

► OUTSIDE THE OFFICE



◀ Figure. Dr. Yeung spending time with her two children (left, center) and doing yoga (right).

BUILDING A FIRM FOUNDATION WITH YOGA



Picking up this healthy hobby has helped me achieve balance in my life.

BY ELIZABETH YEUNG, MD

As a busy surgeon with two kids at home, I recognize first-hand that, in order for us to work as hard as we do, see the number of patients that we do, work full-time while also parenting as many of us do, and attend meetings or conduct research as many of us do, it is extremely important that we maintain our emotional, physical, and spiritual health (Figure). I believe that when one of those things gets out of balance in life, it throws everything else off, too. If I am feeling extremely stressed, I can see the ramifications of that stress in my physical well-being.

MAINTAINING BALANCE

About 5 years ago, I discovered that meditation, stretching, and yoga were excellent activities for maintaining balance among the three arenas of well-being (emotional, physical, and spiritual).

I had been noticing that I would sometimes come home having given so much of myself over to the work day—between empathy and physical exhaustion—that there was little left to give to my family. This would trigger a cycle of unhealthy guilt because my goal was to give to my kids as much as, if not more than, I gave to my patients collectively. Yoga helped me to achieve that goal.

Doing yoga helps me stay centered, and it refuels me so that I can be the best possible version of myself. I falter and I fail, but doing yoga gives me enough energy to focus on my children, participate in the weekly slumber parties that they demand, and be as present as possible for them. I realized that the more I went to the mat and took the time to refuel physically by doing yoga, the more I was learning lessons on how to better deal with everything else in

my life. Doing yoga put me in balance, and it keeps me there.

Yoga has taught me the beautiful lesson that if we don't take time to ourselves to refuel, we are doing others a disservice. If we don't refuel ourselves and take care of our own health, we will not be able to provide our patients with the level of care that they deserve.

TAKING TIME TO MYSELF

I believe it is vital to take time out for ourselves—in some way—to emotionally, physically, and spiritually refuel. Doing so has changed my life greatly. By doing yoga, I've learned how to move past the uncomfortable and how not to do things simply out of habit. Certain physical poses done in yoga, such as the one in which you interlace your fingers with your nondominant hand, teach you how to break habits. It feels so different to

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do this, and it forces you to be in the present because you are doing something unnatural. It forces you to focus on what you are doing in the here and now. I started yoga as a physical practice, but it has helped me evolve as a person.

A METAPHOR FOR LIFE

In the different poses in yoga, it takes many small stretches and practices to get to the point at which you can do each pose correctly. In this way, yoga can be seen as a metaphor for life.

You have to build a firm foundation in order to achieve whatever goals you have set for yourself. Those small steps you take to get you to your goal are not going to be comfortable, but you can use the lessons of the discipline to work past the discomfort and move on to the next level. Emotional and spiritual health are very connected to physical well-being. Most important, I’ve realized that I’m only one small piece of a very large universe, and, thus, for all the good that I do or for all that I falter along the way, I appreciate what I have to offer and I don’t take myself too seriously. ■

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