



## **“REAL MEN” DON’T DO YOGA**

### **An example of Active Compassion written for Men**

By Gregg Newsom

**A**ll men, whatever their background and path in life, can find in one another common ground. Here is the place where we can heal ourselves and help to heal the world around us. Many believe we are at a pivotal point in history. For men, this means, among other things, reassessing the roles that are considered acceptable for us in our culture.

There is a huge discrepancy between the portrayals of men in the media and the men that many of us would like to be and that the world really needs right now. This discrepancy keeps us from engaging in, and gives us the opportunity to avoid, practices that inspire health, well being and active compassion because they don’t fit acceptable roles. In order to change this we must change ourselves and support and encourage one another.

No matter where we are in our lives, there are some practices we can take up to eliminate the manipulative concept of men altogether and to encourage the emergence of a healthy and compassionate nature.

The majority of us are not going to receive overnight

enlightenment, but we might feel better, breathe more deeply, and possibly even experience rare states of being, like contentment, empathy and even peace through new practices, techniques and tools. Once we realize that through action we can create change in ourselves, we can then postulate the role we can play in changing the world around us.

We are all aware of the fast pace that the world around us is traveling at, but not everyone is aware that we can choose to participate or not. In cultures focused on agriculture, men are connected to the natural world through their labor. The assembly line and cubicle have lessened our awareness of the cycle of life to the point where, in order to redefine ourselves, it is necessary to pursue and experiment with actions that will facilitate our reconnection.

### **Yoga**

Three tools with benefits that can come quickly are yoga, massage and diet. The first of these, yoga, is dynamic. Until very recently, yoga as practiced in the West

was perceived as a women's activity. Thankfully, men have since discovered the benefits of it. If considering a yoga class, there are a few things to be mindful of before your first practice:

### **Consult your Doctor before making changes to your exercise routine**

Each yoga session is a little culture unto itself. Yoga is full of traditions, adaptations and social norms co-created by the students, the instructor and the space. Be open to these subtleties and instruction.

Most studios have website that describe classes and schedules. Many also post guidelines that will help you to get acclimated to the style and fitness level.

### **Arrive early to class to get settled in and meet the teacher.**

Some people take yoga very seriously because that is what they want yoga to be, others practice with a sense of lightness and ease. Visit different studios and find the one that fits best.

Be gentle with yourself. Even if we are active, many of us quickly realize that yoga gets into muscles we rarely use.

Remember that, even though it is sacred, it is only yoga – give yourself room to be imperfect.

### **Touch**

Human contact is essential to our development and well being, yet touching is a challenge for many. Respect is key. But men can do something much more to reframe and reclaim touch; we can become more aware of how special and sacred it is. No matter whom we touch or how we touch them, it is always an intimate experience.

If you've never had one, schedule a professional massage. Massage is both a therapeutic modality and an art form. This learned technique can demystify touch for us while providing the health benefits firsthand.

If cost is a factor, consider contacting

a local massage school. Many schools have student clinics where massage is offered to the public at a discounted rate.

Open up a discussion about the health benefits of touch and massage. Consider the potential that this could have in reframing touch in your life. If you have a partner, ask if they would be interested in exchanging non-sexual touch. It's important to express this and keep to it, as it will provide space for both of you to experience the benefits without pressure or expectations that are often associated with sex.

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Many find that drawing this line with touch improves many aspects of their relationships, including sex.

Self-massage is beneficial, too. Take the opportunity to sit and explore the nooks and crannies of your palm and arm.

Finally, when you are practicing touch, listen to your partner and listen for your reactions. Keep the lines of communication open and always share what feels good in addition to things that don't work.

### **Diet**

Food is another powerful tool that is extremely loaded in our culture. Food is actually one of the most frequently defined aspects of being a man. Misconceptions abound about what "real men" eat. That fact is, we truly are "what we eat." To kick the concept of "Real Men" we need to radically change our diets, eliminate quick and poor quality foods, and try new things. For many, this is the toughest tool to get a handle on. .

### **Consult a physician before making radical dietary changes.**

Increase your intake of whole foods (fruits, vegetables, grains, beans and nuts) Don't fall for the protein myth. Eating whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds and dark leafy greens, like spinach, will provide you with all the protein your body needs.

Diversify your shopping habits. Many of us get into a rut when buying food. Rather than getting your food from one store, visit your local farmer's market for your fruits and vegetables.

Increasing the amount of raw vegetables and fruits that we eat will increase our overall health. Thankfully salad bars are easy to find, just be mindful of the dressings. Find a recipe to make your own dressing using healthy oils like olive or sesame.

Find a local healthy food meet-up group to meet others who are making similar changes. Having a support system in place and a resource for new ideas and recipes will be invaluable.

Like yoga and touch, we can do ourselves a great service if we look at the preparation, eating and sharing of food as sacred.

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