

# Your Health is Your Karma

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Your health is your karma. The structure of your genetics is the physical manifestation of your past karma. Your DNA is a map of the physical karma that brought you back into life. Yoga says that it is changeable. Gene research indicates that genes are not completely fixed; some of them jump around and can mutate. Scientists freely admit they do not understand it all. The difference is that yogis do not try to understand it—they use yoga's proven tools to change it. You can change your health by changing your karma.

The most important thing to understand about your karma is that there's no one else you can blame. You did it to yourself. Karma is the rebound of the tennis ball that you threw against the wall last week, last year or last lifetime. Whatever you do has its strongest effect on you. If you treat other people respectfully and live a good life, the one who benefits most is you. If you try to cut corners, lie or take advantage of others, you will be living with a cheat and a thief — yourself. The world helps you get the lesson by reflecting back to you what you do not see about yourself. In other words, "it is in your face." It is in your body, too.

Some people say you can heal an illness by changing your thinking. This is true sometimes. Sometimes it is not true. When it is not true, you can end up worse off because now you feel guilty about being unwell. When you can change your health by changing your thinking, you must include the subconscious and unconscious levels as well. A woman once shared her morning routine with me, "I get up every day, look in the mirror and give myself a big smile, saying, 'You are wonderful! You are beautiful! You are fantastic! Today is a great day!'" As she described this, she put on a big fake smile and got very perky and animated. But her eyes never changed . . . neither did her body, which was racked with pain . . . nor did her life change. She had many challenges, both financial and family stuff. Her conscious message to herself had not reached the subconscious and unconscious levels.

The most important thing to understand about karma is that, while you created it, you can also change it. If what you are experiencing now is the result of past actions, then what you experience in the future will be the results of current actions (still mixed with some old unfinished business). Yoga offers powerful tools for changing your karma. Some of the tools are familiar and some are new. If you want to change your karma, here's a list of how to begin:

**CHANGE YOUR BODY:** Whether it is your health you want to improve or the way you look, here are some are basics:

**Exercise:** Any kind of exercise is beneficial. Yoga poses can be done as exercise, but they are actually much more. In Svaroopaa Yoga, the poses reach deeper than your body and begin changing your karma. Old patterns get cleared away, clearing the subconscious and unconscious levels of mind at the same time. Last week, a student described it in a yoga class this way, "It feels like I took a toothbrush into my bones and scrubbed out everything that did not belong there."

**Food:** Improve your diet by whatever plan most interests you (vegetarian, raw foods, low fat, macrobiotic, etc.). Choose what eating plan suits you. There is not one right answer for everyone, which is why there are so many to choose from. Yoga recommends a vegetarian diet but allows dairy products in moderation. The classical yoga diet is also the Ayurvedic diet, which means it is personalized for your basic constitution and current needs.

**Relaxation:** The activities you plan for your relaxation time are not the true quietude that yoga prescribes. True relaxation is the cessation of all activity (outer and inner), which means you would turn off the television, radio, CD player, etc., and rest in quietude for a few minutes every day. This is not sleep either, but a more restful stillness that you give yourself daily (ten- to twenty-minutes). Most yoga classes include this at the end of every class. There are many

relaxation tapes available (Hint: Look for “relaxation” tapes, not “guided visualization” tapes that actually activate the mind). This conscious choosing of physical stillness has a profound effect on your body as well as your mind, which starts us on the next category.

**CHANGE YOUR MIND:** I used to be cautious about suggesting to students that they needed help with their mind. I recently realized that everyone knows they need help with their mind!

**Gratitude:** Even if your life is not perfect, there are many blessings for which you can express gratitude. Begin by counting your blessings. Then go one step further and express gratitude for them. Say thank you to the people who bring blessings in your life. Try saying thank you to your employer for your job. On your birthday (or any day), say thank you to your parents for bringing you into the world and raising you in the best way they knew how. Say thank you to the ocean and the sky, to the flowers and birds and sunshine. Express your thanks for the freeways, even if there are other cars on them, too. Have a conversation with God, or nature, or with whatever you consider to be the source of all of this. Look for things to be grateful for and express your gratitude frequently.

**Meditation:** Do it. Even if you think you do not know how. Just sit down, set a timer, and stay there until the timer goes off. Even if your mind keeps going the whole time, stay there. Even if your body aches, stay there. Every time your body or your mind distracts you from your meditation, tell it lovingly, “I will deal with that in just a few minutes.” Later, keep your promise and deal with the physical or mental issues that need your attention. Your mind will begin to trust you. It will become your friend. Then it will become quiet when you choose to sit quietly. You will find who you really are — the true Self that is different than your mind.

**Live in the present:** Researchers now say that you think 65,000 thoughts a day. Most of them are about the past or the future. If even 10 percent of your thoughts were new, you’d have a very interesting mind. But it is mostly playing reruns. If your mind were replaying the most beautiful and significant moments of your life, it would be interesting. Unfortunately, it obsesses on the worst stuff! So, stay in the present moment. Even if the present moment is not great, it is better than what your mind wants to do. This means that when you’re filling a glass of water; keep your mind with you, mentally filling the glass of water. Do not waste your mind remembering how your favorite glass got broken, or thinking about the new kitchen faucet you wish you could buy. Keep your mind in the present, filling the glass of water. Treat your mind as if it is a helium balloon: put a string on it and tie it to your wrist.

**CHANGE YOUR LIFE:**

**Service:** Yoga calls this “karma yoga.” You become free from karma through the yoga practice of serving others. Volunteer with an organization or cause that you believe in. Show up to help, even if what you’re doing is simple stuff. Every organization needs some help with taking out the trash, putting labels on envelopes, running errands, greeting people at events, etc. If you keep showing up, they start to give you things that are more interesting or challenging to do. Now is when you really have to be careful, because it is not “karma yoga” if you are doing it for the wrong reasons. If you want to get ahead in the organization, if you are hoping for the T-shirt or trophy they give out at the end of the year, or if you want to take a course they give in return for a certain number of hours of your work — oops! It is only true service when it is giving while expecting or desiring nothing in return. This is one of the most powerful ways to clean up your karma.

**Dharma:** Dharma means living your life responsibly. Take care of the things for which you are responsible. This includes taking care of yourself as well as the things you are supposed to do. Do all the things you know you are supposed to be doing, willingly. The Bhagavadgita defines yoga as “skill in action.” Do the best you can at each thing you do. Find that part of yourself that hangs back and bring it along with you for a change. Be a responsible, actively involved, willing participant in life, whether you are at work, home or at play.

**Non-harmfulness:** “Above all, do no harm.” This oath of the ancient physician is also a primary principle of yoga, ahimsa. As you do all the things required by dharma, do not cause harm to anyone or anything. Living in this way, you walk lightly upon the earth. You treat others with

compassion and respect. It means: "Do not cause harm to others," but it also means, "Do not hurt yourself!" This takes us back up to the top of the list, where you begin with the basics of taking care of your body and mind.

Changing your karma is easy, because you create your own karma. Thus, when you change what you do, your karma changes, too. Changing your karma is the only way to get out of the repetitive cycle you are caught in and to find freedom. Changing your karma takes some effort, like turning a steering wheel in an old pickup truck. Once you have started the truck going in that new direction, it is easy to continue. You can begin by picking one item from the list above. Do it for three days in a row. You will feel so good that you'll never want to go back to the old way.

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