

Is Therapeutic Hatha Yoga A Cure for Diabetes?

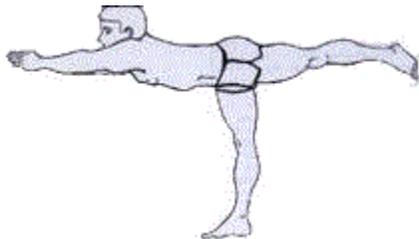
by Julian Goldstein

Diabetes kills more than 350,000 Americans every year, while slowly ravaging the bodies of its surviving victims. This year alone approximately 700,000 Americans will fall victim to their diabetic onset. For 90 percent of the roughly 14 million people who are Type II diabetics, the onset will have occurred in the prime of their lives. Diabetes causes complications such as blindness, kidney failure, stroke, heart disease, hypertension and circulatory disorders leading to amputation of toes, feet and legs -- ultimately causing premature death.

But are diabetes victims or perpetrators living lifestyles that beg for this malady to manifest itself? Having diabetes for over 28 years has given me some insight. But not until I discovered how to reverse this chronic disease did it become clear that I was not a victim of diabetes, but rather a casualty of my own lack of knowledge of how to care for my physical system properly.

You might ask, "Didn't you go to the doctor and have regular physical checkups?"

Certainly, I did. Sadly, it's not until something specific arises, a manifest symptom or negative test result, that medical science steps in. Our doctors are the best in the world when it comes to treating trauma, and curing and preventing infectious disease. Chronic diseases like diabetes, however, have everyone stumped. Our doctors are able to keep us alive only with insulin and anti-diabetic medications. Continued long-term use of these medicines, unfortunately, creates complications of their own. But what if there was a way not only to reverse diabetes, but prevent its manifestation as well?



There is a Way to Reverse Diabetes I tripped over a treatment quite by accident after having suffered a herniated disc in my lower back. Three doctors proclaimed, "Surgery!" This is a risky alternative in any case, but even more so because of my diabetes. Then I heard that regular practice of hatha yoga may help my back problem.

Of far greater benefit, I soon learned, was that performing the yoga postures daily for five months eliminated my need to take insulin or any other anti-diabetic medications! I had required 75 units of insulin daily. Insulin kept me alive, but not healthy. Hatha yoga put me back on the road to good health.

This method is a therapeutic form developed by Bikram Choudhury, a yoga master from India and my teacher. His method consists primarily of two pranayamas (breathing exercises) and 26 asanas (postures). How can yoga reverse diabetes? Isn't it just another form of exercise? Well, yes--and no. All diabetics know that daily aerobic exercise helps control blood sugar and improve circulation (poor circulation is a major complication of diabetes). Though the exact mechanics are not precisely known, exercise reduces the amount of insulin required to maintain normal blood sugar levels. For some adult onset diabetics, proper diet and exercise are all that's required to regulate normal blood sugar. But for the vast majority, oral medication or insulin injection is necessary to maintain life.

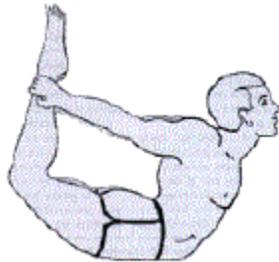


Many who at first can control blood sugar with diet and exercise find that, in later years, they also require medication.

What does hatha yoga offer that ordinary exercise doesn't? Certain postures have a therapeutic effect upon various organs and glands. Those postures that benefit the pancreas and its functions are of the greatest interest to diabetics and pre-diabetics. It is the correct application of these postures that can reverse diabetes.

Among these are the backward bending postures such as the Ardha Chandrasana (Half-Moon pose), Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose), Salabhasana (Locust Pose), Poorna Salabhasana (Full Locust Pose), Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) and Ustrasana (Camel Pose). These postures bring stimulation to the pancreas, as they exercise the erector spinae, latissimus dorsi, obliques, deep intertransversarii and posterior abdominal wall. Also, most of these postures cause the internal viscera to stretch, bringing stimulation to the pancreas and other glands and organs that otherwise receive no stimulation.

Other postures such as Dandayamana-Bibbaktapada Pashimotthanasana (Standing Separate Leg Head-to-Knee Pose), Ardha Kurmasana (Half Tortoise Pose), Sasangasana (Rabbit Pose) and Janushirasana with Pashimotthanasana (Head-to-Knee with Stretching Pose) provide stimulation and rejuvenation to the cells of the pancreas and other endocrine glands by way of compression. Compression of these glands, followed by relaxation, causes an increased volume of highly oxygenated blood to reach the cells, bringing nourishment that rejuvenates atrophied cells.



Diabetes appears to be primarily a deficiency of the pancreas. Yet our body's internal feedback system is so complex that, when modern allopathic medicine prescribes a drug for one problem, it causes a myriad of other complications, some worse than the original symptoms. Hatha yoga is a body balancing system. Its therapeutic application utilizes the body's power to generate its own medicines that have no negative side effects. Therapeutic hatha yoga may be considered as complementary medicine, adjunctive to modern allopathic medicine.

Since stress further complicates diabetes, the calmative effects of performing hatha yoga and the specific practice of Savasana (Dead Body Pose) at correct intervals also contributes to the reversal of this so-called chronic, incurable disease. And when certain other postures, such as Trikanasana (Triangle Pose), or Tuladandasana (Balancing Stick Pose) are applied in the therapeutic manner, aerobic conditioning occurs, eliminating the need for other exercise forms as therapy. Since hatha yoga improves flexibility and overall muscle tone, however, most everyone finds their overall athleticism improved. Additionally, age is no barrier. Though many diabetics find it difficult, if not almost impossible, to maintain a regular exercise regimen as they grow older, they are still able to maintain an effective therapeutic hatha yoga regimen.

The application of therapeutic hatha yoga to reverse "incurable" disease is relatively

unknown in the West, but that is changing.



Dr.

Deepak Chopra, the famous endocrinologist and author of Quantum Healing, combines Western medical technology with ayurvedic medicine. A significant part of his patients' treatment includes this form of yoga. Dr. Dean Ornish, who is famous for his radical techniques for reversing heart disease, states, "Increasing evidence indicates that medications to lower blood pressure and cholesterol prevent or reverse heart disease in only a small percentage of people. These drugs sometimes make people worse." Therapeutic hatha yoga, diet and meditation form the major part of his treatment.

If heart disease can be "reversed," "cured," "controlled," "managed without medications," etc., then why not diabetes? Dr. Phulgenda Sinha, director of the Institute of Yoga in Patna, India, and Washington D.C., and author of Yogic Cures for Chronic Diseases, states, "The yogic treatment restores the normal functioning of the pancreas and other glands of the endocrinal system. When these glands begin to function properly, the individual is fully cured of the diabetic disorders and his health is restored to normal level." Is a cure for diabetes too much to hope for? Diabetes is an age-old disease that has been treated successfully in the Eastern world by methods we in the West are just beginning to try, let alone understand. Amazing as it may seem, therapeutic hatha yoga has been shown to:

1. Control diabetes at significantly reduced insulin levels for Type I diabetics;
2. Control diabetes without any external medication for Type II diabetics;
3. Prevent and heal the ravages of the complications caused by diabetes with the body's own medicine.

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Julian Goldstein, B.S., M.S., CYT, and member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, was a certified yoga therapist who had taught therapeutic hatha yoga to diabetics at the Yoga College of India in Encino, California. He published a support group newsletter for diabetics called *Diabetic Backtalk* and was the author of the book *Diabetic Always -- Insulin no More! Or Any Other Darn Pills!* He was also the founder of the non-profit Diabetes Alternatives Foundation.