

Conquering anxiety

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Yoga offers solutions to take care of generalized anxiety and helps recover self confidence, in your body and in yourself.

How to heal yourself with yoga ? Answers from Doctor Lionel Coudron, founder of the Institut de Yogathérapie.

José is shy, he arrives with his shoulders slightly arched forward, his face is tense. His speech is almost hesitant. Almost embarrassed, he explains to me that he comes to see me because he is afraid of flying, which handicaps him. Admittedly, it is a phobic anxiety, but if I push my questioning a little further, I discover that José has been suffering from generalized anxiety since childhood, characterized by an irrational thought that constantly repeats to him: “it's going to be a disaster, everything is catastrophic”.

Indeed, José worries all the time. Everything is a source of worry, his life is an ordeal. His fear of flying is only one facet of his anxiety and I understand that I'm going to have to deal with the problem beforehand. If José wants to get rid of all his fears, starting with the fear of flying, he will need to establish a state of security in his body, which yoga can help to do. Without this prerequisite, he won't be able to do that. José is so used to being tense that, for him, it's normal. I insist that he describe exactly what he feels in his body at the present moment and help him to clarify it. Not without effort, he manages to tell me: “I feel tense, my jaws are tight, my shoulders are tense, I feel a knot in my throat, difficulty breathing, a tightness in the solar plexus.” I explain to him that the objective in yogatherapy, in his case, is to set up exercises to install a state of well-being in his body and that all tensions should be squarely at 0 on the scale from 0 to 10.

To do this, we set up a session in which I strengthen his self-confidence, which is accompanied by a physical feeling of strength, mastery, control and confidence. The body will need to be rooted and straightened, working on postures that encourage the opening of the shoulders and all the scapular and pelvic belts.

First of all, I propose a stretching posture of the arms towards the sky (the Mountain, photo 1) and an opening of the shoulders backwards (photo 2a). During these exercises, I regularly stress the feeling of energy that is developed by the effort. I continue with a knee bending exercise with the back straightened to strengthen the tone the legs and to feel their strength (Photo 2b). I don't forget to ask him throughout the session “how do you feel now?”. This is a crucial point. If he tightens up even more, if he is in pain because of a painful body, then I would have to look for another exercise.

Then, he continues with a hip-opening exercise in tree pose (a variation of the dancer pose, photo 3), which also allows him to open the pelvis and straighten up. Always in the will to anchor and open up. Finally, the bow pose (photo 4) will allow a complete opening (of which the dancer's pose is a good preparation). In yoga we say that the bow pose opens all the “chakras”, and that is indeed what it does. It thus makes it possible to “recondition” the body to effort in a progressive way by releasing the various articulations.

All these postures allow to reinforce the feeling of strength, control, mastery and ultimately confidence.

With this session, José can gradually regain confidence and fight against generalized anxiety. To achieve this, he must practice every day this session that we recorded for him. After three weeks, despite the persistence of many periods of anxiety and apprehension, José regained confidence in himself and it was then that we were able to begin the treatment of his specific phobia of flying on a plane, which he was able to take shortly afterwards.

The practice



Mountain pose

Start with the feet together, hands together at the chest. Inhale as you raise your arms vertically. Exhale in the posture by contracting the perineum, retracting the abdomen and slightly digging the shoulder blades (photo 1).

Then inhale again and exhale by bringing your hands back to your chest. Repeat the exercise three times. Concentrate on stretching and feeling pleasantly energized, such as when you wake up.



Arms flying backwards

Standing, interlace your fingers, thumbs and indexes pointing out. Inhale while stretching your arms backwards (photo 2a). Exhale while relaxing the elbows. Repeat the exercise three times.



On the fourth time, exhale while bending forward, the back straight (photo 2b). Concentrate on the strength in the legs and the back and on the agreeable stretch of the front of the body and of the solar plexus.



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Danser pose (preparation)

Standing, hands together. Inhale while lifting the right knee (left foot as a support) and your arms vertically. Exhale by grasping the knee forward. Straighten your back and shoulders, anchor yourself in the ground. On the next breath, inhale while carrying the foot backwards and grasp it with both hands (photo 3). Stabilize and anchor yourself well. Check that the knee is not flying forward. Focus on feeling grounding and strength.



4

Bow pose

Lying on your stomach, place your chin on the ground. Bend both knees and grab your ankles. Knees and feet should be spread apart as required. Breathe in while raising your upper back and thighs (photo 4); exhale as you settle into the pose. Repeat the exercise three times and on the fourth time, remain in the posture, breathing as calmly as possible. Concentrate on the sensations of strength, openness and joy that resonate in the posture. Then inhale and move up a little higher and exhale while settling in.

After each posture, feel the effect that persists as an echo that resonates in the body. Concentrate on the positive and pleasant sensation of the effort. Repeat yourself mentally: I strengthen my confidence, I feel confident, I feel strong.