

Rising Sun Yoga



Introduction to Yin Yoga

By Barb Pierce

It took me about 10 years to appreciate the benefits of yin yoga. I was a power and ashtanga yoga girl - I love the movement and the strength I feel after doing a powerful style of yoga; the kind of yoga that makes you sweat and makes your muscles tremble. The only problem was that I lived all of my life this way. Everything had to be a challenge.

Last year I had the opportunity to experience yin yoga while I was in India. Halfway through the first pose, I instantly understood the attraction of yin yoga. The poses, although seemingly simple, were extremely challenging to maintain after the first minute or so. After so many years of power yoga, I had forgotten how to relax my muscles and 'sink into' the poses.

I then dove into the practice of yin, learning as much as I could about this powerful practice. The results: **in my first 9 weeks of practicing yin yoga, I had more flexibility gains than I had had in my first 9 years of power style yoga.**

YIN

still

calm

cold

YIN Yoga

YANG

moving

excited

hot

Power Yoga

What is YIN yoga?

To understand yin you also need to understand yang. Yin and yang are opposing but complementary principles. Yin is generally described by words like still, calm, cold and hidden while yang is described by words like moving, excited, hot and exposed.

All things can be described in terms of yin and yang, but more specifically, yoga can be described in terms of yin and yang. A yin style of yoga is a yoga of calmness and stillness where poses are held for 2-5 minutes (or longer). A yang style of yoga is a power or ashtanga style of yoga which is characterized by a constant flow of movement 'sprinkled' with poses which are held for 30-60 seconds. In yin style yoga, poses are held with the muscles completely relaxed. In yang style yoga, poses are held with muscles engaged.

YIN Theory - why it works

Throughout our bodies, we have connective tissue - the tissue that makes up ligaments and fascia. We already know that if we don't use our muscles, we begin to lose strength ('use it or lose it'). The same principles apply to our connective tissues - **if we don't stretch our connective tissues they will slowly become shorter to accommodate our daily activities.** We will lose the ability to bend our knees, ankles, backs, etc.; however, if we were to exercise our connective tissues the same way we exercise our muscles, we would likely end up with torn ligaments, tendons, etc.

The connective tissue can only be stressed when the

"Athletes generally don't retire because of muscle problems, they retire because of joint problems. Yin Yoga postures gently stretch and rehabilitate the connective tissues that form our joints." (from Paul Grilley, Yin Yoga - Outline of a Quiet Practice).

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surrounding muscles are fully relaxed.

When doing yang styles of yoga (like power yoga), we engage the muscles around the joints to provide stability so we don't stress the joints. When doing yin yoga, we purposely relax the muscle so that we can stress the joint in a gentle and safe way. When practicing yoga in this way, it is possible to lengthen and strengthen the connective tissues. Through yin yoga it is also possible to gently break up scar tissues and adhesions in and around the joints.

Even though I am a convert to yin yoga, I also know that there is a balance required. If

I only did yin yoga, then I would lose muscle strength. Ideally individuals will practice a combination of yang forms of exercise (i.e. power yoga, running, walking, etc.) combined with yin forms of exercise (i.e. yin yoga) on a regular basis.

Yin yoga has a secondary benefit of being a relatively easy step towards longer meditations. Yin yoga is the equivalent to a series of 5 minute meditations (while holding the postures). Even people with very active minds can be still for 5 minutes at a time.

Barb

Meridian Theory

There are thousands or millions of meridians running through the body and it is believed that these meridians are housed within the connective tissues. Yin yoga directly stimulates these tissues, and consequently stimulates and improves the flow of chi, prana or life force energy within the body.

from YIN Yoga - Outline of a Quiet Practice by Paul Grilley