

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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REJOICE, RENEW, GROW

TEMPLE WISDOM

Yogga & Islam

NAOMI GROSSMAN
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH
Yogga

AGEING GRACEFULLY

Yogga & INTEROCEPTION

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS
SHIVAPURI BABA



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CONTENTS

ON THE COVER



76 — 26
 40 — 44
 22 — 48

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PHILOSOPHY

22 'HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE' – SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF SHIVAPURI BABA

Maintain a positive attitude: as servants of God, we can overcome every obstacle. Shivapuri Baba's teachings emphasise self-knowledge, charity, and spiritual practice.

48 HARMONISING MIND AND BODY: THE INTERPLAY OF YOGA AND INTEROCEPTION FOR HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

Yoga enhances interoceptive awareness, aiding emotional regulation and holistic well-being through mindful movement and breath.

60 THE TIMELESS PATH OF SHAMANISM: EMBRACING THE ANIMAL SELF AND SPIRIT WORLD

Shamanism guides us beyond our known world, emphasising spirit, freedom, and nature's connection to spirituality, defying conventional religious paths and societal norms.

64 WHAT IS INNER WISDOM AND HOW CAN IT HELP YOU?

Inner wisdom is our intuition, guiding us towards our highest path. It fosters love, creativity, and alignment with our true selves..

72 THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Spiritual awakening involves a shift in awareness to unseen realms, leading to healing. It's unique for each individual, honouring diverse experiences.

BWY SPECIAL

14 FIVE GAME CHANGING WAYS YOGA UNLOCKS ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE

Yoga boosts athletic performance by enhancing awareness, breath control, movement efficiency, recovery, and mindful practice, leading to transformative fitness benefits

INTERVIEW

40 NAOMI GROSSMAN: EMMY NOMINATED AHS STAR

Naomi Grossman, Emmy-nominated AHS star, shares how 25 years of yoga transformed her life, career, and mental health.

IYENGAR YOGA PAGES

08 YOGA IS FOR EVERYONE! ...BUT IS IT FOR ME?

Garth McLean's journey with Iyengar Yoga emphasises accessibility, inclusivity, and adaptive practice, transforming lives, especially those with health challenges.





FEATURES

26 FINDING SPIRITUAL HARMONY: THE INTERSECTION OF YOGA AND ISLAMIC FAITH

Essraa Nawar explores the harmony between yoga and Islam, highlighting spiritual and physical benefits, and empowering Muslim women through her #changethenarrative campaign.

32 IF YOU GO DOWN IN THE WOODS TODAY...

Children's yoga teacher Vivian Lans shares her unique 'Children's Yoga with Bear' method and book, promoting movement and mindfulness for kids.

36 FINDING CALM AMIDST THE CHAOS

Claudia Dumond explores holistic practices like breathing techniques, diet adjustments, decluttering, social connections, gentle movement, and pursuing passions for inner peace and resilience."



44 AGEING GRACEFULLY

Optimising health in later years involves a balanced diet, community engagement, mental stimulation, and avoiding harmful habits like excessive alcohol and TV.

54 COKE-AINE AND SMARTPHONES

Returning from a meditation retreat, I experienced the overstimulation of modern life through a Coke, highlighting our exaggerated responses to pleasure and pain.

76 TEMPLE WISDOM – LESSONS FROM ANCIENT TEMPLE TRADITIONS

Ancient Temples, found worldwide, are sacred spaces honouring deities and providing spiritual solace. They embody timeless wisdom, inspiring personal transformation and connection with the Divine Feminine.

YOGA DESTINATION

82 TOP UK HOTELS FOR YOGA AND WELLNESS

The Good Hotel Guide shares top UK hotels for yoga and wellness, featuring luxurious spas, scenic locations, and holistic treatments from Cornwall to Scotland.

SERIES

68 THE KUNDALINI: MEMOIRS OF A YOGI (CHAPTER 20)

A yogi's mystical journey with Kundalini power reveals profound insights, guiding him through challenges and transforming experiences with Siddhis and blessings.

READER'S ASHRAM

58 ASK YOGI MAHARAJ DR MALIK

96 VEDIC ASTROLOGY

NUTRITION

86 EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR GUT HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

For optimal gut health, adopt a whole food, plant-based diet, emphasising plant diversity to support a healthy microbiome and prevent chronic diseases.

88 GUT-FRIENDLY YOGHURT BARK RECIPE FOR A HAPPY BELLY!

NEWS

20 FILLING THE 'SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS' VOID IN HEALTH AND PASTORAL CARE

A new survey reveals unmet spiritual care needs in the UK. The SCT launches a pioneering diploma in Spiritual Coaching and Caregiving to address this gap.

WHAT'S HOT

90 NEW BOOKS, ACCESSORIES AND PRODUCTS



GAME CHANGING WAYS YOGA UNLOCKS ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE

**EVIDENCE-BASED
APPROACH TO
TRANSFORM FITNESS
POTENTIAL**

Words: Hayley Winter, BWY Tutor
and Founder of the Institute of
Yoga Sport Science® (YSS)

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Whether you're a seasoned athlete or someone looking to deepen your joy of movement, yoga offers a unique path to unlocking your athletic potential in ways you might not have imagined.

For those of you who practice yoga, or teach it, you already know how effective it can be. The benefits are numerous and transformative. As a Yoga Sports Scientist, my mission has been to prove the efficacy of yoga and deliver its benefits to athletes through bite-sized sessions.

As a British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) trained teacher, I'm delighted to partner with the BWY for an upcoming online workshop to align with a summer of high-profile sporting events. This initiative is part of BWY's ongoing campaign to reach new audiences, especially through its partnerships with Sport England and Sport Wales, to enrich lives through the transformative benefits of yoga.

This live, interactive event, titled "BWY Yoga for Sport: Online Game Changers Workshop," will take place on Saturday 10 August, from 3 to 6 pm.

In this article, I share five key evidence-based approaches from seven years of Yoga Sports Science® case study research that will be practiced and explored in next month's online workshop.

AWARENESS: UNLOCKING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM SUPERPOWER

Our journey starts with awareness, the cornerstone of yoga that sets the tone for everything else. The arrival phase in a yoga class is where tuning into the nervous system begins, not only preparing the body and mind for the session ahead but also helping you



disengage from the busyness of life before coming to class.

By focusing on sensory feedback, you can tap into what we like to call your nervous system superpower. This superpower involves understanding and feeling the subtle cues your body gives you, enhancing your physiological, biomechanical, and biochemical preparation. It's like having an internal guide that helps you optimise every movement and breath, setting the stage for peak performance.

Practice Tip: Centre and Anchor Your Nervous System

There are simple and effective techniques to centre and anchor the nervous system. One way to release the tension we might bring to class is by encouraging stomping, tapping, shaking out the limbs, and making sounds. This helps kinetic energy start flowing and invites a sense of playfulness—a great stress reliever!

The nervous system controls posture and movement, and it thrives on a

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sense of safety. The key to an effective yoga practice is to prepare the nervous system and establish a stable, foundational base of support with the ground. You can do this by gently massaging or patting the areas of your body that will be in contact with the mat, enhancing your connection and awareness.

BREATH: YOUR PERFORMANCE ADVANTAGE

Breathing might seem basic, but in the realm of sports-specific yoga, it's a performance powerhouse. Where sports-specific yoga training differs from traditional forms of yoga is in its modern-day scientific approach, as practiced at YSS. Our method is evidence-based and tailored to meet the demands of modern athletes. Over seven years of case study research demonstrates that proper breathing techniques directly impact athletic performance, a crucial aspect often overlooked in traditional training.

Each sport has its own respiratory demands. For example, the breathing pattern required for swimming is different from that needed for running. Understanding these demands is crucial for a safe and effective yoga session. By integrating breathwork into your routine, you create a stable foundation for fluid movement. Helping athletes learn how to tap into the subtlety and power of their breath provides them with a personalised breathing strategy that enhances performance.

Practice Tip: Enhance Your Breathing for Better Performance

This simple breathing technique is helpful for runners—and really for any sport! In running, there's a tendency for shoulders to rise, causing breath to be focused in the upper body. Over time, this can compromise respiratory strength and endurance.



To shift the focus to more diaphragmatic/abdominal breathing, try this:

- 1. Lie on the mat with your legs bent.**
- 2. Place a block under your head.**
- 3. Take a second block between both hands and playfully brush it side to side and around your abdomen while breathing freely. This creates sensory awareness in the area.**
- 4. Remove your hands, letting your palms face upwards, and breathe into the area where you feel the block on your belly.**

This technique helps promote deeper, more effective breathing, enhancing your overall performance.



MOVEMENT: EFFICIENT, SAFE, FLUID, AND ECONOMICAL

Movement in yoga is more than just exercise; it's a language that integrates the nervous system connecting the mind and body. Embracing a new movement vocabulary through sports-specific yoga can bring playfulness and awareness to your training. It's about moving efficiently and safely, harnessing force and control with structural integrity.

By initiating movement from the ground up and activating muscles sequentially, you generate power more effectively. This approach addresses structural imbalances that might affect your performance, ensuring that every movement is economical and purposeful. The result? Enhanced performance with the aim of minimising the risk of injury, making your athletic pursuits more enjoyable and sustainable.

Practice Tip: The Slower You Go, The Stronger You Get

My friend and colleague, Leon Taylor, an Olympic medalist in diving and co-host of the "BWY Yoga for Sport: Online Game Changers Workshop," created the world's hardest dive. Leon was one of the first athletes to help me understand how challenging it was for those in dynamic sports to move at an intentionally slower pace.

My biggest tip on this topic is to be aware that every movement is a postural moment. Challenge yourself to slow your movements down, especially during transitions between postures. Find the balance point in each movement, pause, breathe, and know that the smaller postural muscles closest to the bone are co-contracting to help you build strength.

RECOVERY: WHERE STRENGTH OF MIND & BODY FLOURISH

Recovery is where the magic happens. It's the phase where our muscles, nervous system, and overall health rejuvenate

and strengthen. Just like interval training needs breaks, so does our brain and body. Recognising the need to rest and recharge is essential for optimal performance.

During recovery, your body moves into a parasympathetic state, which facilitates healing and balance. This allows your brain time to reorganise movement patterns and support changes. It's a time when real strength and resilience are built. Practicing yoga during recovery keeps you balanced, both mentally and physically, so you're always ready for the next challenge.

Practice Tip: Make More Time for Rest

If you're a yoga teacher or practice yoga daily, consider removing a handful of postures from your sequence to allow more time for rest. Incorporate blankets, bolsters, and breathwork with legs resting up the wall—it's incredibly nourishing for the nervous system.

LESS STRAIN, MORE GAIN: YOUR MARGINAL ADVANTAGE

In the world of sports, we often hear about pushing limits. However, a "less is more" approach through sports-specific yoga encourages a shift towards a more integrated and mindful method. Our case study research has shown that athletes



who adopt this mindset achieve their personal best while minimising the risk of injury.

This approach is about quality over quantity. It's about listening to your body, respecting its limits, and making incremental gains without overstraining. By focusing on precise, mindful movements and breathwork, you can enhance your performance sustainably. This marginal advantage is what sets you apart, allowing you to excel without compromising your wellbeing.

Practice Tip: Listen to Your Body

When we move slower, we can listen more. Pay attention to the signals your body gives you. Remember, injury can creep up on you, but by becoming attuned to your body and recognising the signs, you can benefit from a slower yoga practice. If you're aiming for a personal best, this becomes even more important.

Dispelling the Myth About Being 'Good Enough To Do Yoga'

The idea that you need to be flexible to do yoga or that yoga is all about Downward Dog is a myth—and one that often turns athletes off from taking a class. Our research shows that the biggest gains come from individuals with "weary bones"—those who are tired, overwhelmed, and have pushed themselves too hard. By integrating these five key areas in easy, bite-sized ways into your practice or training, you will reap unexpected rewards!

As part of the "BWY Yoga for Sport: Online Game Changers Workshop," Leon Taylor shares in a pre-recorded session how the five yoga game changers have helped him and the athletes he mentors.

Experience the Game Changers!

To find out more and register for the online workshop, please follow this link and use the discount code BWYSPORT24 at the checkout: <https://instituteofyogasportscience.mykajabi.com/yoga-for-sport-the-game-changers>



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Hayley Winter (BWY Dip, ERYT-500, YACEP, SYT) is the founder of the Institute of Yoga Sports Science® (YSS - accredited with the BWY). For almost 30 years, she has worked as a yoga educator and Yoga Sports Scientist. Hayley specialises in sports-specific yoga, biomechanics, movement science, and provides continuing education and advanced yoga teacher training.

In 2009, Hayley pioneered online yoga education, and in 2010, she co-developed a research method to study yoga's impact on athletic performance. This research, conducted over seven years, significantly advanced the field.

Hayley authored the Yoga Sports Science syllabus and co-created "The Yoga Sequencing Solution" online course, and "The Yoga Sequencing Playbook" with Annelize Ferreira.

She is dedicated to empowering yoga teachers with the scientific principles of yoga to effectively apply yoga to athletes, merging ancient yoga with modern exercise science.

A woman with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a dark tank top, is shown in profile from the chest up. She has her eyes closed and a serene expression. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor space, likely a yoga studio. A teal-colored overlay covers the left side of the image.

BWVY

A woman in a white long-sleeved top and dark leggings is shown in profile, performing a yoga pose with her hands pressed together in front of her chest. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor space, likely a yoga studio. A purple-colored overlay covers the right side of the image.

**AT
THE
HEART
OF YOGA**

A woman in a dark long-sleeved top is shown in profile, performing a yoga pose with her hands pressed together in front of her chest. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor space, likely a yoga studio. A magenta-colored overlay covers the bottom-left corner of the image.

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