

The Yoga Experiment

Life changing moments happen when you least expect them, that's what they say. When living with Crohn's all of the life changing happenings seem to be for the worse, and if it is a batch of good news, we're always waiting for the other shoe to drop. We know the permanence of this disease process, the day-to-day struggles, the challenges the medications themselves bring and we know for the most part it is completely out of our control.

In 2010, I was in the middle of a three year undiagnosed allergic reaction to Remicade that produced crippling arthritis all over my body. My father had passed suddenly in March from cardiac arrest and my mother was diagnosed with stage IIIA cervical cancer three weeks later. My life as I knew it was literally falling apart. After the news that my mother hadn't responded to chemotherapy or radiation and was facing a radical hysterectomy, she flew to Nashville where I was living at the time to visit for a month and gain perspective. For vanity reasons more than therapeutic ones, we decided to try Hot Yoga, a sequence of 26 Yoga poses practiced in a 105 degree room. And while the effects on my body were noticeable, it was something completely unexpected that I found there on my mat that very first day. It was the very first time in my entire life that I hadn't been thinking of anything else but what I was doing in that exact moment. Two weeks of sweaty, challenging and blissful Yoga classes later, I found that my joints were causing me less suffering. My mother went home to Oregon to hear that she was in complete remission from her cancer. It was then that I knew something powerful was happening.

Let me start by saying that healing is not curing. Healing is necessary for curing, but does not necessarily mean that it will result in a cure. Healing occurs in many ways; in the body, in the mind, in the spirit; it is the process of making oneself whole again. In my case, I believe Yoga allowed me the opportunity to search within myself and find the root cause of my disease process. The result of an accumulated Yoga practice paired with self-inquiry, I found that I had never truly believed in myself. This resulted in displaced anger and hurt that I chose to internalize, blame on others and generally avoid a resolution to for fear of conflict. Locating that foundation of dis-ease in my body, I was able to begin the process of healing. Last June, after almost 5 years of Yoga, I went back to my doctors at Vanderbilt University Medical Center to record what I already knew had happened in my body. I am in remission from Crohn's disease, there is no arthritis left in my body, my gut and blood work looks perfect and I am free from all medications.

How Yoga Works

Yoga is a moving meditation and meditation stills the mind and allows freedom from our constant barrage of thoughts. In Yoga we practice self-inquiry and "cultivating the opposite". In other words, we begin to notice our negative thoughts as they arise and then choose the opposite until accurate thoughts about ourselves and others becomes second nature. The focus on the breath, the movement and sensations in the body help us to realign ourselves with our true

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nature, to connect us with something bigger than ourselves...this may be God, nature, the universe, divinity...whatever resonates in your heart. The combination of union with our true nature and holding ourselves accountable for our false thoughts has a substantial impact on the body. The mind body connection is something that is being studied by medical professionals all over the world and the results are astonishing. This of course is a simplified explanation, but nonetheless a powerful one.