Yoga Can it really help pain NYT 2011

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/17/really-the-claim-yoga-can-help-manage-pain/>

For many people, [yoga](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/y/yoga/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier" \o "More articles about yoga." \t "_blank) is more than just exercise: Studies show it is one of [the most commonly used forms of alternative therapy in the country](http://nccam.nih.gov/news/camstats/2007/camsurvey_fs1.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). Many rely on yoga to relieve chronic and acute pain.

The reasons for this are varied. Some researchers believe that yoga may alleviate pain through relaxation and the release of endorphins. Others say it may reduce inflammation and promote positive emotions.

Plenty of studies have tried to determine whether taking up yoga can actually help lessen pain. In a recent report, a team of researchers sifted through the science and identified 10 randomized clinical trials on the subject involving hundreds of patients.

The studies looked at yoga’s effect on pain stemming from ailments like[arthritis](http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/arthritis/overview.html?inline=nyt-classifier" \o "In-depth reference and news articles about Arthritis and Rheumatism." \t "_blank), low back problems, [pregnancy](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/pregnancy/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier" \o "Recent and archival health news about pregnancy." \t "_blank) symptoms and migraines. The control conditions were standard treatments and exercise, diet and lifestyle changes.

Nine out of the 10 clinical trials found yoga could help provide relief from pain, which the authors called “encouraging.” But they also noted that [no definitive conclusion could be reached](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21944658%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), for a number of reasons.

The studies involved patients experiencing pain from a wide variety of conditions, and they looked at several types of yoga that had some similarities, like breathing, stretching and relaxation exercises — but also many differences. Complicating matters was that the intensity, amount of time and frequency of the yoga sessions differed from one study to the next.

While the evidence suggests that yoga has the potential to alleviate pain, they wrote, the science is not firm enough to say for certain.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

A review of the research on yoga suggests that it may have some usefulness in relieving pain, but more research is needed.