

FitBiz Watercooler Wellness

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GET HEART HEALTHY! – Try Yoga

Downward dog? Warrior pose? Sun salutations? These might be foreign terms to you or words you wouldn't normally associate with keeping your heart healthy, but there is growing evidence that proves yoga helps reduce the risk of heart disease. While most of us know the more active you are the better your heart health will be, we normally don't think of yoga as the exercise of choice to keep our tickers "ticking" effectively. For years, aerobic exercise has been touted for its numerous health benefits, including better mood, improved circulation, reduced blood pressure and stronger bones. But there's another form of exercise that's grabbing headlines – yoga.

While yoga is often associated with images of sitting quietly in a dark room, it is more than just closing your eyes and doing handstands. Yoga includes physical poses, breath work, and meditation and there are many different styles to choose from with each having a specific emphasis such as relaxation or body alignment.

Recently, more Americans are stepping onto the mat than ever before. One in three of us have tried yoga at least once, and nearly 36 million Americans practice yoga regularly. Many begin the practice as a holistic approach to health and wellness and now research is showing that it also may lower cardiovascular risk factors. Performing a variety of yoga poses gently stretches and exercises muscles. Deep breathing can help lower blood pressure and manage cholesterol. Mind-calming meditation, another key part of yoga, quiets the nervous system and eases stress. All of these improvements may help reduce the risk for heart disease.

Because yoga is less strenuous than many other types of exercise, it's perfect for people who might just be getting started. Consider starting with a gentle or restorative based class that focuses on slow, smooth movements and an emphasis on integrative breathing. And if you still haven't convinced yourself to step on a mat, remember that yoga IS exercise and any exercise is better than none at all.

