

# PRACTICING YIN YOGA

As we age we tend to notice that if we don't move it, we lose it - range of movement that is. There are different factors involved in how the human body moves - muscles, connective tissues and bones. Typically, a yoga practice addresses range of movement in the muscles, and to some degree, bones. This occurs with dynamic movement. Connective tissue, the fibers that wrap around bones to hold them together, needs to be addressed differently. While muscles are like rubber, connective tissue is more like plastic. Muscles warm up quickly with dynamic movements and can be encouraged to lengthen by holding postures (asanas) for 5 or so breaths. Connective tissue is not as malleable and need to be 'stressed' for a longer period of time to increase range of movement in the joints it surrounds.

Yin and Yang is a Taoist theory of opposites - dark/light, cold/warm, night/day, hard/soft, static/dynamic. The theory only works when put into relationship or relativity with something else. Muscles are Yang and connective tissues are Yin. As we age, our lower bodies become more Yin in that we tend to lose our range of motion while our upper bodies are more Yang, in maintaining strength.

A Yin Yoga practice targets the Yin aspects of our bodies - the spine, hips and legs. A small number of poses are held for approximately 5 minutes each. Each pose is designed to open meridians (superhighways through the body - carrying energy - prana). There are six meridians that run vertically through the body. Each meridian carries energies specifically related to the first three Chakras (energy centers located along the spine). In a Yin practice, the energy channels are cleared and energy is transferred deeply to the bones.

<b>Meridian</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Chakra Relationship</b>
Urinary Bladder	Inner Wisdom	1st, 2nd (Root & Sacral)
Stomach	Sympathy and Compassion	3rd (Navel)
Gall Bladder	Courage and Decisiveness	3rd (Navel)
Spleen	Creative Possibilities & Faithfulness	3rd (Navel)
Liver	Kindness	3rd (Navel)
Kidney	Essence and Potential	1st, 2nd (Root & Sacral)

Paul Grilley (Yin Yoga) and Biff Mitthoefer (The Yin Yoga Kit), two leading authorities on the ancient Yin yoga practice, provide illustrations and explanations of how the meridians run through the body and the relationship to the Yin practice.

In addition to holding poses longer in a Yin practice, the postures are named differently, though quite familiar to yogis/yoginis. For instance, Pigeon Pose is named Swan in a Yin practice - conjuring an image of a graceful, peaceful bird. Each pose can be modified to accommodate a vast range of motion in the joints and props can be used to help yogis/yoginis explore the edges of comfortable tension in each posture.

Because the Yin practice is deeply felt within the body, it is important for those practicing to become connected to their bodies - understanding the difference between tension and compression - and understanding if the sensations being felt - which can sometimes be slightly uncomfortable - are therapeutic or not serving the practice. There needs to be sensation in the practice, however, if the sensation causes the body to grip or feel misaligned, the posture needs to be reassessed and changed immediately.

Yin doesn't replace your yoga practice, but compliments it. You can practice a few poses daily, or weekly to realize the positive benefits of strengthening your joints.

Yin yoga applies strategic stress to connective tissues to help prevent deterioration of connective tissue - which happens as we age. It must not apply excessive stress or the connective tissues will be damaged or will degenerate. It is recommended that you approach a yin practice under the guidance of a trained teacher - in class or following the directions of Yin masters like Paul Grilley or Biff Mitthoefer. Practiced correctly and consistently, it can extend your range of movement and add longevity to your fitness routines and your yoga practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- 🌀 Yin Yoga, by Paul Grilley (His book is nicely laid out and his DVD offers background information as well as expert instruction.)
- 🌀 The Yin Yoga Kit, by Biff Mitthoefer (this kit includes a comprehensive book discussing the meridian system, sample practices and photographs of options for each pose; an audio CD that guides you through a Yin practice; and posture cards with photographs of options for the poses)
- 🌀 [www.yinyoga.com](http://www.yinyoga.com) - web site dedicated to the practice of Yin Yoga. This site includes a directory of Yin Yoga teachers worldwide.