

The benefits of yoga and cycling



As a cyclist and a yoga enthusiast my dream is to be able to unite these two practices. Mainly because I know how beneficial yoga is for cyclists.

I have been really trying to drive more cyclists to take up yoga in their spare time. *Yoga gives you the ability to maintain a healthy and strong body. It works on the flexibility and strength in legs, upper body and core.* There are now many cyclists who see the benefit of using yoga to focus and improve their cycling. Don't be behind the times. Yoga isn't just for hippies and yes it can be strengthening whilst also being relaxing. It can target the deep muscles we may not use in day to day life to strengthen our back and core and give us the extra push when riding your bike. Yoga offers many varieties and styles from the slow grounding style of Hatha yoga, to the controlled powerful pace of Ashtanga yoga. All styles can be beneficial but the most applicable for cyclists are styles that focus on continuous movement. Styles such as Ashtanga for a steady flowing, work out through a full range of movements and build great muscle endurance.

The benefits of yoga for cyclists

Strength and core

The strength built from yoga will help you feel more relaxed on the saddle; giving you the ability to stay more focused while climbing and descending and having added strength and flexibility in every phase of your riding. Conversely, when you go back to the mat, you'll be able to hold poses longer.

Yoga exercises will help to align your spine, release back and neck pain and give you more flexibility in your upper back which is really what cyclists need when doing long rides and

regularly getting on their bikes. It is about taking the time for body conditioning on the mat before you start training on your bike.

When you first start yoga you may be surprised that some of the poses will need a lot of strength. Over time yoga teaches us to stabilise the muscles, using balance and strength.

A strong core makes you a better cyclist but cycling does not make your core stronger. Some people think of the core as just the abs and while they are an important set of muscles, there are also more than 20 muscles attach to the lumbo-pelvic-hip complex. Yoga doesn't just target one area it works the whole region.

Cyclists need to focus on leg strength, which many of the poses in yoga target, but they also need to focus on flexibility and lower back strength. Cyclists spend most of their time bent forward over the handlebars, which leads to tight hip flexors. Many yoga poses target the hip flexors and lower back, helping to balance muscle strength and prevent injury. Yoga also keeps you focused on a deep and steady breath, forcing you work aerobically. Training your muscles aerobically and learning how to control your breathing are two very important aspects of training and racing for any endurance athlete.

Flexibility

With yoga comes greater flexibility. Cyclists spend a lot of their time hunched over their handlebars which puts a strain on their lower backs, shoulders and necks. Tightness in the hamstrings and hips are common complaints. Stretching and warming up helps. When I did long cycles I remember the pain of aching shoulders and stiffness after long rides.

When I was a cyclist I constantly felt I had tight hips and tight hamstrings. When I started yoga I started to loosen these out and become more flexible, as I released all the tension in my back and legs. Flexibility is believed to improve performance and reduce risk of injury. When you first start practicing yoga you may have a little soreness, practicing yoga long term reduces muscle soreness. After a cycle you are encouraged stretch, yoga can be more interesting and dynamic than the standard fitness style stretches and deepen the stretch on the muscles helping to also relax your mind and body.

Breathe

Yoga will help you to feel calm. When you are in a particular long ride you can calm your mind to your breath, like you do in your yoga practice and use this to push through the pain. Remember the mindfulness you had in the resting poses and use your yoga training to connect your mind to your breath and relax into the saddle.

Your body will be used to being stressed in these yoga positions yet the breath is calming your mind to give you more endurance, especially when you are pushing through a climb or racing through a time trial. Remember to use your breath, we often hold our breath when we are concentrating and yoga teaches us to be under pressure but also breathing and releasing the tension we create, out of the body.

Shallow panting is not helpful when cycling, it drives inadequate oxygen to perform and causes muscles fatigue. Yoga teaches us to breathe to our lower belly rather than in the upper chest, which is quite normal. Using full inspiration and exhalation in the yoga practice trains the cyclist for the time on the time in these pressurised environment.

Injury protection

Listen to your body and your limitations. Don't push yourself as you can overstretch which will put just as much damage on the body. Don't become too competitive in yoga. It is about your body and how you feel on that day at that moment. Leave any ego at the door and just take your focus within, don't worry what your neighbour is doing. When cyclists injure themselves it is usually due to a imbalance related to weak backs or core. There can also be misalignment between left and right leg which will cause a difference in the strokes when peddling. Yoga will strengthen your whole body, legs, core and back whilst also giving you a good posture.

There is a sterotype in yoga that it is just for girls who want to stretch. We need to get away from this viewpoint as yoga can be a strong powerful workout. The focus you put in during class is what you will get out of it once you are on your bike. Yoga will make you strong. With strength you will get faster and yoga will bring in flexibility. You may feel sore after class and work past this soreness to get to the next level of flexibility but you will also leave the classes relaxed and have more clarity and focus for the rest of the day.

Cycle faster do yoga watch this clip for more

details https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Q7a4NsQqGdc

Lance Armstrong, one of Austin's most **famous** residents, tweets about his **yoga practice**, and restorative **yoga** classes for **cyclists** are offered regularly

<https://twitter.com/lancearmstrong/status/6769257709>

Integrate yoga into your weekly regime to gain the benefits. Don't wait until you have an injury before you join a class. Sometimes it is too late. Just our daily life can cause misalignment in the body so yoga is a good way to check in with your body to see the difference