

Are You Too Busy to Take Care of Your Health?

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Most Americans are busier today than ever before in history. We work longer hours than nearly all other industrialized countries in the world. We also travel more hours to and from the job. Furthermore, those who choose to stay at home, including homemakers and caregivers, have much more on their shoulders, too.

What is the consequence of this predicament? Studies show that overwork increases the rate of hospitalization twice as much as for those who have lighter workloads. Researchers attribute heart attacks; high blood pressure; lung, back, neck, and shoulder problems; and even violence to the stress of this overly-busy lifestyle so many of us have taken on today.

Another serious consequence of being overworked is that we usually feel that we do not have the luxury to take time for our own health. But our health is not a luxury; it is a ***necessity***. If we lose our health, we lose too much. A Spanish proverb states: "One who is too busy to take care of his health is like a mechanic too busy to take care of his tools." Consider what happens if you are too busy to maintain your car. Eventually the car breaks down. You get nowhere, and you might even get into an accident. The same goes for neglecting your health: you would be endangering yourself and possibly those around you.

The things you are responsible for in your life are very important. I do not suggest that you should ignore them. What I do suggest though, is that you need not ignore your health, and you can do something daily that will make a powerful impact on your health.

For decades I have explored and studied many different regimens for health maintenance, and none compares to that of yoga. Yoga brings the most long-lasting benefits while requiring the least amount of time. A little bit can go a long way.

As a cautionary note, the yoga I write about here (*hatha* yoga) includes any style of yoga that is gentle and appropriate for a wide variety of people and taught by experienced, well-trained teachers. It is best to shop for a class and teacher that best suits you. Certain styles of yoga can be inappropriate for some of us. The National Yoga Alliance (<http://www.yogaalliance.org/>) maintains a list of registered yoga teachers who comply with minimum standards. [*This could be a footnote.*]

The main benefits of yoga include improved physical health and a greater sense of well-being, along with being able to think more clearly and to enjoy peace of mind. These latter mental benefits are not trivial, as our state of mind undoubtedly affects our physical health. Our mental condition also affects our ability to "downshift" or put on the brakes when we need to recuperate, refuel, or maintain our bodies — and that is something so vitally needed in the frantic pace of living today. It is all too easy just to keep spinning out of control, only to have an accident or serious illness bring us to a stop!

The style of yoga I teach, called Svaroopa® yoga, can release muscle tension and decompress the spine. In contrast, in other styles of yoga and forms of exercise, we knowingly or unknowingly tense muscles and compress our spine. Our yoga classes are carefully choreographed to release tension in the muscles connected to your spine, from your tailbone progressively all the way to the neck. In a few minutes, you feel genuinely more alive. You feel and look younger and healthier, and you have more strength and stamina, even though you did not exercise in the traditional sense.

One might ask how strength follows from such an easy, gentle practice? Tight muscles are weak muscles. When you release the tension, the muscles lengthen and blood-flow increases to the muscles, bringing them more mobility and power.

Besides releasing tension and improving your circulation, yoga practice strengthens your heart, increases your lung capacity and oxygen utilization, and improves the mobility of your joints. It also decreases physical discomfort and pain. With these benefits, you feel less stressed and more energized, joyful, kind, loving, and understanding. Not only do you enjoy your yoga, but your friends and family enjoy you more, too!

The Author: Phil Milgrom is a yoga teacher, public speaker, wellness consultant, educator, writer, and therapist, and, along with his life-partner Nancy Nowak, co-director of The Centered Place yoga studio in Warren, MA. He has a web site at <http://www.philmilgrom.com>.

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