

Yoga linked to improved body satisfaction

November 16 2018



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Body dissatisfaction is highly prevalent among young adults and often leads to severe adverse health consequences, including disordered eating, weight gain over time and poor psychological health. To help address the problem, researchers led by Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, a professor at the

University of Minnesota School of Public Health, are exploring how yoga could help people see themselves in a better light.

In their latest study, published in the journal *Body Image*, the researchers interviewed 46 [young adults](#) who practiced [yoga](#) at least 30 minutes a week, on average, over the past year. The [adults](#) were selected from her long-running Project EAT, a multi-decade study tracking the health and wellbeing of thousands of participants beginning in adolescence.

The study found that:

- 83 percent of participants expressed that yoga has a positive impact on their body image.
- 28 percent found that the influence of yoga can also be negative.
- All but one of the respondents who indicated that yoga can have a [negative impact](#) on their body image also discussed its positive impact.

People who felt that yoga harmed their self-image mainly said it was due to comparing themselves to the physical appearance or performance of others in class.

"The results of this study give great insight into the small tweaks instructors and studios can employ to improve the positive impact of yoga on people with poor body image," said Neumark-Sztainer.

To support improved [body image](#), Neumark-Sztainer recommends that instructors and studios:

- Adjust language: encourage participants to be grateful for their bodies and what they can do.
- Make explicit efforts to invite people of all ethnicities, genders, ages, body shapes and sizes to their yoga classes.

- If mirrors are present in the studios, make sure people use them constructively—such as to check body alignment—and offer strategies to avoid negative thoughts about how they look.

Neumark-Sztainer is continuing her research into the benefits of yoga and seeking funding to explore its effects on mental health and stress reduction, as well as conducting a randomized trial to see if and how yoga can be used as an intervention to improve body satisfaction.

More information: Dianne Neumark-Sztainer et al. Yoga and body image: How do young adults practicing yoga describe its impact on their body image?, *Body Image* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.09.001)

Provided by University of Minnesota

Citation: Yoga linked to improved body satisfaction (2018, November 16) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-yoga-linked-body-satisfaction.html>

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