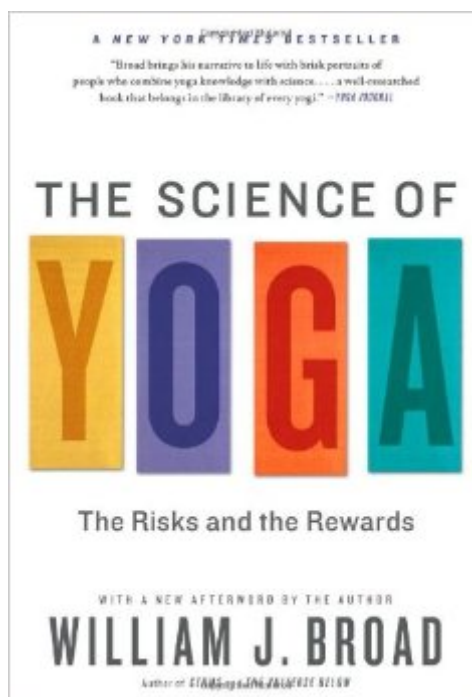


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# The Science Of Yoga: The Risks And The Rewards



## Synopsis

A lead science writer for The New York Times and lifelong yoga practitioner examines centuries of history and research to scrutinize the claims made about yoga for health, fitness, emotional wellbeing, sex, weight loss, healing, and creativity. He reveals what is real and what is illusory, in the process exposing moves that can harm or even kill. A New York Times bestseller. The Science of Yoga draws on more than a century of painstaking research to present the first impartial evaluation of a practice thousands of years old. It celebrates what's real and shows what's illusory, describes what's uplifting and beneficial and what's flaky and dangerous and why. Broad unveils a burgeoning global industry that attracts not only curious scientists but true believers and charismatic hustlers. He shatters myths, lays out unexpected benefits, and offers a compelling vision of how the ancient practice can be improved.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book created a buzz in the yoga world when a controversial excerpt, entitled "How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body," appeared in the Sunday New York Times magazine. While highlighting the important and under-discussed problem of yoga injuries, the article struck me as imbalanced and alarmist and, I'll admit, I was expecting to dislike the book. But I quite enjoyed author William Broad's lively voice and the various historical anecdotes he unearthed in his five years of research -- and even learned a few things about a topic I've intensely researched for more than a decade. Where the Pulitzer Prize winning science writer shines is in debunking various myths, which continue to be spouted by well-meaning, but misinformed yoga teachers. Thus, yoga will not help you lose weight by revving up your metabolism, fast yogic breathing does not increase oxygen

delivery to the brain (it actually has the opposite effect), and asana, even vigorous versions, won't give you anything like the aerobic workout of running or swimming. The book focuses on modern, athletic yoga styles, with little talk of meditation, cultivating awareness, growing spiritually, or finding your life's mission. And sometimes in his glee to overturn sacred cows, Broad oversimplifies the science, or ignores research that doesn't support his point of view. For example, while yoga has been shown to lower the metabolic rate, we don't hear the evidence that suggests it does facilitate weight loss, likely via such mechanisms as encouraging mindful eating and better food choices, and reducing the level of the hunger-inducing, fat-depositing stress hormone cortisol.

Review of William J. Broad's "The Science of Yoga" by Leslie Kaminoff, author of Yoga Anatomy-2nd Edition  
In spite of the fact that I have some highly critical things to say about this book, I am recommending that every yoga student, yoga teacher and teacher of yoga teachers read "The Science of Yoga." The issues that Mr. Broad raises are too important to be ignored, and need to be openly and objectively discussed by anyone who cares about truth, clarity and safety. When he's at his best, Broad does a great service to our field by thoroughly investigating the history of yoga research and reporting on the actual science that's available to either support or refute many of the claims that are commonly made about yoga's promises. Several of the myths he exposes are ones that I have been trying to debunk for years. He also does a great job of documenting the evidence of yoga's benefits - for health, creativity and mental balance. When he's at his worst, he's attempting to make his book more colorful by spinning speculative yarns about the personalities of his cast of characters. Most of them are long dead and cannot dispute Broad's assertions about their motivations, ambitions and ethics. However, some of his subjects are very much alive and I know for a fact that at least one of them takes extreme exception to the manner in which he was portrayed (full disclosure: I am referring to a good friend of mine). Broad also loses his objectivity when, in chapter 4, he launches into the controversial issue of yoga injuries.

1. Firstly, the book focuses mainly on pranayama and asana ... obviously a narrow slice of "yoga" as practiced everyday by millions of Devotees, Babas, Sannyasis and Yogis who are a vital part of cultural and spiritual life in India. It's a tad Western-centric to use "Yoga" in the title when the focus of the book is a narrow slice of an otherwise rich and multifaceted spiritual practice. 2. Broad describes how the modern form of Western yoga is a "cleaned up" version of a centuries-old Tantric practice. The modern postures were developed in Mysore in the early 1900's as part of India's press for independence from the British. This clean, gymnastic & more regimented form of asana and

pranayama practice developed by Krishnamacharya is what eventually caught on in America. In India, yoga remains a source of great National pride in both its modern scientific foundations as well as its relationship to ancient Indian culture and religion.<sup>3</sup> Broad provides a, ahem, broad, overview of the way in which scientists have tried to understand how and why pranayama and asana practice lead to wellness and longevity. He digs up research findings in India from as far back as the late 1800's and follows them up to the present day. This was my favorite part of the book ... his trips to the original schools in India to dig up and introduce us to the earliest research on yogis ... usually on yogis who could stay buried inside of airtight chambers. Back then, yogis were believed to have supernatural powers! Even today however, modern scientists study the physiology of hibernation among mammals and wonder if humans might be able to enter similar dormant states. Who knows how long humans can really extend the natural age limit?

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