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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Yoga Eases Low-Grade Back Pain

The next time your back acts up, maybe in addition to seeing your chiropractor you should try the "Warrior", or the "Cobra", or perhaps the "Supine Butterfly".

A study of 101 adults with chronic lower back pain compared the benefits of yoga, conventional therapeutic exercise, and the information contained in a popular back pain book. The result: those who took weekly yoga classes for 12 weeks experienced the most increase in function and the biggest decrease in the need for pain medication. The study suggests that for people who are looking to do something for themselves, one could say that yoga is a good choice.

The official results of the study, which was sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, appear in the Dec. 20 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. For the study, the participants chosen were between 20 and 64 years of age and suffered from chronic but not serious back pain -- people who "see their primary care doctor because their back is bothering them, and they're not feeling good".

The participants, mostly women in their 40s, were divided into three groups. One group took classes in viniyoga, a therapeutically oriented style of yoga that's relatively easy to learn and also emphasizes safety. The second group attended specifically designed therapeutic exercise classes taught by a physical therapist, which included strength and stretching exercises. The third group was given a copy of *The Back Pain Helpbook* and asked to read it.

The participants were interviewed four times during the 26-week study, including prior to the start the study and a follow-up at 26 weeks, to assess their ability to do daily tasks, pain level and how much pain medication they took. All three groups reported improved function. But, those who took the yoga class experienced the most improvement.

Seventy eight percent of this group improved by at least two points on a standardized measure called the Roland Disability Scale, which assesses how people can perform daily tasks, such as walking up stairs without pain or bending over to tie shoelaces. Sixty-three percent who took the exercise class reported at least a two-point improvement, while 47 percent of those who read the book reported a similar benefit.

The yoga participants also reduced their use of pain medicine more than those in the other two groups. By the end of the 26 weeks, only 21 percent in the yoga class were taking medication for their back pain; 58 percent had been doing so before starting the yoga class. The use of pain medicine for the exercise group dropped to 50 percent from 57 percent, while those who read the book increased their use of pain medication -- from 50 percent to 59 percent.

This study tells us that specific yoga classes will help ease mild back pain. However, I suggest that everybody should participate in some form of regular exercise, yoga or not. In fact, everyone should be exercising and seeing their chiropractor regularly to prevent low back pain from occurring in the first place.