

# Yoga Part 1 – Introduction to Yoga and Its Benefits

David Bretton chats with Zeena Kalisperides, founder and owner of Yoga with Zeena

by  
David Bretton

In this article of *DentaltownUK*, I got to catch up with the amazing Zeena Kalisperides. After practising yoga for over 20 years, Zeena followed her instinct to change career paths, from practising dentistry as a GDP to become a yoga teacher in 2013. Zeena's passionate about sharing the benefits that a regular yoga practice can bring and she has set out to pass on the holistic science of yoga to as many people as she can, helping students to improve their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

**David Bretton:** Hi Zeena, I just wanted to start by asking a little about yourself and why you switched from dentistry to become a yoga teacher?

**Zeena Kalisperides:** Hi David, thank you for inviting me. I live in West London and have largely lived in London for most of my life. I studied Dentistry at King's, graduating in 2008 and then I worked as a GDP in and around the north London area.

It was during this time that I observed that so many of my patient's complaints were not solely related to oral health issues, but that social and mental health and lifestyle choices were playing a much bigger role in their overall health issues.

This is probably what triggered my interest in actually becoming a yoga teacher as I had experienced so much insight through yoga as how to manage simple issues like what to eat to stay healthy and to manage pain through a yoga practice called pranayama (breath work).

So in 2011, I applied to the UK's largest Yoga school, Triyoga, to spend the next two years studying to become a yoga teacher. After

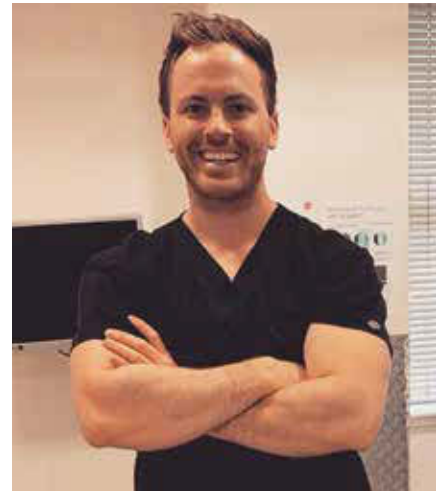
a gruelling application I was accepted and am very grateful to have been able to spend two years studying under the guidance of some of the worlds most senior yoga teachers. It was important for me to train under the best teachers in London so that I could pass on the science of yoga in its most authentic form, keeping in line with both traditional yoga techniques and modern science.

After qualifying as a teacher, I carried on working as a GDP whilst I started to build up local classes of Ashtanga yoga – the style I practice daily and teach. The more I taught, the more positive impacts I could see the practice having on local members of the community.

I even had some of my patients come to class and one who was particularly scared of having dental treatment found the breath work really helps to alleviate her phobia of dentistry. It was seeing these huge impacts on peoples lives that made me finally make the switch over to teaching yoga full-time.

**DB:** Why do you think all dentists should take an interest in yoga?

**ZK:** As the demands being placed on the



dental profession continue to grow, whether these manifest as less time to see patients, more UDAs, more pressure from corporate practices or simply dealing with accounts, the daily stresses being faced by dentists are continuing to grow.

With increases in both work and stress load, our physical and mental wellbeing are often the first things to suffer as a result and as such, the need to slow down and find ways to protect and improve our health has never been more apparent.

The sedentary nature of the role also places a concern on the physical wellbeing of the dentist, as we spend so much of our workday sitting down, even with loupes, our posture can suffer and fatty deposits around our middle can start to become harder to shift.

The ancient practice of yoga is a great way to help address these concerns. Yoga is both a physical and mental practice and is highly efficient as a truly holistic form of exercise to deal with not only our physical posture and strength but also with our stressed out minds.

**DB:** What actually is yoga?

**ZK:** The word yoga originates from the Sanskrit language and means to unite. Yoga is an ancient mind-body practice, which brings about inner and outer strength by uniting the physical body with the mind through the practice of physical postures, meditation and breath work. On the surface, yoga may look like a purely physical form of





- Increases overall body awareness
- Increases the levels of dopamine production which can help to lift one's mood
- Improves how we see ourselves and our relationship with others

Thank you, Zeena.

In the next yoga article I will chat more with Zeena about how we can get started! ■

exercise, but through the diligent focus on the breath throughout the class, one can find themselves becoming very mindful of the present moment, which results in a clearer and more focused mind.

Originating in India, yoga was first practised by ancient seers who lived alone and wandered the land in search of a deeper meaning to life. Through observing nature and holding themselves in postures for long periods of time they started to discover the benefits of the physical practice not only on their bodies but also on their mind.

It was in the 1960s/70s when Americans and Europeans started travelling to India in search of mysticism, that yoga started to become more visible in the West and now it has become commonplace in most gyms. Throughout London and in most of the major cities in the UK there are even dedicated yoga shalas (schools) where you can practice either one style of yoga only or choose from tens of styles of yoga.

The many styles of yoga can be daunting to decipher, and they mainly differ in speed and techniques but they aim to do the same thing – to bring us into the present moment thereby moving us away from our habitual patterns of worrying about the past or projecting fears onto what is coming up

in the future.

**DB:** Could you summarise the physical benefits of yoga?

**ZK:** Yoga offers a huge benefit to our muscles, joints and internal organs. Some of the physical and physiological benefits of yoga include:

- Strengthens and tones the core muscles, needed for good posture
- Increases muscle definition throughout the body
- Improves flexibility
- Strengthens the muscles around joints and can contribute to better bone health
- Supports the function of the cardiovascular, digestive and respiratory systems
- Can help to reduce high blood pressure
- Balances the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems
- Aids better quality and more restful sleep

**DB:** In addition to the physical benefits, what other health benefits does yoga bring?

**ZK:** In addition to the physical benefits, yoga is known to help maintain and improve mental and emotional health:

- Reduces the levels of cortisol circulating in the body, helping to alleviate symptoms of stress and anxiety
- Improves cognitive function