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Your daily survival guide to sports, recreation and outdoor news in Colorado's High Country

Why the yogic pursuit is awesome

As a person who frequently finds himself overwhelmed, stressed and frustrated, I am often looking for a good prescription for dealing with and preventing mental anguish. Stress takes a toll on virtually everyone at some time or another. In my work as a counselor, I see people often looking to the behavioral prescriptions, as opposed to the medicinal ones. I applaud and respect this decision.

First, eat healthy. This is the pot calling the kettle black for me. I need to eat better. Second, sleep. If you can sleep, you can make it!

Third, exercise — wherever, however and whenever. It's essential to mental health and important on so many levels: biologically, socially, emotionally, spiritually and physically. What happens to us when we get hurt and can longer (temporarily or long-

term) perform our normal exercise outlets?

This is exactly what happened to me this summer after a broken ankle at the Imperial Challenge in April, followed by a head injury at the National Championships for Ultimate Frisbee in July. I could not exercise in any of my normal ways — biking, running, even hiking was a challenge.

It sucked. Still kind of does.

MAKING PEACE WITH YOGA

But athletic refuge exists for someone like me — yoga! My first encounter with yoga came in seventh grade, when an ahead-of-his-time tennis coach forced me to do 10 Sun Salutations before allowing us to pick up our racquets. As a teenager, I did not grasp the essence and need for what I was doing. I rushed, as if it was an activity to merely complete, rather than one that could be significantly beneficial to my body and performance.

Fast-forward about 20

years. Yoga seems to be everywhere and practiced by everybody, from people looking to feel better and lose a few pounds all the way to elite-professional athletes competing for world titles. This craft has been around for hundreds of years and is still on the rise. From an overall health-wellness perspective, this couldn't be better.

Yoga became important to me after meeting Rachel Lary, a certified Yoga Alliance instructor who teaches at Blue Lotus and Meta Yoga Studios. She was living in a room in my house with my wife and I when my yoga fervor began. The problem I had with yoga was beginning with a completely wrong impression of what yoga had to be.

In my mind, yoga was in a quiet studio-box, with a bunch of other yogis (Is that derogatory? If so, substitute with "respected persons beautifully practicing yoga") and a teacher "criticizing" my awkwardness and inflexible hamstrings. The weird cracking noises my body releases every time I move would distract others from enjoying a top-notch lesson, while I would have no fun and probably need a follow-up trip to the orthopedic doctor.

Silly, narrow-minded Drew. Rachel, who has a contagious passion for yoga, claimed it is much different than the horror story I had created in my mind. Not shockingly to any of you, she was right, and, for this reason, she taught me that you must find your yoga. She pointed out

that I had literally put yoga in a box — a studio-box, but a box, nonetheless. I tend to do that.

She was convinced this would be something great for me because she always says, "There is a place for yoga in everyone's life, across the board." She knew I struggled with mental-health issues, inflexibility and a plethora of injuries, so she knew that, for me in particular, yoga would be life changing.

The all-inclusive, benefit-everyone, welcoming attitude sounded amazing. Problem: I still did not want to go a studio. I know this is terrible and small-minded, but yoga reads to as more of an individual activity by nature, something I could learn about and do in my domain. Rachel reiterated, "Find your yoga, Drew."

She was kind enough to help me find my yoga. On hikes, we would do some yoga and just enjoy the beauty of Summit County while exercising our mind, body and spirit. She taught me some poses and, more importantly, how to do yoga safely by myself. "If it feels good and is not hurting; enjoy the sensation," she would remind me.

I know that yoga is a sport/art/craft that needs to be respected or injury could occur, but I also wanted to be able to practice by myself while hiking, watching football, before sleeping and anytime that I felt the urge, or,

more likely, needed the stress relief.

FIND YOUR YOGA

Rach provided some important tips about yoga.

Know your limits: If you begin to experience pinching, piercing or excessive pain, stop immediately. Understanding the sensations you may be experiencing will help prevent injury. In many sports, pushing past your limit is recommended; but, in yoga, getting to the edge and without injury is the goal.

If you are injured, talk to your doctor before starting yoga: It's more than likely that a doctor will encourage modifying or limiting poses but will support your yogic pursuit.

Take a few classes — or a lot of classes: Classes are a great way to learn about yoga and make sure you are grasping the fundamentals. Practice can be done anywhere, but getting the groundwork will only enhance your experience. *The yoga community is a beautiful, welcoming, encouraging and supportive community — you are welcome there.* Blue Lotus even is offering yoga for hockey players, runners and people with head injuries. I might need to check that out sometime.

Understand the mental and spiritual components: A major part of yoga does not involve body movements but, rather, a mindset. Meditating and being aware

of your body, mind and soul are significant aspects of the experience.

Yoga is not a competition: Frequently, athletes try yoga and think they need to be "better" than the person on the mat next to them. Yoga is a practice in humility to some extent, not a competition. You must go at your own rate or injury will happen — "your yoga."

Yoga can be very helpful after injury: Yoga improves blood flow and can be very rejuvenating, if done properly. It has been proven to fight diseases like osteoporosis. Be sure to talk to your doctor or physical therapist for any additional recommendations.

Yoga can improve performance in all sports: There isn't a single athlete who no longer benefits from improved flexibility, strength and body awareness. In the '70s and '80s, professional football players were secretly taking ballet classes to improve balance and footwork. Now, it's yoga.

It wasn't until I was able to practice yoga in my Cleveland Browns basement — or on the side of Minnie Mine trail — that I realized how beneficial yoga is. I am one of the last people in Summit County to get on the yoga-train, but it is an awesome one, and it is for everyone.

As Rachel proclaimed, "Yoga is good for the mind, body and soul." I don't know about you, but, when those three things are fulfilled, I would feel pretty good.

Namaste,
Summit
County.



Drew Mikita

