

Yoga for Scoliosis – from the inside out

The word “scoliosis” is derived from the Greek word skol, which means twists and turns. In scoliosis, the spine forms an S curve (or reversed S) from side to side down the back, and at the same time the back of the spine rotates toward the concave side of the S, twisting the rib cage and making the sides of the back uneven.

The decision to do yoga to remediate a scoliosis entails a lifetime commitment to a process of self-discovery and growth. For many people, this kind of commitment is intimidating. It’s tempting to turn instead to an orthopedic surgeon, who will “fix” a back by fusing it and get rid of the pain forever. Unfortunately, this operation results in a virtually immobile spine and frequently fails to alleviate the pain. I taught one teenage student with an extreme scoliosis who, weary of struggling with her yoga practice, gave up and had her back fused. To her dismay, her pain persisted, and she had even less mobility than before. When the rod in her back broke, she had it removed rather than replaced, and she returned to her yoga practice with a renewed and deeper commitment.

Choosing the path of self-discovery rather than surgery requires not only commitment but inner awareness. Guidance from a competent teacher is helpful, but awareness of our own bodies is crucial - no famous guru can fix our backs for us, any more than an orthopedic surgeon can. Only through our own constant awareness and loving attention can we transform our discomfort into a guide that helps us to get in touch with our bodies.

The goal of yoga practice should not be to straighten our backs; we must learn to accept them as they are, not deny them or judge them. Instead, we must work to understand our backs and to relate to them with sensitivity and awareness.

Abdominal Muscles. To strengthen the abdominal muscles is very important with a scoliosis. If the abdominals are weak, then it causes the back muscles to overwork and therefore tighten. In extreme cases, it may cause lordosis or an extreme curve of the lower back particularly on the concave side of the lower back.

Breath: Awareness of the breath is perhaps the most important thing to focus on while doing the yoga poses. Usually very little air enters the lung on the concave side of the spine. Sending the breath into the collapsed rib cage on this side can actually stretch the inter-costal muscles and create more lung capacity. This creates more openness and evenness on both sides of the chest, from the inside out.

-- Elise Miller Brown

Yoga for Scoliosis with Joan

9:30 - 11am level 2-3

11 - 12:30pm level 1-2 **Saturdays** classes are on-going

For optimal benefit from these classes, we recommend a series of classes for the student to begin to gain awareness of the body and breath, learning to release deeply. The first class may be a drop-in, after which, a sign-up for a 10-class course is necessary. Patience, consistent effort and training with right knowledge of how to work with the back are required for transformation.

Drop-in: \$35 Block of ten classes: \$280