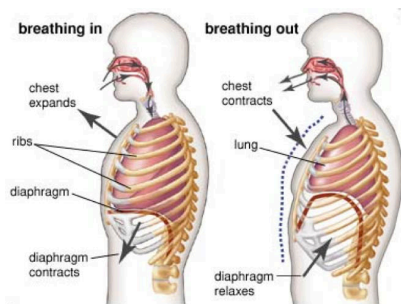


## Yoga as Emotional and Physical Therapy for Adults with DM1 or DM2 (by Leslie Krongold, Ed.D.)

I have DM1 with ~ 500 CTG repeats and I'm 50 years old. I occasionally practiced yoga before I was diagnosed in 1998 but now yoga has become a critical self-management tool. On Sunday, August 19<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 a.m., I am sponsoring an *Adaptive Yoga* class at the hotel in Sandpebble A. The instructor, Amanda Sharpe, is a trained Physical Therapist as well as an Iyengar-trained Yoga Instructor. During the class you may stay seated in a chair or wheelchair for all of the activities. If you prefer, you may bring a mat or towel to do the activities on the floor but the intention is to practice these at home while seated.

You may already be familiar with Yoga as an exercise practice but it is much more than that. Yoga was introduced as “right living” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in India and is organized into 8 areas only one of which – *asanas* – represents the body poses we’re most familiar with. There is much information about all 8 areas but for the class we’ll focus on pranayama (breath work), asana, and four combined areas representing the “meditative path.”



© 2006 Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Many health practitioners believe epidemic *shallow breathing* is responsible for anxiety, depression, fatigue, and other problems. We are often unconscious of how we breathe. By practicing pranayama, or breath work, we become more conscious of providing deeper nourishment for our body's cells. Breathing exercises can either energize or relax – different practices can quiet the mind and calm the nervous system.<sup>1</sup> Pranayama translated from the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit means “energy management” and may be thought of as a tool to support our energy, mood, and well-being.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Andrew Weil, a Harvard-trained physician equally steeped in Eastern modalities, produced a compelling audio CD, *Breathing: The Master Key to Self-Healing*, with excellent guided practice for pranayama. Slower breathing calms the nervous system.<sup>3</sup> In yoga we try to breathe through our nostrils rather than our mouth.

In her book, *Yoga for Pain Relief*, Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D., describes a sequence of poses helpful for people with chronic illness.

1. The mountain pose is grounding and helps lengthen the spine. Imagine your spine lengthening from the tailbone to the crown of the head and lift the chest.
2. Next, reach your arms overhead and stretch your hands and fingers; this is the sun pose.
3. Return to the mountain pose and inhale to the Fierce Pose by leaning your torso forward & lifting your arms.
4. Exhale and lower your torso toward your knees. Let go of unnecessary physical or mental stress.
5. The downward-facing dog pose may be the most famous yoga posture. Modifications include using a chair to stretch your hands forward while standing a few feet away. Or, while seated, stretching your arms out over a table. This pose releases tension in the legs, hips, chest, and back.



Stay down off hands in a Half Cobra

sleep disturbance.<sup>4</sup> Flowing yoga (vinyasa) such as the sun salutation is beneficial for pain. Reclining poses with supportive props, such as bolsters or blankets, are good for sleep disturbance.

There are no books or journal articles championing the practice of yoga for people with DM1 or DM2 although there is significant research about the benefits of yoga for various symptoms we experience, symptoms that are common to others with chronic health conditions. Yoga therapy has been promising for people with fibromyalgia -- a condition known to cause musculoskeletal pain and tenderness, stiffness, fatigue, and





Each yoga teacher is different and often integrates other disciplines they're familiar with into their class. Some of these are not typical yoga poses and may be something you've learned from a physical therapist as they exercise the range of motion of your joints such as shoulders or ankles. Practicing yoga enhances flexibility and thus helps with maintaining a range of motion.<sup>5</sup>

My favorite asanas are twists and they're easy to do in a seated position. Twists increase circulation to the abdominal organs, exercise the abdominal muscles, and improve digestion.<sup>6</sup> A review of research on the use of yoga in the management of irritable bowel syndrome found pranayama practice, inversions, twists, and relaxation poses to be most beneficial.<sup>7</sup> Inverted poses reverse the effects of gravity. The legs-up-the-wall pose, with the support of a pillow or rolled-up blanket for the lower back and sacrum, both revitalizes and relaxes.<sup>8</sup>



**Effortless Inverted Pose  
10 Minutes.**

Keep groins down. Do not slide away from wall. Feel opening of abdomen and chest. Draw shoulders towards bolster. Rest completely.

Most yoga classes end with the relaxation, or corpse, pose. The body gradually relaxes as the racing mind also begins to slow down. Generally this position is done with the entire body stretched out flatly on a yoga mat but bolsters can be used for support. Some yoga teachers will lead a class through a body scanning process with each body section gradually relaxing from toes to the head.

Returning to the eight different yogic areas, I mentioned the final four all deal with meditation. The previous four are meant to prepare for meditation as well. Yoga is meant to bring the body, mind, and senses to a balance that positively impacts the nervous system.<sup>9</sup> There are many ways to meditate and no one way is the correct way. Some tools people use to meditate include the use of sound whether listening to pre-recorded music or chanting, the use of imagery or a guided visualization, gazing at an object such as a candle or flower, or focusing on the breath. Meditation postures include sitting, walking, standing, or reclining.

Are you ready to begin practicing yoga to help ease both physical and emotional stress?

Please join me on Sunday at 10:30 a.m. for the Adaptive Yoga class at the hotel. Once you return home perhaps you can seek out gentle yoga classes in your community. There are so many different types of yoga classes but some of the key words I look for are: *gentle*, *adaptive*, or *accessible*. Some hospitals even have yoga programs for people with chronic health conditions. It's hard to start your own yoga practice and remain disciplined; that's why I've identified several classes in my community. I enjoy the social aspect of being in a class with other like-minded people. When you attend a class please let the instructor know about any of your limitations but it's always your responsibility to not push yourself to do poses that hurt. One of the beauties of yoga is its noncompetitive nature.



**Corpse Pose 10 minutes.**

Place blanket under neck and head. Extend trunk, arms and legs prior to relaxing them. Turn upper arms out, palms up. Quiet mind and breath.

<sup>1</sup>Timothy McCall, M.D., *Yoga as Medicine: The Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D., *Yoga for Pain Relief: Simple Practices to Calm Your Mind & Heal Your Chronic Pain* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2009)

<sup>3</sup>Timothy McCall, M.D., *Yoga as Medicine: The Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Janet Hennard, MA, RYT-500, "Yoga Therapy in Practice: A Protocol and Pilot Study for Managing Fibromyalgia with Yoga and Meditation," *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* No. 21 (2011): 109.

<sup>5</sup>Juliane Vogler, MSc, Lily O'Hara, MPH, Jane Gregg, MHP, Fiona Burnell, PhD, "The Impact of a Short-Term Iyengar Yoga Program on the Health and Well-Being of Physically Inactive Older Adults," *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* No. 21 (2011): 109.

<sup>6</sup>Cynthia Worby, MSW, MPH, RYT, *The Everything Yoga Book* (Avon, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation).

<sup>7</sup>Shokufeh Tavassoli, "Research Review: Yoga in the Management of Irritable Bowel Syndrome," *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* No. 19 (2009): 97.

<sup>8</sup>Cynthia Worby, MSW, MPH, RYT, *The Everything Yoga Book* (Avon, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation).

<sup>9</sup>Mara Carrico, "Let's Meditate: A Beginner's Guide to Meditation Practice," *Yoga Journal* <<http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/141/?page=2>>