

A photograph of a woman from the back, her hair in a bun. She has several orange dots marked along her spine, indicating the location of scoliosis. Her hands are resting on her neck and lower back.

REAL
LIFE
STORY

Can Yoga help with Scoliosis?

by Christina Fernandes

With regular practice of yoga, you can ease the pain of a curved spine and turn it into a powerful healer and a teacher, says Iskra who overcame a severe form of Scoliosis with a regular practice of yoga.

Iskra carries herself with a quiet confidence. She moves deliberately and with great consideration, both on the mat and off. Looking at her now, it is difficult to imagine that she was in pain for 25 years of her 31-year young life. But the fact is that Iskra was and still is dealing with the effects of a severe form of scoliosis, a three-dimensional deformity in which the spine curves sideways.

Scoliosis can cause nerve pinching, severe pain, diminishing lung capacity and pressure on the heart. Its effects, however, are not limited to the physical, but can also bring about deep psychological issues and severe depression.

"The way your body aches and deforms reflects on your emotional state and on how your mind works," explains Iskra.

Without fail, all doctors she turned to for help wanted to operate on her and told her this was her only option. Surgery, however, would have resulted in a long, extremely painful recovery and most likely would have kept her in constant, continuous pain. "I probably would have been in hell for the rest of my life," she says. "So I decided not to do surgery."

Iskra tried cranio-sacral therapy with some degree of success, but it only ever relieved her pain temporarily.

"I would get adjusted and feel better,"

she recalls. "But then the pain would return and I would have to go back to the therapist to get adjusted again." Iskra decided that she needed to find a way to break out of this cycle of misery rather than continuing to rely on temporary fixes. And so her yoga journey began.

When she moved to Dubai almost 10 years ago there was a yoga festival taking place. Iskra had heard that yoga might help her with scoliosis. So, deciding that she had nothing to lose, she headed to the festival to seek help.

"I assumed that I could just show them my body and they could help. So I just turned up and basically exposed myself

I said this is me, this is my severe back. I have been in pain for 25 years now, I'm a hopeless case for western medicine and I need your help."

None of the teachers she met that day felt confident or knowledgeable enough to offer Iskra help, but someone recommended that she get in touch with Kaya Peters. She was told that Kaya was experienced in working with people suffering from severe health issues.

Upon meeting her for the first time, Iskra felt that entrusting her body to Kaya had the potential to bring about real change for her and her new teacher felt the same.

"From the very beginning we kind of connected to each other," Kaya recalls. "And we have developed a really strong friendship since we started working together." Finding the right teacher was critical for Iskra. "In a case like mine, you really have to trust the person you are working with," she explains.

"There have been so many procedures in my life. I have experienced some really violent interventions on my body. I needed to find a person I could trust and whose method I believed could work for me."

Iskra and Kaya started private yoga sessions, slowly establishing a personal practice tailored to the needs of her particular condition.

"I felt a huge result from the first session," says Iskra. "You could see changes in the way I carried myself and something changed in my mind."

Kaya believes that Iskra's own readiness helped her to bring about change as quickly as she did. "Her body was so ready to get better and to accept change," Kaya says. But Iskra believes that her success is not only the result of her own hard work but also the guidance she received. "I'm deeply grateful to my teacher Kaya for



fully believing in me, my capacities, and for seeing my hidden potential, seeing deeper," she says.

Practicing yoga has given Iskra an incredible gift, setting her up with the tools for long term as well as immediate pain relief not only through the use of stretches and asanas but as much, if not more, through breathing exercises in the form of *vayus* and *pranayama*.

But more than that, it empowered her. She had experienced much pity and condescension from doctors over the years.

"They would say things like 'oh, it's so sad to see a young, beautiful girl like you suffering like this.'

It was not encouraging or empowering at all, it just made me feel depressed. Doctors told me all kinds of things: That I would not live to see 40. That I would never be physically able to bear or lift a child. That if I did, the baby would suffer severe deformations either in my womb or during the birth. I could write a book on all the negative stuff I was told."

Practicing yoga with Kaya, on the other

hand, made her feel empowered and independent. "Yoga has given me tools to take care of myself in the long term and it gives me ways to relief pain immediately as well," says Iskra.

Her transformation was impressive for Kaya as well.

"She got really into it," the teacher recalls. "She practiced consistently and she completely changed as a person. It has been amazing to see someone grow so much."

The pair had worked together for one and a half years when Kaya invited Iskra to take part in one of her 200-hour therapeutic yoga teacher trainings because she believed that this next step could offer great potential to propel Iskra towards even more profound changes in her body.

It turned out that these changes were so huge and Iskra's transformation was accelerated so dramatically that it took even Kaya and Iskra herself by surprise.

"It showed us how beneficial yoga can be if you are really interested in growing, creating self awareness by bringing together the body and mind," says Iskra. "I'm a real life confirmation that yoga really can heal your body. Now I can not only take care of myself instead of being a burden to my family, I can even take care of others."

These dramatic changes were the result of Iskra's mindset and dedication.

"Everyone has the potential to heal themselves," says Kaya. "You just need someone to show you how. Iskra did it all herself, she worked so hard."

Iskra successfully completed her 200-hour therapeutic yoga training last December is now a certified yoga instructor. She has also embarked on another 300-hour training with Kaya.

Iskra hopes to work one on one with »



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those who are at the very beginning of their practice or who have severe health problems, those who need pain relief and those whose needs are not suited to practicing in large groups.

“I see yoga as a tool for me to do something bigger,” she says. “I feel that what I learned from my yoga teacher training will really give me the tools to empower and encourage people to change something and improve the quality of their lives. I want to encourage people to shift something, to get somewhere better, rather than teaching them acrobatic sequences. It is more important to me to teach how deeply our emotions influence our posture, body and health.”

Iskra is not interested in perfection or in performing extreme poses. “You don’t think about extending your ego when you’re struggling to survive,” she says, recalling the days when she was in constant pain.

“My transformation has been so huge, so fast, so deep, but even I can still hit limits in yoga. So my aim mostly is to show people that it’s okay to be imperfect; that the most important thing is to keep mastering and working on themselves.”

Iskra tries to apply this to her own life and be kind to herself, not just others.

“If you look at me and my practice, I still bend my knees. I don’t do many poses fully there are many asanas I struggle with, it still takes me more time to work on some specific aspects like grounding, balancing and strength. But I look back and I can see and feel the difference that this journey has made in my life and that is what makes sense to me. So my message would be: You can bend your knees, come to only half of a pose, use props, and still be graceful, light, harmonious, and happy. You can have a high quality of life, be painless and full of beauty. You can be yourself, you don’t have to copy incredibly complicated asanas or go upside down if you are not ready. This doesn’t make you less of a human or less of who you truly are – a soul with light and love within.” ✨

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Penne Alfredo