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In the zone: Yoga strengthens body and mind

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BY MARA KNAUB - SUN STAFF WRITER

BENEFITS OF YOGA:

- Increased balance, strength and flexibility
- Reduced stress and increased confidence
- Improved mental alertness and focus

Michael Little took his first yoga class 15 years ago.

"I was fat and out of shape. Yoga brought back my health, made me fit and taught me how to live a more relaxed, less stressful life."

Little is now a registered yoga



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Photo by Jared Dort/Yuma Sun

Stephanie Martin, with Serenity Yoga, demonstrates some quick and easy yoga stretches that one can do in their office or home to start off the day.

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Downward facing dog pose

Stephanie Martin with Serenity Yoga demonstrates a modified

downward facing dog pose that can be done with the help of a chair. Try a new pose each day this week on YumaSun.com

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Cat-cow pose in a chair

- Decreased anxiety, internal stress and depression
- Improved mood and sense of well being
- Improves learning efficiency and memory
- Increased mental range of motion in shoulders and hips
- Improved spinal alignment and reduced or alleviated back pain
- Increased energy
- Body detoxification, immune system stimulation and toning of the organs
- Improved overall posture
- Improved digestion
- Improves flow of lymphatic system
- Normalized endocrine function
- Increased bone density
- Normalized weight and body composition
- Decreased blood sugar levels
- Decreased sodium

therapist, a certified yoga instructor and has taught for the past 10 years.

"Disease, medications and suffering is rampant in our society," said Little, the new owner of Serenity Yoga. "My goal in life is to help people live a more healthy life. I do this through body movement therapy and body work. I have literally seen complete turnarounds in people's health."

He said he has seen improvements in back, knee, hip, foot, wrist, shoulder, neck and overall body pain. He's also witnessed improvements in people who suffer from arthritis, multiple sclerosis, stroke, Parkinson's, neuropathy, anxiety attacks, severe stress, grief, fibromyalgia, polymyalgia, plantar fasciitis and carpal tunnel.

"Yoga will improve all of the systems in the body such as respiratory, circulatory, nervous, lymphatic, digestion, musculoskeletal, etc.," he said.

Marie-Josée Griswold, owner of Yogamour LLC, said she believes yoga also helps people who are fit, not just those out of balance.

Recognizing that yoga might seem foreign to some people, she nevertheless encourages them to try it.

"It helps to have a teacher break things down," she added.

"Yoga can be practiced in different

 Stephanie Martin with Serenity Yoga demonstrates a series of poses she calls 'Cat-cow in a chair', combining two simple poses that can be done easily in an office or at home for a quick stretch. Find a new yoga pose each day this week on YumaSun.com


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Yoga for health


Stephanie Martin with Serenity Yoga explains how simple yoga poses can benefit anyone, stretching out muscles and relaxing the mind and body. Try a new yoga pose each day this week on YumaSun.com

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Source:
SerenityYogaYuma.com

"Yoga can be practiced in different forms based on individual goals and capacities, but benefits are based on improving our ability to breathe in yoga postures."

Griswold, who has been practicing yoga since 2000, is certified as a yoga instructor and registered through the Yoga Alliance.

She pointed out that yoga is more about "staying in the pose" versus "racing to the finish line." People go at their "own pace, own rhythm and follow through."

Yoga's slow process is especially useful for managing stress, but it also benefits the body's strength and flexibility, Griswold said.

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"Yoga provides tools to connect the mind and the body using the breath, by focusing on how we breathe and moving with the breath. Yoga provides an opportunity to open up areas of the body that normally remain tense or closed."

Griswold noted that research has proven that "yoga will help almost everything in our bodies, including our minds."

Little said he believes the body has three factors that cause disease and "dis-ease:"

- Intake — "Most notably, smoking and poor diet."
- Stress and anxiety — "Doctors estimate that over 50 percent of what they see patients for is caused by or exacerbated by stress/anxiety."
- Lack of effective body movement — "Not just exercise, but effective body movement. Most activities that people do are one-sided."

Little explained that the human body has more than 600 muscles working together.

"The problem in our society is that most people's muscle tone is imbalanced with more muscles contracting than stretching.

"We carry stress and contractions in our bodies constantly. Yoga will balance out our bodies, strengthening and lengthening our muscles to evenly balance out the body tone."

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