

# How Yoga Can Improve Your Life After a Stroke

By Julia Schwarz

When yoga became popular in the early 2000s, many thought it was just a passing fad. However, new yoga studios continue to open, workplaces offer classes to employees, and now hospitals even offer classes to patients. Over the years, yoga has demonstrated its ability to provide both physical and mental health benefits.

## **What is Yoga**

Yoga was developed 5000 years ago in India, and consists of different series of movements, postures, breathing and meditation techniques. Yoga can be practiced alone or in a group setting with a teacher guiding a class. The great thing about yoga is it can be adapted for anyone. Young children, professional athletes, and seniors can all benefit from yoga.

## **How It Can Improve Your Balance**

Many people struggle with balance after stroke. A disrupted sense of balance leads to a high rate of falls in stroke survivors. In order to reduce falls, as well as the injuries and anxiety they can cause, balance training is recommended for anyone struggling with it after a stroke. Yoga is one way to receive this balance training. A study performed in 2012 found that stroke survivors had improved balance, decreased fear of falling and increased independence after they attended an hour long yoga class twice a week for eight weeks [\(1\)](#).

## **How it Can Reduce Depression**

Depression is another common challenge stroke survivors face. Attending yoga classes regularly for an extended amount of time has been shown to reduce depression symptoms, improve quality of life, and optimism [\(2\)](#). The practices of deep breathing, slow movement, and meditation can help reduce stress and help those dealing with depression. Yoga is not always a replacement for therapy or medication for depression, but yoga can be a helpful addition for those trying to overcome depression.

## **What Makes It Unique**

Many people enjoy the mind-body connection that yoga offers. This feature allows participants to both physically and cognitively engage in their practice. The combination of breathing, complex movements, and strengthening in yoga is thought to improve overall body awareness, which may explain the improvements in balance. While yoga is not a “cure-all” treatment, the numerous health benefits it provides make it a great activity to try for those recovering from stroke.

## **How Can I Get Involved?**

Talk to your local yoga studio to ask if they know any certified instructors who have experience teaching people who have had a stroke or classes focused on regaining balance.

## **Sources:**

1. A. A. Schmid et al., Poststroke balance improves with yoga: a pilot study. *Stroke* 43, 2402-2407 (2012).
2. H. Cramer, R. Lauche, J. Langhorst, G. Dobos, Yoga for depression: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Depress Anxiety* 30, 1068-1083 (2013).