

19 Jan 2012

Sirs,

The recent New York Times article on the “dangers” of yoga, adapted from a book by William J. Broad on *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and Rewards*, is heavy on anecdote and slim on science. It is full of physiological inaccuracies and confines itself to the most sensationalistic aspects of yoga-related injury, cherry picking a few extreme examples to implicate the entire practice.

A more balanced article would acknowledge that it is problematic to produce accurate figures on injuries directly causally linked solely to the practice of yoga. Injuries can result from physical activity whether or not we are taking risks. This is not to say that yoga practice is without risk of injuries, which might occur due to the over enthusiasm of a student who wants to achieve more extreme postures and ignores the guidance of the teacher. It could also be that a student has an underlying health issue which they haven't shared with the teacher – a problem which can be exacerbated in very full classes in gyms etc.

Mr Black – the yoga teacher interviewed by Broad - is quoted as saying that he has no formal training for determining which yoga poses are good for a student and which may be problematic, preferring to rely on his “ton of experience.” At the British Wheel of Yoga (the National Governing Body for Yoga), we do not rely solely on experience. Our teachers complete a rigorous diploma course (the only yoga teaching qualification in the UK equivalent to the first year of undergraduate study), which includes modules on physiology and anatomy, and gives advice and guidance of ways in which postures can be modified so that people with underlying health issues can practice safely. All our teachers have professional indemnity insurance and BWY members benefit from insurance that covers them against injury.

Anyone can practice yoga, regardless of age, sex or ability. As well as stretching and strengthening the body yoga improves posture, promotes feelings of relaxation and has been linked to improved concentration, better quality sleep and a reduction of anxiety and depression. The British Wheel of Yoga, in conjunction with Sheffield University, is about to publish a research report into the therapeutic effects of yoga for health and wellbeing and, if Mr Broad's experience is anything to go by, we look forward to the comment and debate which we hope will be stimulated by our research. Maybe the biggest benefit for him is that, after the publication of his extremely inflammatory article in the NY Times his book shot to the top of yoga category on Amazon.

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to promoting a greater understanding of yoga  
through education, study, training and practice



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