

## Sparkle for Spring with a Yoga Cleanse!

A yoga teacher of mine used a wonderful analogy during a detoxifying yoga pose. “Imagine you are unzipping your heavy winter coat,” she said. “Let it fall open and slip off of your shoulders, your chest lightening up as your breath expands. One after another, let all of your sweaters and coats fall off. Let the heaviness you’ve been carrying around this winter fall away and dissolve.”

When it’s time to spring clean your body, you can turn to the purifying tools of yoga to banish toxic excess and create vitality. The power of yoga to cleanse, detoxify, and support the body’s systems goes far beyond fancy poses. A certain alchemy takes place when you enter into a state of complete attention – and intention-focused on a clear result. That attentiveness to breath, body, and mind in yoga is truly the basis for self-healing.

By the end of winter in Minnesota, we often feel as dirty and crusty as the snow melting around us. City dwellers especially feel this as snowdrifts recede to reveal trash, sand, and general grime. With the environment as inspiration, we can turn our attention inward to clean away the residues of a heavy diet, holiday desserts, tantalizing beverages, and general inactivity.

Yoga offers a three-pronged approach to cleansing and detoxification: mindfulness, physical postures, and breathing techniques.

### Mindfulness

The word yoga means to yoke, or to join. In physical yoga practice, we join our full attention with our body, breath, mind, and the experience of presence, or consciousness, inside of us. At first practicing mindfulness may seem to yield few affects. With consistent practice of mindfulness, though, the light of awareness begins to shine through and you become more mindful of everything you are doing.

Mindfulness is important when considering what program to take up. Detoxification and cleansing programs are not one size fits all. For example, person 1 may often be distracted when eating and therefore eat too much, not recognizing the subtle signals of fullness. Person 2 might be a smoker or work around people who smoke. Person 3 might have high occupational exposure to plastics, chemicals, or fumes. Each person will need a different emphasis from their yoga detoxification and cleansing process. It is helpful to spend some time considering your lifestyle before deciding on which detoxification practice is right for you, and then being mindful as you carry out each step of the practice.

### Physical Practice

Yoga poses are a great friend in detoxifying the body. A qualified, experienced yoga teacher can design a specific program and make unique recommendations of poses for detoxifying your body. There are resources available for individual research as well. Light On Yoga is a wonderful book by yoga guru B.K.S. Iyengar, who has spent his life analyzing and cataloging yoga’s physical postures and their health benefits.

The physical portion of a yoga cleanse must be carefully considered to ensure it meets your needs. Take for example Person 1, our distracted over-eater. Most likely the stomach, pancreas, liver, and gall bladder have been working overtime to produce enough fluids, hormones, and enzymes to break down food, assimilate nutrients, and remove toxins. Additionally the stomach, small and large intestines, and colon have been stuffed to capacity. Person 1 would need a physical practice focusing on:

- compression of the internal organs (forward folding postures like Child’s Pose), which literally squeezes them like a sponge, releasing stuck toxins and increasing blood flow;
- twisting poses (Sage Twist and Supine Twist), which move the contents of the intestines through the large intestine and colon in the correct direction for elimination; and
- abdomen-opening poses (Supine Hero’s Pose and Cobra Pose) which assist in regulating the glands producing digestive hormones.

### Breathing Practice

Take a deep, cleansing breath. Exactly! Though it might not be obvious, the breath is a natural detoxifying agent. Deep, healthy breaths increase the amount of oxygen in blood flowing through all of the tissues in the

body. Sufficient oxygen is critical in cleansing and relaxing muscle and connective tissue, nourishing organs, and maintaining the acid-base balance of blood.

Most people's breathing follows a shallow pattern, in which 80% to 100% of the breath is carried out by just the lungs, which comprise only 25% of the total human breathing capacity. A yoga detoxification program emphasizes healthy breathing, where the diaphragm controls most of the breath.

That backbend my teacher guided the class into offered immune system strengthening and digestive detoxification. I focused my attention on breathing deeply and increasing vitality. I immediately felt cleaner, lighter, and more vibrant, much like you will after practicing a yoga cleanse this spring!

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