

# Health Insights Today

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## The Yoga of Movement

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With the arrival of spring, I am always reminded of the cyclical nature of life. Cycles are best represented visually, I think, by circular patterns as opposed to linear ones. However, when we look at the calendar, time is represented in small boxes that reach out in neat little lines until we have a week of them. Stack a few of these lines and you have a month. Arrange these stacks into larger boxes, and you get a year.

A year in nature doesn't look like a neat line or a stack of lines or a box. While there are observable patterns in nature, they are far more three-dimensional and recursive than our two-dimensional calendars suggest. Likewise, bodies move in a multitude of patterns, yet once past childhood few of us explore our full range of motion. Many of us, it seems, have been conditioned to live as if we only move in two planes. We walk in straight lines, run in straight lines, and get on a treadmill, elliptical trainer or rowing machine for a cardiovascular workout. If we do a strength workout, the machines we use often reinforce these habitual movements—flexion and extension, sometimes lateral flexion or abduction and adduction. There is nothing wrong with using these machines for a workout; I'd far rather people be getting some cardiovascular and strength training than doing nothing. However, I also believe it is important to have some activity that keeps us moving in circular, cyclical, patterns, experiencing our full range of motion.

### Full Spectrum of Movement

Yoga *asanas* present a perfect opportunity to experience the full spectrum of our movement capabilities. They often consist of complex combinations of movement that are lacking in our normal daily lives. Even *asanas* that seem basic usually include actions in multiple ranges of motion. For example, consider *utthita trikonasana*, “extended triangle pose.” It is a standing pose generally taught even in beginning yoga classes. Just looking at it on the surface, one may not appreciate the complexity of this *asana*; however, a more focused analysis of the pose reveals its depth and breadth. This standing *asana* has elements of flexion at the hip, lengthening of the spine, and rotation of the torso and neck. Each extremity is activated, along with the core, in accomplishing this shape. *Asanas* like *utthita trikonasana* are asymmetrical, so they have to be done with the right leg forward and then again with the left leg forward in order to stretch and strengthen the body on both sides.

Now imagine sequencing multiple *asanas* of equal or greater complexity into a 30-, 60-, or 90-minute class! Then, link those *asanas* creatively and students can be turning in a 360 degree radius around their mats, not only moving in multiple planes, but facing a different direction—breaking habitual patterns that constantly reinforce unidirectional observation and action.

Whether you try a yoga class or not, I hope the coming of spring will inspire you to remember that life is all around you—not just right in front of you on the computer screen, in the car or at the gym. No doubt, there is power and joy in running directly for the finish line in a race; it is hard to beat the satisfaction of setting a goal and taking the most direct path to get there, of being on the move. Fully engaging all the joints in our body in all planes of movement available to them, though, is good for our health, and also serves as a powerful reminder to resist being limited to only facing forward and moving in a straight line. Ask any child, and you'll learn that there is tremendous joy to be found twirling around in one place, arms out, head thrown back, laughing.

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