

How Yoga Beats the Blues

Yoga, The Brain and Mental Health Conference November 2012

Felt blue during the cold, dark winter months? Don't suffer in silence – instead head for a yoga class. That is the suggestion of psychiatrists who have researched the effects of yoga on depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.

In the first UK conference of its kind, scientists from around the world joined mental health professionals and yoga teachers to share findings on how yoga

affects the brain. Their conclusions were that yoga can be highly effective in fighting the blues – and other debilitating mental illnesses.

In one study, veterans of the Vietnam war, who had suffered post-traumatic stress disorder for decades, had their symptoms halved by a five-day course of yoga. Their health continued to improve with reduced symptoms six months later. In other trials, yoga relieved anxiety and depression in survivors of the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, the 2004 Asian tsunami and of child sexual abuse.

Advances in science mean it is now possible to test some of the claims that have been made for the mental health benefits of yoga over the years. For example, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans can measure chemical changes in the brain over short and long periods of time as people practise yoga movement, breath and meditation.

In various trials evidence has emerged of yoga being effective at helping people with a range of health problems, including:

- Post-traumatic stress
- Anxiety disorders
- Depression

