



FABIENNE GROSSMAN, R.D., LDN, E-RYT

### **New Year- Stay Calm, Have Fun and Get Stronger!**

It is a New Year! Rather than having the same old intentions of losing weight and hitting the gym, why not look at an overall plan with the intention of having fun, achieving inner peace and becoming stronger in body and mind? Yoga is a phenomenal, fun way to improve one's mental, emotional and physical health. Yoga has various postures named after animal forms such as cobra, cat/cow, camel and rabbit, to name a few. Each of these postures resembles the animal it describes, and each helps with aligning, stretching and strengthening of the spine. In addition to bringing a smile to your face when you think of the poses' names, once you complete them, your mind is occupied with focusing on the postures, thereby negating other thoughts you may have at this time. This temporary clearing of thoughts, even for a few moments, is highly effective at calming the mind and bringing in peace.

As we get older, we may not have as much time to "play". Yoga gives us the chance to go back to our childhoods; we sit on the floor, and sometimes stand on our hands or our heads. These seemingly trivial postures are not just horse-play. These postures like easy sitting position, head stand and hand-stand all have real physical benefits for our bodies. When we sit on the floor, we are opening our hips. When we stand on our heads or hands we are reversing gravity. Inversions, having the heart higher than the head, is said to be beneficial at reversing blood and lymph flow, improving heart function and improving the immune system. With inversions that involve the legs being higher than the heart and head, the additional benefit of relieving varicose veins and edema has been reported.

Yoga also promotes practical fitness. Yoga increases flexibility by stretching the body in new ways, bringing greater range of motion to muscles and joints. Yoga is a low to no impact form of exercise, making it beneficial for those with joint or bone pain. Many yoga postures require you to support your own body weight in new ways, including balancing on one leg such as in Tree Pose or supporting yourself with your arms in Downward Facing Dog, which helps increase arm and leg strength. Through experience and research, it is clear that yoga increases strength and muscle tone, giving those who choose to practice increased lean, long muscles.



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Further, many people have shallow breathing. Our natural breathing is controlled by the Medulla Oblongata, the more primitive part of our brain; however, when we use conscious breathing, a part of every yoga practice, we activate the Cerebral Cortex, a more evolved region of the brain. Yogic breathing increases awareness of breath and some breathing exercises (*Pranayama*) within yoga help increase lung capacity, clear nasal passages and even calms the central nervous system, which has both physical and mental benefits.

Science has proven that meditating restructures the brain and trains it to concentrate, feel greater compassion, and cope better with stress. In a study published in the journal *NeuroImage* in 2009, Eileen Luders and her colleagues compared the brains of 22 meditators and 22 age-matched non-meditators and found that the meditators (who practiced a wide range of traditions and had between 5 and 46 years of meditation experience) had more gray matter in regions of the brain that are important for attention, emotion regulation, and mental flexibility. Increased gray matter typically makes an area of the brain more efficient or powerful at processing information. Luders believes that the increased gray matter in the meditators' brains should make them better at controlling their attention, managing their emotions, and making mindful choices. Current findings suggest that even meditating in small doses can profoundly influence peace of mind. <sup>1</sup>

Overall, yoga is an effective way to connect and soothe the body and mind. Yoga is also a deeply enjoyable way to become stronger and more flexible, bringing ease to the body and calmness to the mind. Make this year your best ever, have fun, bring in peace and commit to strengthening body and mind with nourishing practices of yoga and meditation.

#### About the Author:

Fabienne C. Grossman is a Registered Dietitian, Certified Yoga Instructor, Relax and Renew Trainer & Certified Ayurveda Yoga Specialist. Fabienne teaches individual and group yoga and meditation classes online and in person, as well as workshops and 200 hr RYT Training Programs and Transformative Retreats. She believes everyone can learn to feel their best and live their best life with yoga, meditation, eating well. For more information visit [www.fabiennegrossman.com](http://www.fabiennegrossman.com) or contact her by calling 954-871-5222 or emailing her at [fabyogi18@gmail.com](mailto:fabyogi18@gmail.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Luders E, Toga AW, Lepore N, Gaser C. The underlying anatomical correlates of long-term meditation: larger hippocampal and frontal volumes of gray matter. *Neuroimage*. 2009b; 45:672–678. [PMC free article] [PubMed].



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