

## Yoga Therapy

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By Johns Hopkins Health Alerts; [www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com](http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com)

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**Mounting evidence suggests that yoga can relieve chronic back pain. There are many schools or types of yoga. They feature precise alignment and props such as mats, blocks, and straps. The props help in achieving correct yoga poses. The poses, combined with breathing techniques, help relax muscles and calm the mind.**

There's nothing new in the world of exercises for back pain, correct? Not exactly. In fact, there's more evidence that yoga -- specifically, Iyengar yoga -- can help alleviate chronic back pain.

There are many schools or types of yoga. Iyengar yoga (named for its developer, B.K.S. Iyengar) features precise alignment and props such as blankets, bolsters, and chairs. The props help people who are less flexible and/or are injured achieve the correct yoga poses. The attention to alignment helps prevent further injury.

Iyengar yoga teachers are trained with a premium on knowledge and a stepladder of increasing levels of accreditation. Even at the entry level, certified teachers undergo a rigorous education program that includes in-depth knowledge of anatomy and physiology, and demonstrated expertise in teaching.

In the first randomized trial of Iyengar yoga and back pain, 60 participants were placed in either a yoga group or an educational group. Both programs lasted 16 weeks. Participants had experienced low back pain for an average of 11.2 years, and 48% used pain medication. At the end of the study and at a three-month follow-up, those in the yoga group had significant reductions in pain intensity, functional disability (including spinal range of motion), and use of pain medication. The results compare favorably with results obtained with physical therapy.

With yoga's increasing popularity, finding a teacher today is easier than ever. If your local Yellow Pages aren't helpful, try Yoga Journal ([www.yogajournal.com](http://www.yogajournal.com)) or the National Association of Iyengar Teachers ([www.iynaus.com](http://www.iynaus.com)). Be sure to ask about the teacher's training and certification, and be honest about your concerns and any limitations or injuries.

Remember, too, that yoga is not a competitive sport: You have nothing to prove, and there is no gain to be found in pain. Honor your body, with all of its idiosyncrasies. If you come up empty-handed, don't despair. Many of the back exercises taught by physical therapists closely resemble those taught in a yoga studio.