Walk out the legs for a bit until the body is able to sink both heels down towards the earth. Breathe and hold 1 – 3 min.

Flowing Standing Forward Fold

From downward dog, walk the feet up to meet the hands and bring the body into a standing forward fold with the feet hips distance apart. Extend the arms long by the ears and engage the lower abdomen. With an inhalation and



a long flat back, lift the arms and torso and reach up and out of the lower back into Arching Mountain. With an exhalation fold forward and bring the hands to rest on the front of the shins or thighs. Inhale halfway up into a flat back and exhale fold forward. Repeat the combination of movements 2 – 5x. Finish with a prolonged forward fold and hold 30 sec – 1 min.

Squat with Ashwini Mudra

Widen the standing position to about mats distance apart and turn the toes out to point at approximately 11 and 1 on a clock. With an exhalation, bend the knees and bring the buttocks down towards the earth. If the heels will not comfortably come to the floor, tuck a folded blanket or pillow underneath them and rest into the support. Press palms together to aid the elbows as they gently encourage the groin to open. Practice *Ashwini Mudra* (Horse Seal) while holding the pose by gently contracting the sphincter muscles of the anus with the inhalation and relaxing them on the exhalation. Hold 30 sec – 2 min.



Note: If the knees are injured or will simply not sustain a squat, gently sit back onto the buttocks, turn the feet out, bring the hands to the ankles and use the arms to encourage the groin to open.

continued on page 18