

NIH video reveals the science behind yoga

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A video featuring research on how yoga works, the safety of yoga and whether yoga can help treat certain health problems is being released by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). For example, there is a growing body of evidence that yoga may be beneficial for low-back pain. However, yoga has not been found helpful for treating asthma, and studies investigating yoga for arthritis have had mixed results.

The video also spotlights a set of consumer tips to help viewers make decisions if they are interested in practicing yoga. For example:

- Yoga is generally considered to be safe in healthy people when practiced appropriately under the guidance of a well-trained instructor. However, people with high blood pressure, glaucoma, or sciatica, and women who are pregnant should modify or avoid some yoga poses.
- Everyone's body is different, and yoga postures should be modified based on individual abilities. Inform your instructor about any medical issues you have, and ask about the physical demands of yoga.
- If you're thinking about practicing yoga, be sure to talk to your [health](#) care providers. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health.

A 2007 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey reported that 13 million American adults (6 percent) used yoga in the previous year, and the number is on the rise as mind and body therapies are becoming increasingly integrated into the health care system. Due to a growing body of evidence-based research, the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society now include a number of mind and [body](#) approaches, including yoga, in their 2007 clinical practice guidelines for managing chronic low-back pain, a common and difficult-to-treat problem.

"This video provides important information on the safety and usefulness of yoga and also insights into how scientists study this commonly used health practice," said Josephine P. Briggs, M.D., director of NCCAM. "What we're seeing from our researchers — through the application of rigorous scientific methods — is evidence suggesting that yoga may help people manage certain symptoms while it may not help with others. We're also learning more about the safety of yoga, particularly when it is used in populations who are at increased risk for injury."

The video, available at nccam.nih.gov/video/yoga , highlights the work of two respected researchers in the field of yoga. George Salem, Ph.D., at the University of Southern California, uses innovative technology to examine how older adults use their muscles and joints in certain yoga postures. Karen Sherman, Ph.D., M.P.H, at Group Health Research Institute in Seattle, focuses on how [yoga](#) may be a beneficial complementary health practice for people with chronic low-back pain.

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