

# Combine spiritual practice and exercise for a healthy heart

People often look to maximize the benefits of their diet and exercise regimens to make every minute they spend in the gym as beneficial as possible. A new study says that combining two common exercises can drastically help do just that, at least when it comes to lowering heart disease risk factors.

The study by the American College of Cardiology, says that when people with heart disease practiced yoga in addition to aerobic exercise, their blood pressure, body mass index and cholesterol levels went down twice as much as patients who practiced either one alone.

In total, researchers looked at 750 patients who had previously been diagnosed with coronary heart disease. Each was assigned yoga and/or aerobic exercise sessions. Those who did either exercise alone saw similar reductions to the various risk factors, but both were dwarfed by the combined group.

Dr. Thomas Discher, cardiologist at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, IL, said he wasn't too surprised by the study's findings. "It makes sense that a program treating the mind, body and soul through routine physical exercise and stress reduction such as yoga would benefit cardiovascular patients," Dr. Discher said. "But the combined effect is great."

As people of faith, we know that our spiritual practices of prayer, meditation, and centering are powerful ways to connect with our Source and find peace. Turns out that these practices help protect and heal our hearts, as well!

**Prayer:** *God who is bigger than anything we can imagine, may we connect ever more deeply to the peace and stillness that we find in you.*

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# Manage Stress for Heart Health

Current life expectancy in the United States is 79 years. Only about 20 percent of our genes determine how long the average person lives. This means that our lifestyle and environment will greatly shape our health and happiness in later years.

"Genetic predisposition is certainly a part of longevity, but, yes, by itself, it may not be enough," says Dr. Beata Styka, a geriatric medicine physician at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, IL. She explains that while we cannot control or alter our genes, we are in control of our habits and certain environmental factors.

One key thing that we can do to keep our hearts healthy is to keep our stress levels down. "Exercising, staying engaged, eating a healthy diet and spending time with friends and family are all ways that people can relieve stress," says Dr. Styka, who agrees that stress can exacerbate health issues.

She offers these additional four tips for keeping stress in check:

- Learn to accept that life brings constant change and that there are many things that you cannot change or control.
- Don't let fear take over and control your life.
- Be aware of your limitations. Don't overextend yourself.
- Know what you cherish in life and make those things a priority.

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