



# *Yoga* for the **Larger Woman**

## *Living in My Body*

In March 2010, four amazing women committed to incorporate yoga into their every day living by beginning a regular home practice. They agreed that under Vilma's guidance they would practice every day for the next year. Starting with five minutes, they ultimately worked up to an hour at least of daily practice. And each of them blogged on this website (blogs on the right side) several times a week during the whole year. To maintain their individual voices, they agreed not to read each other's blogs until the year ended.

Their year has now just concluded. The stories they have to tell are quite different and quite remarkable. The changes they have experienced go way beyond simply what happened "on the mat."

Towards the close of this year of Living in My Body, they were each asked to respond to a series of questions. Their responses, which are pretty interesting, are provided below.

Participant A

Participant B

Participant C

Participant D

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### **Participant D**

#### **Changes after one year of Living in My Body (LiMB) project**

Please respond to all topics. Feel free to offer additional comments on any of the topics.

##### **1 Daily yoga home practice**

a year ago: maybe a couple of times a week, no more than 15 minutes

now: generally 1 hour a day unless I know I'm going to class, then 30-45 minutes

**2 Walking**

a year ago: walked pretty regularly with my dog, 15 minutes a day

now: daily 1 hour or more with my dog

**3 Meditation**

a year ago: no regular practice. I'd try it for a few days, skip a couple of weeks/months and then give it another go.

now: 3-4x week most of the time

**4 Describe your degree of breath awareness**

a year ago: was only aware of my breath when meditating or exercising (or sick)

now: More aware of my breath - especially the calming influence intentional breathing can have on my body when my stress level rises.

**5 Characterize your food choices**

a year ago: severely restricted by gut problems. I had 3 major abdominal surgeries in my late teens/early 20's and then about 5 years ago a laproscopic procedure. Most of what I ate was not by my choice. Visits to various MD's/nutritionists advised avoiding, dairy, wheat, fresh fruits and vegetables, soy, flax, spelt in addition to life long sensitivity to citrus. When gut "attacks" occurred (pain, nausea/vomiting) I switched to nothing for 24 hours then added tea, broth, white rice and potatoes. White foods (in the restricted category) seemed to be tolerated okay.

now: many more food options! Occasional dairy ok. Small amounts of wheat ok. I have a much broader range of foods to choose from. Most recently I've even had a couple of (small) salads and even some fresh fruits. Still have a challenge with sugar/chocolate.

**6 Describe your sleeping time & quality**

a year ago: 6-7 hrs weekdays, 8-9 hrs weekends

now: time wise about the same but enjoy a deeper sleep most nights.

7 **Describe your body's strength, flexibility, balance**

a year ago: so-so, was exercising fairly regularly (jazzercise)

now: strength has improved slightly in upper body, flexibility has improved slightly- especially in lower extremities, balance has improved also

8 **Describe what changes occurred in your injured/tight/challenged parts of the body (shoulders, hips, back, belly, etc)**

a year ago: chronic problems with SI joint, GI pain, headaches

now: SI joint flare ups infrequent and healing is faster when they do act up. GI problems have eased up also. Rarely have gut "attacks" (pain, nausea/vomiting). Still have headaches when in need of chiropractic work. Adjustments "stay" longer though.

9 **Body's weight**

a year ago: morbidly obese

now: not much change

**Additional comment:** One disappointment- being about the same weight. Going into this year I believed weight would magically disappear as I learned to be more accepting of myself. While I now usually make better food choices (it helps having more options), it's not enough to significantly change the weight. I do feel that there is usually less of a struggle. It's maybe an hour a day instead of 8 hours a day.

10 **Describe your degree of belly awareness**

a year ago: made an effort to avoid awareness of gut.

now: much more acceptance of gut.

11 **How you would describe your gastrointestinal functions**

a year ago: a lot of pain, gas, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting.

now: much better, improved food options and far less pain.

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**Please respond to the following using a scale from 1 to 10 (1 is low; 10 is high).  
And then include any particular comments on any of the subjects.**

**12 Ability to listen to my body**

a year ago: I generally chose NOT to listen to my body until it got to the point I couldn't ignore it anymore.

now: MUCH improved. I usually listen but don't always heed what it has to say.

**13 Ability to appreciate what my body is telling me**

a year ago: It usually wasn't what I wanted to hear so there was little to no appreciation.

now: I am still learning to appreciate what my body has to say.

**14 Ability to appropriately respond to what my body is telling me**

a year ago: Most of the time I was unwilling to respond appropriately until forced to do so.

now: Much improvement - probably 80% of the time whether it's to simply going to bed, stretching or avoiding certain foods.

**15 Ability to initiate movement from the belly**

a year ago: 0 Thought belly movement was limited to belly and hula dancers.

Now: 4 can do a belly driven "cat/cow" pose

**16 Stress level**

a year ago: 8 med to high but fewer coping mechanisms

now: 8 med to high but don't take it "on" as much. Able to notice and "let go" of a lot of it.

**17 Immune system strength**

a year ago: 6 average

now: 6-7 aside from one whopping cold this winter- good

**18 Energy level**

a year ago: 4-5

now: 6-7

19 **Ability to notice, to change and to sustain energy level**

a year ago: 4

now: 5 can sometimes up energy level with yoga practice

20 **Mood swings**

a year ago: 3 much bigger problem 15-20 years ago

now: 1 usually not a problem

21 **Ability to notice emotions when they are present (anger, joy, etc.)**

a year ago: 6 no problem with positive emotions

now: 8

22 **Ability to turn negative emotions into positive ones**

a year ago: 5 on a good day

now: 7 don't really change them, just allow them to be and don't dwell on the negative ones so much.

23 **Level of awareness of what's going on in the body**

a year ago: 3 noticing usually triggered a fear response so I was more into avoidance.

now: 8

24 **Ability to concentrate**

a year ago: 4 often distracted with "other" conversations going on in my head

now: 7 easier to focus when it's important and tune out or put aside "head conversations"

25 **Ability to turn your negative thoughts into more positive ones**

a year ago: 5

now: 6 able to ID negative thoughts more easily. Don't generally try to change them as just identifying them for what they are eases the mental pain.

**26 Ability to notice mental distractions**

a year ago: 4

now: 6

**27 Ability to notice patterns of thoughts**

a year ago: 3

now: 8 The Recollective Awareness meditation really helped with this.

**28 Ability to think clearly**

a year ago: 5

now: 6-7

**29 Level of anxiety**

a year ago: 5

now: 3-4

**30 Level of depression**

a year ago: 3

now: 2

**31 Were there any other mental or physical conditions that bothered you before (e.g. diabetes)? If so, please briefly describe and then rate changes on the scale 1 to 10.**

a year ago: NA

now: NA

**32 Ability to deal with everyday challenges**

a year ago: 5

now: 7 less frustration overall

33 **Self-acceptance**

a year ago: 2-5

now: 4-7

34 **Self-knowledge**

a year ago: 7

now: 8

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35 **Of the all changes that have occurred with you in the past year, which made the most difference to you?**

Mental: The sense of being grounded in both mind and body.

Physical: Reversing some of the problems with my gut/GI system.  
When things were bad I starting wondering how much worse it would get and did I really want to live with it.

36 **Of the all discoveries you have made about yourself last year, which was the biggest surprise?**

That I can do more than I thought, that I am probably more limited by my mind than my body. For example, I've always loved the sound of the cello and wished I'd taken it up as a child. The past couple years when I've heard cello music that faint wish would reappear - and I would laugh away the idea of ever playing. I was just a few months in the project when - acting on an uncensored whim - I rented a cello and bought some books. At first the sounds were not what I had envisioned and the strings hurt my fingers. But I found a teacher and persisted - and now I am coming up on a year of practice. And I plan to continue.

37 **Of the all lessons you learned last year, which do you think will be the most beneficial to you?**

That I'm stronger and more capable than I think I am.

That I can influence the health of my body when I'm willing to listen to what it needs.

- 38 **How does it feel to live in your body now as compared with a year before?**  
Mentally it feels much better. I feel I can rely on myself more to make better choices, choices more in line with my integrity and beliefs instead of just shutting down to experiences.
- 39 **Estimate how much you saved (\$\$) from reductions in medications, or "alternative" healthcare services, or other areas of expense?**  
\$500