

# Have you ever seen a fast yoga instructor?

BY DR. PHIL WAGNER  
FOR THE DAILY NEWS

At SPARTA Performance Science in Menlo Park, we're asked a lot of questions. They're often about nutrition, injuries and other types of training. We try and address most of the questions in this weekly column. One question we get a lot is, "I do yoga, that's good, right?" The answer really depends on who's asking.

The benefits of doing some form of yoga on a regular basis are well proven. Much of the research focuses on the improvements in mental and physical well-being in the subjects tested. Studies out of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi have shown significant improvements of the subjective well-being and stress management in healthy subjects, as well as cancer patients, people with hypertension (high blood pressure), coronary artery disease and diabetes. Research out of the Department of Neurology and Behavioral Neuroscience at Oregon Health and Science University showed that seniors (ages 65-85) who completed a six-month yoga class displayed significant improvements in quality-of-life and physical measures (strength and flexibility) when compared with subjects who completed other types of

exercise (walking class). Research has even shown that yoga can increase the strength and endurance of respiratory muscles, most likely due to the focus on breathing during the sessions. Yoga often incorporates elements of meditation and controlled breathing. Poses (asanas) are often held for 30 seconds to several minutes. While this activity is definitely beneficial for the mind and body of the general public (as shown above), it is not good for a competing athlete. Yoga poses can best be described as static stretches. The negative effects on performance as a result of static stretches were discussed in the Jan. 28 Sparta Point column. In addition, the respiratory (aerobic) benefits of yoga are of no use to power athletes (see Dec. 31 column). Practices, competitions and resistance training will prepare an athlete's aerobic system better than any yoga session. Finally, yoga poses challenge the participant to hold a stationary position, requiring what's called isometric (static) strength. This essentially trains an individual's slow twitch muscle fibers, which are responsible for slow, controlled movements. Whenever possible, athletes



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Finally, yoga poses challenge the participant to hold a stationary position, requiring what's called isometric (static) strength. This essentially trains an individual's slow twitch muscle fibers, which are responsible for slow, controlled movements. Whenever possible, athletes

should train their fast twitch muscle fibers, responsible for ballistic or explosive movements (like the type found in competitive sports).

Research out of the School of Human Kinetics at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, showed that dynamic training had a much greater effect on punching speed (one of the most ballistic movements a human can do) than subjects who trained with isometric (static) means. Research does show that isometric muscular training can increase maximal strength (a component of explosive strength). However, this research also shows that to illicit these maximal strength gains exercises must be completed at near maximal intensities and last no longer than six seconds per repetition. When you examine yoga poses, contractions last much longer than six seconds and only involve a small percentage of body weight, far too little to illicit maximal strength gains. Yoga essentially trains an athlete to be slower.

So if a parent, grandparent, coach or other non-competitive person asks me if yoga is a good activity, I tell them that it's great for general health and well-being. But when it comes to athletes, it hurts much more than it helps.

*Dr. Wagner is the Director of SPARTA Performance Science in Menlo Park. For info on this article or to learn more about SPARTA, www.SpartaScience.com*

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