

# Power Yoga ... More Than Just Exercise?

By Barb Pierce

Why do people feel so good after practicing power yoga? Is it just because they are getting a cardio workout & producing endorphins or is there more to it?

People practice asana (yoga poses) to help to cleanse their bodies, calm their minds and become physically and mentally present. These are all steps towards fulfilling the eight limbs of yoga (otherwise known as Ashtanga).

The eight limbs of yoga include:

- Yama (restraint)
- Niyama (observances)
- Asana (steady posture or posture easily held)
- Pranayama (science of breath or mastery of vital energy)
- Pratyahara (withdrawal of the mind from sense objects)
- Dharana (concentration)
- Dhyana (meditation)
- Samadhi (union with Brahman/God)

Balanced yoga classes will generally offer you teachings that will help you to practice the eight limbs of yoga, but the key is to find a class that offers these in a way that is meaningful for you.

When choosing a yoga class, you should consider your level of strength and flexibility, energy level, knowledge of yoga asanas (postures) and desire for spirituality (or not). Once you find a class with the appropriate mix that suits your energy, strength & flexibility requirements you will find that you leave

the class feeling great. How is that possible when there are so many different styles of yoga? Although different yoga styles offer many benefits, this article will focus primarily on Power Yoga.

## Why Practice Power Yoga?

If you are a person who is extremely active and not accustomed to sitting quietly to meditate and relax, you might find a gentle hatha or a yin class maddening. Instead, you might initially benefit more from a power or vinyasa style class, which is more dynamic and strenuous, in order to engage your mind and give you some thing tangible to focus on (like your breathing, trembling quadriceps or tired shoulders). You may choose later to try some different yoga styles which offer more relaxation benefits.

Power yoga classes can leave you feeling energized, powerful, strong, more relaxed and more focused. This happens partly because the class offers such a vigorous workout, but also because the poses are offered in a specific way that promotes the stimulation of both nadis and Chakras.

## What is a Nadi?

A nadi is an energy channel (there are 72,000 of them in the body, but three which are considered to be primary). By stimulating and opening these channels you can help to balance physical, mental and spiritual levels of energy. The nadis are stimulated through specific breathing (pranayama) exercises which are typically performed at the beginning and end of a balanced power yoga class.

| Chakra Number | Chakra               | Associated Emotion  | Associated Gland     |
|---------------|----------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1st           | Muladhara - Root     | security, stability, confidence                                 | none                 |
| 2nd           | Swadisthana - Sacral | reproduction, creativity, determination                         | ovaries & testes     |
| 3rd           | Manipura - Naval     | assertiveness, vitality, calming anger                          | adrenals, pancreas   |
| 4th           | Anahata - Heart      | compassion, selfless love, empathy                              | thymus               |
| 5th           | Vishuddha - Throat   | creativity, devotion, surrender, trust, openness to higher will | thyroid, parathyroid |
| 6th           | Ajna - Third Eye     | logical judgement, intuition                                    | pineal               |
| 7th           | Sahasrara - Crown    | illumination, peace, inviting blessing                          | pituitary            |

## What is a Chakra?

Chakras are psycho-spiritual centres in the astral body at the junction points of the nadis. There are over 1,000 chakras in the subtle body and seven that are considered to be primary (please see the Chakra Chart to learn about the chakras and their associated body parts and glands). The chakras can be stimulated and balanced through breathing exercises, meditations and asanas.

During asana, the chakras can be stimulated through the contraction and expansion of key areas of the body. For example, by performing a posture which opens the chest, such as cobra, you will stimulate the heart chakra. Similarly, when performing a posture which contracts your pelvis, such as a forward bend, you will stimulate the root chakra.

## The Sun Salutations

Even if you don't know much about yoga, you can help to keep your body and mind strong and healthy

by learning and practicing the sun salutation sequence. Through the rhythmic use of the sun salutation, power yoga offers one of the easiest ways to increase the flexibility of your spine, stimulate all of the chakras in your body, massage and stimulate all of the glands in your body, improve your lung capacity and keep your mind present & focused.

Sun Salutations are an integral part of power yoga and provide the basis for either a short or long yoga sequence. **So don't be surprised when you feel great after a power yoga class.**

## References:

- Moving into Bliss With Yoga by Yogi Vishvketu and Chetana Panwar
- Ashtanga Yoga - The Practice Manual by David Swenson
- Yoga Mind, Body & Spirit by Donna Farhi