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EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OF YOGA FOR RUNNERS

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Abstract:-Runners are often reluctant to try yoga; their most common fear is that they are not flexible enough. Yoga is suitable for every body type. It can be started at any age regardless of physical condition, and those who are the stiffest have the most to gain. Runners, specifically, have a tremendous amount to gain from adding yoga to their fitness regimens. Runners can benefit greatly from yoga's effects on strength, flexibility and balance. Many of the problems runners face, including sore knees, tight hamstrings and lower back pain, can be resolved by practicing yoga asanas. According to Yoga Journal, regular yoga practice improves flexibility, increases muscle strength, improves joint flexibility, Balance and encourages healthy blood flow.

Keywords:physical condition , strength, flexibility and balance.

INTRODUCTION

Through flowing movements and poses, not only can you become a more balanced runner physiologically, you'll also discover a subsequent mental centering. "Yoga helps runners balance their bodies, right to left, top to bottom, and front to back to prevent injury," says Sage Rountree, a runner, triathlete, coach and author of *The Runner's Guide to Yoga*. "But the deepest benefit is in mental focus as we learn tools of endurance and breath that directly apply on the roads and tracks." With regular yoga sessions, you'll find your mind, body and soul are better prepared to take on that next workout and beyond. Let's take a closer look at the effects of yoga, both physical and mental on runners as well as benefits of yoga.

A). Physical Effects

1). Increase Flexibility and Range of Motion:- Yoga routines incorporate slow, steady flexibility exercises that are ideal for athletes. Frequent yoga training may increase flexibility, and range of motion while relieving muscle tension. Improved range of motion can often help improve performance and prevent injuries. Yoga stretches not only your muscles but all of the soft tissues of your body. That includes ligaments, tendons, and the fascia sheath that surrounds your muscles.

2. Increase Core Strength:- A strong core provides the stability, power and endurance that one needs for powering uphill's, sprinting to the finish and maintaining efficient form mile after mile. Yoga poses are all about building core strength. Many think of our core strength as only our abs but the back and pelvis are also a part of our core. A strong core improves running posture and speed.

3. Improve Balance:- Balance exercises are often overlooked by athletes, but are one of the most effective ways to correct muscle imbalance or body mechanic problems. Yoga places special attention on symmetry in the body thus it allows us to balance out the areas we are compensating in.

4. Develop Deep, Relaxed Breathing:- Deep, relaxed breathing is the foundation for reducing performance anxiety and improving concentration. Yoga will help you develop a habit of breathing correctly. Because of the deep, mindful breathing that yoga involves, lung capacity often improves. This in turn can improve sports performance and endurance through our yoga practice we become aware of our breathing patterns whether short or long active or relaxed thus we increase the amount of oxygen feeding our body and increases endurance.

5. Less stress and more calm:- With its quiet, precise movements, yoga draws your focus away from your busy, chaotic day and toward calm as you move your body through poses that require balance and concentration. Through our yoga practice we become aware of our body, breath and state of mind through the practice of stillness, breath and movement we are able to manage our nervous system and release stress.

6. Improved fitness:- With regular practice, yoga can improve balance, range of motion and strength. So if you want to become and stay physically and mentally fit, make sure your yoga practice includes a balance of poses that build strength, stamina, and flexibility, along with breath work and meditation to help develop body awareness. In particular, include a series of standing poses in your practice. Yoga also offers many other gifts. It improves your health, reduces stress, improves sleep, and often acts like a powerful therapy to help heal relationships, improve your career, and boost your overall outlook on life.

7. Better sleep:- Regular practice of yoga can help people relax making it easier to turn off at the end of the day. If you habitually do not get a good night's sleep, in addition to not feeling well or thinking clearly, chances are you are aging faster than you could be. When we sleep are body repairs on a cellular level. It removes toxins, and lends attention to sustaining us in a way that ordinarily is not possible during waking hours. (Very experienced yogis are more at rest in meditation than most are in their deepest sleep. This is one reason they tend to live so long).

B). Mental Effects

1). Mind-body:- the effects of running have significant parallels to the meditative aspects of yoga. Yoga practice teaches you to stay in tune with your body and connected to the breath. Running, especially longer distances, requires this same discipline. It is easy to see that the aware calm and in tune with your body during challenging runs. After all, running can be meditation in motion.

2). Body awareness:- as a runner, you understand your body in relation to running. Yoga demands awareness of the entire body, from head to toe and large to small muscles. As yoga students quickly discover, no part of the body is untouched by yoga. As your awareness increases through yoga, you will be able to control smaller movements of your body or even feel the movement inside your body while simply being still. This increased awareness of your body in a yoga practice will translate into being more in tune with your body while running. The signals that your body gives can lead to more enjoyable running and even injury prevention.

3). Calmness:- yoga asana practice is physically demanding and requires mindful concentration in the body. This brings a sense of calmness to the mind. Yoga classes typically include at least a few moments of sitting quietly and simply breathing. The simple act of sitting and observing the breath while eliminating the stream of thoughts that otherwise permeate our mind is the foundation of meditation. Meditation is known to produce a state of relaxation. The mind control practiced on the yoga mat can transfer to calmness and ease in running.

4). Stress reduction:- all forms of physical activity are good for relieving stress and this is particular true of yoga. The practice provides a much needed break from the source of stress. Concentrating on the movement and the breath seems to melt away the daily issues that cause stress. A yoga practice provides the mental clarity to put things into better perspective, and problems often diminish in intensity. On a physiological level, yoga stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (the branch of the nervous system involved with healing and the nourishment of the body), allowing the body and mind to heal while relieving the pressures related to the fight or flight mode.

5). Mindful eating:- yoga is a health system that encompasses far more than physical movement and breathing. The yamas and niyamas described in the yoga sutras related to universal morals and personal observances, and many of these can be applied to food. Eg:- the first yama is ahimsa or non harming, which raises the notion that what we eat should not be harmful to us or to other beings. Eg:- the first niyama is shaucha or cleanliness of body and mind which challenges us to think about the purity of our food, eliminating toxicity in our bodies and in our environment, and the effect of foods on our minds and emotions. It is not uncommon for yoga practitioners to make diet changes. This can be driven by the greater awareness instilled by the yoga philosophy, along with an overall heightened awareness of internal and external body functions. The strong mind body connection during a yoga practice, you may become more mindful of the effects your food choices have on your body and mind. There is no doubt that cleaner eating (the

reduction of junk food, animal fats and processed foods, along with the intake of more whole foods) improves health, which only compounds the positive effects of running. Additionally this is a wholesome and healthy approach if you are interested in weight loss.

BENEFITS OF YOGA FOR RUNNERS:-

Many runners experience tremendous benefits even after just one yoga class, often expressing that they feel taller, their lower backs feel better, and they have greater body awareness during runs and daily activities. Following a yoga class that focuses deeply on the hips and hamstrings, many runners are surprised at the greater fluidity and ease they feel in their stride the next time they go for a run. The following benefits of yoga are:-

1). Better running:- one of the biggest benefits of yoga for runners is better running. Yoga stretches and lengthens muscles so they become more supple and able to react during a run. This decreases muscle stiffness and increases range of motion in joints namely:- the hips, shoulders, ankles and spine. Specifically longer hamstrings and less restricted hip joint mobility create a longer and more fluid running stride. In addition the strength and length gained by the muscles help to stabilize the skeleton, resulting in faster running. A flexible joint requires less energy to move through a wider range of motion, and a flexible body creates more energy efficient movements. This results in greater ease while moving about throughout the day and potentially an improvement in athletic performance. Runs become less exhausting and more enjoyable.

2). Healing and avoiding injuries:- improved symmetry, alignment and balance through yoga prevent new injuries from occurring while healing stubborn, chronic and recurring injuries. Yoga postures help aligns the knee joint while strengthening the arches of the feet for better shock absorption. This reduces the weight bearing impact of running. Chronic lower back pain is often eliminated as increased flexibility in the hamstrings, hip flexors and muscles that attach to the pelvis relieves stress on the lumbar spine (lower back).

3). Post race recovery:- a yoga practice after racing helps to eliminate the stiffness caused by lactic acid build up in muscles tissue. Runners who attend a yoga class the day after the competition are often amazed at the speed of their recovery; they are able to go up and down the stairs without pain and stiffness in short order.

4). Pigeon Pose:- This pose stretches a lot of important muscles for runners that can be prone to injury – the gluteus, hip rotators, and the IT band. Plus, it just feels great after a long run. To get into the pose, start on your hands and knees, and then put your left knee behind your left hand and your left foot in front of your right hip. Lower yourself down, leaning forward so that you are resting on either your palms or forearms, depending on your flexibility.

5). Bridge Pose:- Have you ever found yourself hunching forward at the end of a particularly hard run? That may be because your back muscles need strengthening. Repeating this pose several times will work your gluteus and hamstrings as well as the muscles in your back, leaving you balanced and stronger for your next run. Begin lying down on your mat. Bend your knees, placing your feet directly below them. Press into your feet and slowly lift up. Hold for several breaths, and then slowly lower yourself back down, from the top of your spine down.

6). Downward-Facing Dog (or Down Dog):- This stretch feels incredible for your hamstrings. The pose will also help stabilize your shoulders. Start on your hands and knees. Spread your fingers wide and lift up so that the balls of your feet are pressed into the floor and straighten your legs. Try to align your back, neck, and arms. Try alternating the stretch between your legs by relaxing one calf at a time, while you press the opposite heel to the floor.

CONCLUSIONS:-

The numerous physical and mental benefits and effects of yoga help to broaden and round out the one dimensional aspect of running. Furthermore, with the high risk of injury related to running, practicing yoga helps runners remain healthy and maintain their running routine and actually improves their running.

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