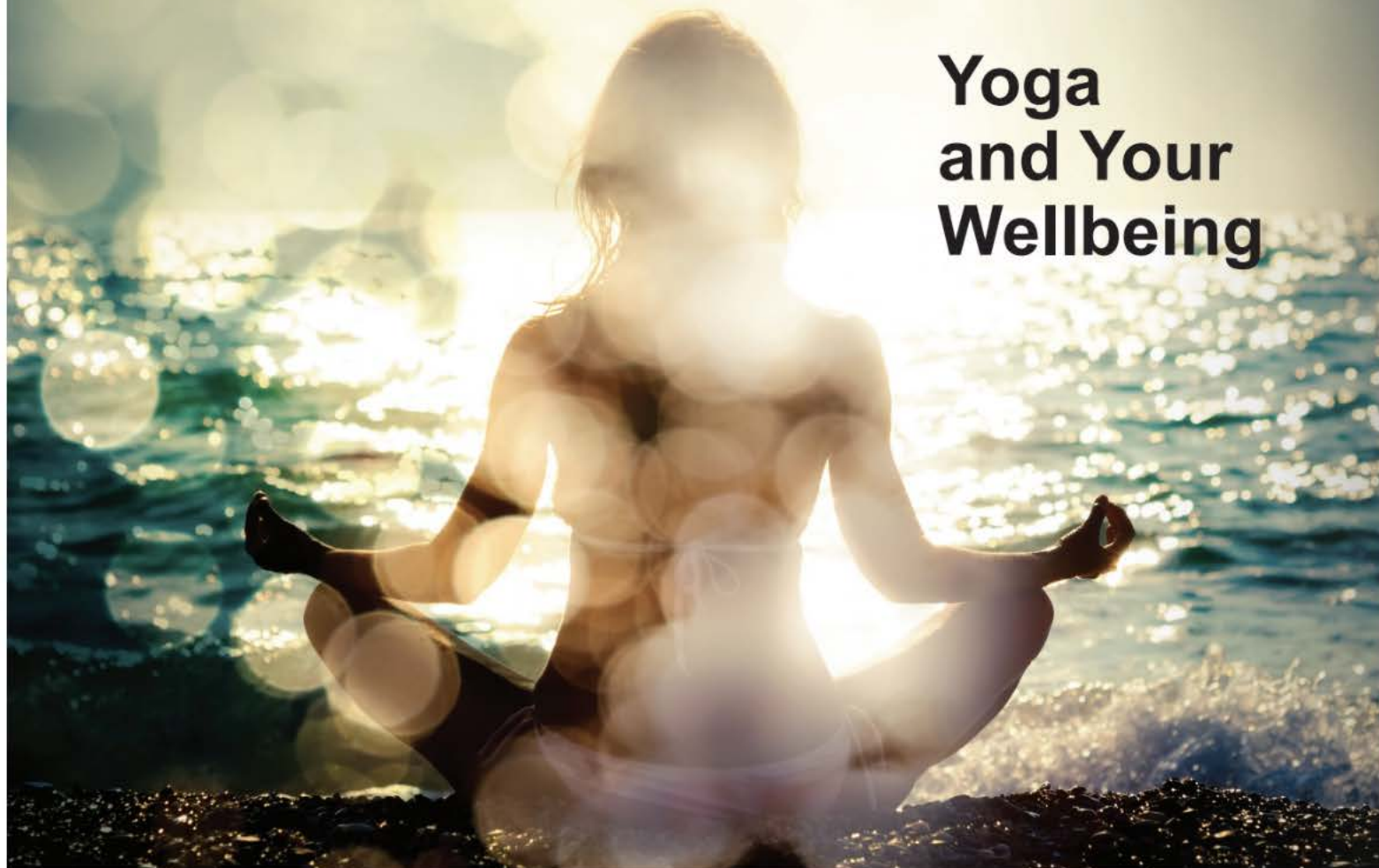


## Yoga and Your Wellbeing



By Lisa Jackson, RN, CHC, RYT-500, FDN-P, AFMC

I jumped on the opportunity to write an article for Mental Health Talk magazine. As a wife, and mother of four adult children and two grandchildren, I understand the stressors of having multiple roles and responsibilities. I have been helping people for the past 40 years and founded Carpe Diem Wellness with the privilege of helping thousands of individuals around the world. Having lost too many loved ones and friends to cancer and chronic disease, I am passionate about inspiring, educating and empowering individuals and corporations to become the leader of their lives and to create cultures of wellness. I lead high achieving professionals to prevent burnout so they can optimize wellbeing and productivity.

Today, I take *carpe diem*, (seize the day) literally by striving to live my best life. When I am not speaking, coaching or teaching yoga, you can find me with family and friends, on the tennis court, or on my bicycle.

My first encounter with yoga was as a young girl in the late 60's and early 70's after I was diagnosed with scoliosis and excruciating back pain. I was fortunate enough to have an older sister whose friend went to India to study yoga.

Yoga was not common in the US then, nor was it common for a young African American male to travel abroad to bring this "weird" practice to our living room. I immediately felt relief but did not get serious about yoga until after bearing three children.

After measuring my height alongside my children's marks on our kitchen wall, I saw that I seemed to be shrinking and my back pain was increasing. I signed up for a 90-day yoga challenge and actually stretched my spine by one and a half inches! I was hooked. Not only did it resolve my constant back pain, but yoga has improved my stress resiliency, helped me reverse my hypertension, decrease anxiety, and improve my mood.

Here are a few pearls I have learned along the way:

- Yoga has taught me how to remain calm in the midst of chaos
- Stress is not what happens to us, it is how we react to the perceived stressors
- The body follows the mind and the mind follows the breath

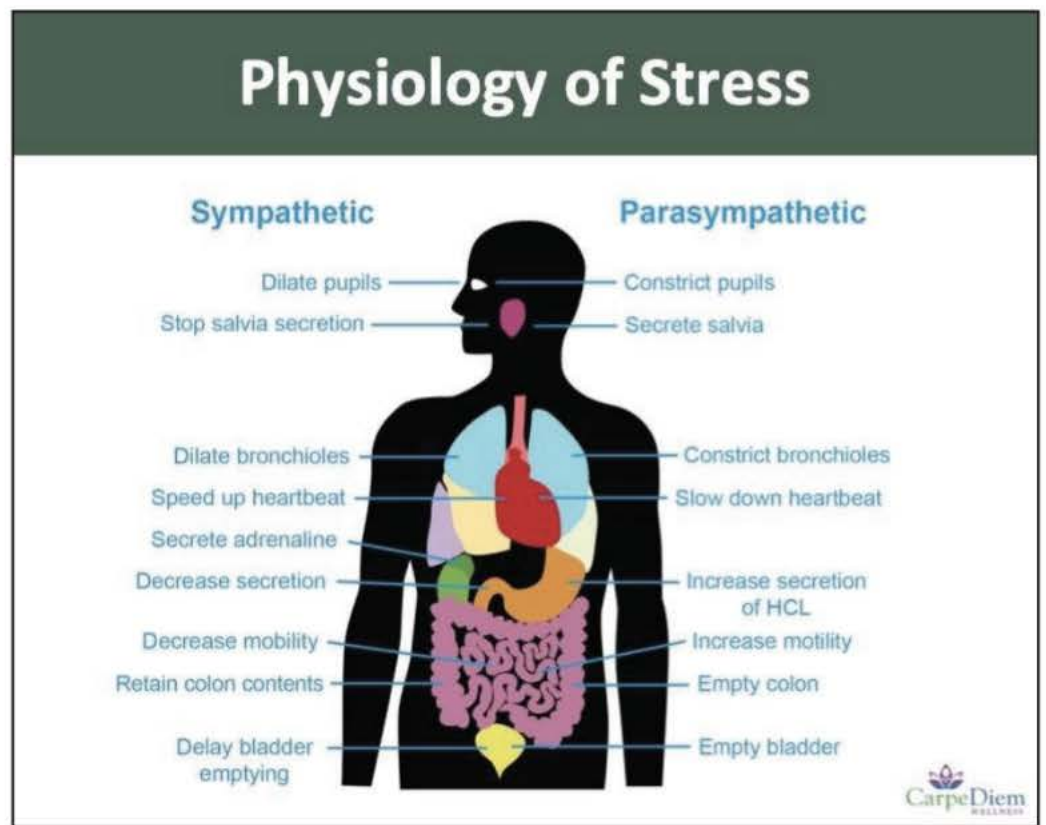
One of the best ways to improve your wellbeing in the moment is through the breath. Yoga and Breathwork directly affect the vagus nerve, also known as the vagal nerves - the largest nerve outside the spinal column which regulates your autonomic nervous system. This wandering nerve controls breathing, heartbeat, digestion and other automatic processes in the body.

Breathing is at the core of yoga practice. Left nostril breathing will stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system (the rest and repair, rest and digest, or mate and ovulate) function. Conversely, right nostril breathing will stimulate the sympathetic nervous system (the Fight | Flight | Freeze response). If you are preparing to go on stage to speak and find yourself feeling nervous, simply place your finger over your right nostril and take slow deep belly breaths through your left nostril. If you are falling asleep in your 5<sup>th</sup> zoom call for the day, you may wish to engage some deep breaths through your right nostril! This is something you can do at any time to keep you in the present moment, reconnect to yourself and remain calm in the midst of chaos.

As a health coach trained in both conventional and functional medicine, I help my clients maximize, minimize and prioritize what their unique body needs for optimal health. Prioritizing self-care is the most challenging of the three for myself and others. Optimal health is not complicated and can be helped by using simple solutions mentioned above.

What is challenging is consistency. This is where a health coach, accountability partner or a health conscious community can be invaluable. ●

# Physiology of Stress



# The Solution for Health

## Maximize

- Put in what's needed for your unique body and soul
  - Raw materials your body needs to function and heal
  - Oxygen, water, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein, healthy fats
  - Belief that the therapy one is choosing is effective and safe

## Minimize

- Take out what's harmful for your unique body and soul
  - Toxins, infections, allergens, stress, trauma
  - Limiting beliefs, fear, negative expectations

## Prioritize

- Create and environment for healing
  - Sleep, rest, laughter, stress reduction
  - Exercise, stretching, breathing
  - Meaningful relationships
  - Positive visualizations and associations

## Lisa Jackson, RN, CHC, RYT-500, FDN-P, AFMC

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