

## When is Yoga not Enough?

Why do people practice Yoga? Typically in North America the answer to that question is “health”. People are searching for a way to keep fit, healthy and flexible in our increasingly sedentary society. Yoga or any regimen of stretching and light exercise is a definite step in the right direction, but it is a step that requires good nutrition and most importantly a balanced frame in order to achieve our health goals.

In the search for better balance and posture there is only so far that yoga and exercise can take you. Eventually most of us run into limitations within our own bodies that continue to plague us in spite of our best efforts to keep ourselves in top form. These complaints can be as simple as having less flexibility on one side of the body compared to the other or can be as serious as migraines and sciatica or worse. *Many* of these conditions are aggravated if not caused by a clinically imbalanced posture.

You may say: “But I stretch and exercise, my posture should be great!” It's true that yoga and exercise *support* a good posture, but they can't always *correct* a distorted posture. This is because the control of your posture is neurological and automatically maintained. The 3 main inputs for postural control are all tied to keeping your head balanced, level, and on top of the rest of your body. These three systems are: the “Righting Reflex” which attempts to keep your eyes level with the horizon, the vestibular apparatus of your inner ear which deals mainly with balance and movement of your head, and finally the highly sensitive proprioceptive (position sensing) feedback system from the muscles and ligaments of the neck and base of the skull. The proprioceptive feedback system has the largest effect on posture and muscle tone throughout the entire spine, with the key region being where the 15-pound bowling ball called your head sits on a little 2-ounce bone at the top of your neck. The sensitivity of this system is profound, with misalignments of less than 1 degree capable of causing global postural changes.

The top bone in your neck is known as “C1” or the “Atlas” vertebra. Its position relative to the skull and the neck below it is vitally important because of its effect on posture. The Atlas forms very mobile joints and as a result is more prone to misalignment injury than other bones in the spine. Most of the muscles of the upper neck are supporting and stabilizing without specifically moving the individual bones. Thus we end up with a large portion of our population who have become misaligned at some point and now have their body bracing the upper neck and head to prevent it from getting any worse. Atlas injuries can be caused by anything from car accidents to birth trauma, and do not always result in immediate symptoms. Our bodies are durable and adaptable, so this situation can often exist

for years with very little noticeable detriment. However, eventually the constant strain of holding up a crooked frame takes its toll on our bodies and we start to develop symptoms and wear out our parts prematurely.

To correct this problem and get lasting relief from pain and postural imbalance, detailed postural measurements and precise x-rays of the Atlas region are required. With the information gained from such measurements, a very specific and low-impact adjustment can be made to the Atlas in order to correct the alignment with the skull and lower neck. The muscles surrounding the area are then able to relax their bracing action which translates into a relaxing and rebalancing of the muscles all the way down the spine, restoring balance and harmony to the system. Only a trained chiropractor with experience in the specific realignment of the upper cervical region is qualified to evaluate and treat this misalignment. Correction of the misalignment typically results in greater strength, coordination, overall energy and better flexibility in addition to typically seeing a reduction in symptoms. These benefits allow you to get more out of your yoga routine and get that much closer to achieving your health and fitness goals.

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