

Curatio Connects podcast with Bidy Messchaert

[00:00:02] (Robert) Hi and welcome to Curatio Connects, a podcast about health, wellness and staying connected. On this episode, we're going to talk yoga.

[00:00:12] (Bidy) Hi, I'm Bidy, I am from the Netherlands, I live in Delft and I'm a yoga teacher. Yoga is my passion and I love sharing it with people because bringing a sense of well-being to people is the greatest gift I could think of.

[00:00:30] (Robert) Bidy Messchaert on using yoga to help you find a sense of well-being, particularly now during the Covid-19 pandemic. This podcast is brought to you by Curatio, the Private Social Network for health used in over 85 countries. Find out more about our app called Stronger Together, designed to help you cope and thrive during Covid-19, you can download it for free from iTunes or Google Play. And for more about Curatio, visit us online at Curatio.me. Now our guest for this episode, Bidy Messchaert, I spoke to her from her home in Delft, the Netherlands.

[00:01:05] (Bidy) I used to only teach yoga in person and then now with everything that's been going on, my plans to go online really got sped up. So, I was planning to do this all along, but now I set up an online teaching program as well. And I teach a few different types of yoga. The type that I teach mostly in person is a slow flow yoga, which is a movement basically to the rhythm of your breath, and it connects the movement to the thoughts, to the breath, which I really love about, it's almost turning into a dance as you start moving. And another form of yoga that I teach is restorative yoga. And the very first time I did a restorative yoga pose, it almost felt like I came home into my own body because it helps you find rest in poses and we use props such as blankets and pillows to support yourself in poses and then you stay in them for a little bit. So you actually give the body time to rest and relieve stress, and especially the times that we live in now, even before Covid, the amount of stress that most people are under, that type of yoga is really still in my heart, because it is so needed, I think. And I think everyone, no matter how healthy or happy you are, I think everyone benefits from that type of yoga. So that's basically my passion that I was lucky enough to turn into a job.

[00:02:38] (Robert) You came to yoga because of chronic pain, right? Like you started, you discovered yoga because you had chronic pain, do you want to talk about that? Because I think that's a really important part of the journey and also really important about what we're talking about today.

[00:02:54] (Bidy) Yes, of course, I had known yoga on and off, I would try a class here in a class there, but it never really stuck. I enjoyed it when I did it, but I would forget about it for years sometimes. And I have been a person, I've found out recently, I don't know how I never noticed before, but I found out recently that I'm hyper mobile, which means that all of my joints are quite loose and spacious. So, all throughout my life, for as long as I can remember, I've been having joint issues. I would have tears in my tendons in a knee, I would have problems with a shoulder, and it would travel all throughout my body, and we all just thought it was extremely unlucky. And I never really gave it a second thought, really for the longest time. And then at some point I noticed that things started to reoccur, and I asked around with my physical therapist and with my doctors and then finally a manual therapist said to me, listen, you're hyper mobile and that's causing a lot of your issues. So, you get infections, I get inflammation in my joints, which can be extremely painful sometimes. So, what he suggested I would do is find a yoga class and go try something because it will do two things, it will help you not only create strength to support your joints,

but it will also help you to find the relaxation that you really need. Because what happened in my case was because of the loose joints that I had, I would tighten up in my musculature system. My muscles would get really, really tight and I would forget how to release. So, he said, you are always so holding yourself up really like with every muscle in your body is constantly working, which means that you can never relax and then that becomes this chain effect. Because if your muscles are constantly tight, then the rest of your body is influenced by that as well. So, he sent me to yoga, and I didn't go to yoga class at first, I Googled, I found an amazing instructor online who I actually met later, and who became a friend, which was amazing. But then that first moment where I took a breath in a yoga pose and I, little by little felt tension release, I was like, oh, wait, he's onto something. My manual therapist really knew what he was saying, and I got addicted, really. I became, I couldn't wait to get back on my mat because that was the first place in a long time where I actually was able to release tension from my body. And then I was like, okay, now I want to understand why. How does that happen? Because I like to understand why things work the way they work. So, I decided to do a yoga teacher training after about a year of stepping on my mat daily and not always for an hour practice, sometimes it was just five minutes, but I would come back to the mat every day. So, then I took the teacher training thinking, I just want to do this to understand how this works. Why am I feeling so much better now that I'm doing yoga? And then, yeah, it just clicked when I started speaking and they asked me to teach my very first demo class. It was two other people in my training, and I started speaking, I was like, "oh this is what I'm meant to be doing.". It just felt so familiar and so much what I should be doing. But from that moment on, everything just moved towards me becoming a yoga teacher because I can't wait to share this with anyone who is willing to listen. Because there is so much goodness to discover inside your own body.

[00:06:38] I think that was why I loved it so much, because I was in so much feeling so often that I got really frustrated with my own body. It annoyed me, I got angry at myself, and I kept thinking I let myself down every single time. And then through yoga, I started to recognize all the signs I'd been ignoring, like my body was trying to tell me, listen, not the smartest thing that you're doing right now, maybe you want to do it a little differently. But by yoga, I started to recognize those signals.

[00:07:11] (Robert) I mean, that's a really powerful story about not just the fact that obviously it made you feel physically better, but it also made you feel better as a person, aside from the pain, right?

[00:07:27] (Bidy) Absolutely, because you also feel like you start to understand your own body and what you can and can't do, and that knowledge of yourself gives you a little bit more security in all the things that you do. And when you feel secure in what you're doing, that translates into everything else, right? Because you feel more powerful, I think is a good word for that because you know what you can do.

[00:07:53] (Robert) And right now with Covid and the fact that people all over the world are finding themselves in these unique and stressful situations, it sounds to me like all of the symptoms you were talking about that were physical symptoms that, you know, holding yourself in and that tightness and that anxiety, that's something we all feel right now, on one level through the day. So can we talk a little bit about how people could maybe figure out a way to do some home yoga practice to tell them, like what would they be able to accomplish if they did a little bit of that now?

[00:08:27] (Bidy) Even if you've never done any form of yoga before, if I can, I would just like to say that yoga is not just what you maybe know from pictures, because sometimes people think yoga and they have seen a picture of someone doing a lovely pretzel move with their body. That's yoga as well, but that's not the only thing that is yoga, because yoga is really it's about body consciousness. It's about the breath as much as it is about the movement. It's about the stillness as much as it is about setting everything in motion. So that makes it, I think, a little bit easier to comprehend how you can do yoga even for yourself in your home without ever having stepped on a yoga mat in a yoga class before. It can be as easy as just closing your eyes for a moment and taking a very conscious breath in and releasing the tension from your shoulders on your exhale. That's a beginning move in a lot of yoga classes and it's there for a reason because just that awareness of the breath as it travels through your body and the feeling of letting go of tension as you exhale, that can make such a difference already. So even if you just give yourself three breaths with your eyes closed, releasing tension from your jaws, your shoulders, and wherever else you might be holding on, because everyone has their own spots, right? Everyone has their own place in their body where tension sneakily settles. So just becoming aware of that tension is step one and then exhaling it out, releasing it, that can make your whole day different already. And then depending on what you like, what fits you, because I know there's people who cannot stand to sit still and just breathe because their mind will get really anxious from that. So maybe for them, it's nicer to make bigger moves. So, if that is the case for you, then you can maybe use your inhale to gently just raise your arms and let your fingertips come all the way up towards the ceiling. Then as you exhale, just fall forward from the hips. You bend your knees as deeply as you want, and you just let the upper body become heavy and then use the inhale to slowly come up again. And just that conscious movement where you only focus on how your body feels, how your breath moves, can change everything. It can cause this shift in your brain because you focus on just one thing for a moment and not panic, not fear, or not frustration of not being able to go outside, but you focus on what you can do. And you can hopefully, you can always breathe; the breath is always there for you. So just by shifting your focus, you give yourself a chance to really reset yourself.

[00:11:18] (Robert) That stillness makes you stop that churning activity that we're so used to. You know, we live busy lives. Of course, now with Covid everything is complicated and everything that we're trying to do is harder or nonexistent. So, we're constantly kind of running and, you know, our society is built that way. But that stopping even for a moment, has a huge effect on you, doesn't it?

[00:11:41] (Bidy) It really does.

[00:11:43] (Robert) You just go still for a bit.

[00:11:46] (Bidy) Oh, yeah, one of my teachers said it really beautifully. She said, just think back, when in your day have you been not either producing or taking things in? So, you're either talking or doing or you're taking in anything. It could be sound, you could be on the phone listening to someone, you look at your TV, but your brain is always processing. So, when do you ever just sit and do nothing? And yoga gives you the chance to almost accomplish that, but we don't like doing nothing because somewhere in our brain we think that we're lazy if we do nothing. But then if you make yourself focus on one thing that's already amazing. But yeah, it's very hard to find a little bit of stillness these days.

[00:12:34] (Robert) Yeah, well, where, as you said, we're trained almost from the society we live in, we're trained that the stillness is laziness. You're not doing anything right?

[00:12:40] (Bidly) It's so needed!

[00:12:45] (Robert) Can you talk a little bit about that idea, too, that by doing that breathing and that physical movement and that finding that spot of stillness, that you're also psychologically, you're also kind of stilling your brain, I guess. I don't know quite what the right word would be.

[00:13:02] (Bidly) Absolutely. What happens is our nervous system has a few different modes, right? And most of our listeners might be aware of that, but I'm just going to explain, just in case. You have the parasympathetic part of the nervous system, which is the part that's responsible for rest and relaxation. But by what we said before that we're either always consuming or producing, that part is almost never active because our brain is always picking up all these things that are happening, whether it's from the outside world or whether it's your own thoughts, because we tend to keep ourselves very, very busy. And that makes you almost always stay in that fight or flight mode. And you might not feel it, because when you think of fight or flight mode, you think of that, I don't know that very first human ready to defend their cave and their fire. But there is a smaller version of that, that's way more subtle and sneakily almost, that is always with us. And we are always ready to do actions because when you listen to the news, your brain is already thinking, okay, do I need to do something with this information? Can I leave it for now? So, you're always deciding do I do this or do I do that, which means that the parasympathetic part of the brain hardly ever gets a chance. So we do things we decide things all throughout our day and then we decide to go to bed and then we're surprised that it takes the brain a while to settle down and let you go to sleep. So that parasympathetic part of the nervous system needs to be activated and we can activate that actually as simply as with one breath. Because just by really allowing your exhale to be as long as it can be and be conscious of that exhale, you already signal the brain that you are safe because if you're scared or in danger, the breath is never calm, right? We all know that reaction where you go, "ah!", when you get scared or startled by something. So, when you take time to gently exhale, the brain knows, okay, so we're okay, we're in a safe place which will help you switch to that parasympathetic part of the brain. And then the rest of your body reacts to that, it makes it possible for you to relieve stress. So that's the part that we think we might have no control over, but actually we can help it along. I am not saying we can fully control it, there is no way that I can promise you that you can fully turn off anxiety, but we can help the nervous system to make it easier for us.

[00:15:44] (Robert) If someone is listening to this and they're wondering, you know, they maybe have, like you say, maybe seen yoga or maybe going to class or maybe they don't know anything about it. How hard is it for people to get started? How complicated is it for someone to try to do this now in the isolation world?

[00:16:00] (Bidly) Yeah, actually, I think it's easier now than it ever was because a lot of yoga teachers were forced to take their classes online. So, what I saw in my surroundings, the studios that I work with within two weeks after quarantine started, lessons started popping up everywhere. So, if you've never been to yoga class before, it can be a little daunting, I think, too. Because there are so many different types of yoga that you can choose from and then you have to find someone that you like. But the beauty now is nowadays you go to YouTube and you type in yoga and there is a lot of teachers to choose from. So that's one way of doing it, what we'll be doing, in Curatio is amazing because we'll start streaming a few live classes as well. So that's coming up, which might be very, very fun to try. But, the most important thing when you start looking for yoga

instructions is you want to make sure that you like the teacher. It's really important, it sounds so trivial, but if you're listening to someone and you hate their voice or you hate the way they pronounce a word, it's not going to work usually. Because then the brain will be focusing on that instead of trying to find comfort. So, take your time trying to find a video somewhere online and make sure that you check that it's also suited for beginners. So, look for those, look for a teacher that speaks to you, that you connect with on some level, and you don't even always know until you start listening to them, and then give yourself time. Don't think that you have to be able to do everything. When I started, I was recovering from wrist injuries and I was having lower back problems and I could not do half the poses. So, what I did because someone had told me to do this and that was really, I think a golden tip. If you can't do a certain pose, then just close your eyes, sit there, and visualize your body doing it. And as crazy as it may sound, if you allow yourself to do that, that actually really helps. It makes it so much easier if you are forgiving to yourself that you might not be able to do everything right away.

[00:18:21] (Robert) Well, I think too maybe, you know, that advice you're giving us. Also the idea that you don't have to jump into it as a huge deal, like you can start with very small things, those movements that you described earlier about the breath then the moving the arms up and down. I mean, that's actually starting to do a practice. So, you can start, you can start small, you don't have to commit a huge amount of time or energy to start, right? And see what works for you.

[00:18:42] (Bidy) Absolutely, I think that's also something that scares a lot of people off, because if you look at going to a yoga class in the outside world, usually classes are anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes and that can be a little daunting. And I truly believe, one of my friends always says a little goes a long way. If you can carve out three to five minutes of your day and you do that on a regular basis, the effect will be so much bigger than going to a yoga class once a week for an hour. Because coming back to your practice, even though it's only a few minutes, will give you that sense of, okay, there's a routine here, I start to recognize different types of breath when I have different days. Because in a day that you feel really good, your breath and your movement will feel so different from the day that you might have a bad day and you're not feeling all that well. And I think that is way more valuable than showing up once a week for an hour.

[00:19:40] (Robert) Do people need to have, like what do they need just in the physical space that they're in, in order to do this at home?

[00:19:49] (Bidy) You really honestly you don't need anything. You need your body, you need your body and space to move. And of course, it's nice if you have a yoga mat because it saves you from slipping. But then again, as long as you're barefoot, then that's fine. If you have carpet or a towel, that can make it a little nicer. The most important thing is that you move in a space where you're comfortable to move. So, wherever that is in your home, you make sure that you're wearing something comfortable, that's way more important than buying the yoga mat and getting the yoga blocks or bolsters or whatever. Because for all the standing poses, all you really need to do is really connect your feet to whatever surface you're standing on. If you're going to go into seated poses, it's nice to have a pillow or maybe two, or if you can stick a few blankets. So, you just raise the hips a little bit higher so you can go and buy all the fancy yoga stuff that you might see in yoga studios, and they're nice, I'm not saying they're not, I have them all and I love them with a passion. But I didn't start out with them and you don't necessarily need them because there's a lot of different things that you can use. Meditation from a chair is just as yummy and just as good for you as seated on a yoga mat. It doesn't really make it any better.

[00:21:07] (Robert) So this is all excellent advice. So if I'm at home and I'm hearing this, the advice sounds to me like go online and sort of look around and find somebody that you can relate to or that, you know, is somehow appealing to you. And if you don't find somebody right away, just keep looking, because it's no cost to do that. And then in terms of, you don't have to go out and try to buy a bunch of stuff, you can use whatever is in your house to do this. As long as you're there and you have a floor, you're good to go, right?

[00:21:36] (Bidy) Exactly! I had one video on my YouTube channel where I thought I grabbed everything that I needed to film it and I'm still filming from my living room at the moment, all my videos, because that's the best space to do it right now. And I sat down and I forgot to bring my yoga blocks, they're upstairs, and I didn't want to go upstairs again, but I was right next to my kitchen. So, I grabbed a pan and I taught a whole yoga class with the use of the pan! like a baking pan.

[00:22:01] (Robert) Like a baking pan?

[00:22:04] (Bidy) It was, how do you call it? It's like a little bit higher. So, to boil potatoes, and I used that because I was doing a chair yoga class and I'm, you can't really tell from a podcast, but I'm not that tall. So, my feet don't fully rest on the ground when I sit on a chair. So, I wanted to prop up my feet and usually I would use a yoga block. Just a brick shaped foam thing, but I just used a pan. I turned it upside down and I put my feet on the bottom of the pan. So, you use whatever you have close, if you have a big book, that could work as well.

[00:22:40] (Robert) That's brilliant.

[00:22:42] (Bidy) Blankets and pillows are everything that you need really.

[00:22:44] (Robert) So we're going to do some yoga and then we'll make spaghetti in the pot later.

[00:22:46] (Bidy) Exactly, we can multi-task everything together!

[00:22:52] (Robert) Earlier you said a word that sort of caught me, which was, you know, to plan things out or to find the time to do stuff. How important is it to make a plan to actually do the practice, even if it's for five minutes? Is it something that otherwise it's going to slip? Like do we need to kind of carve off a little bit of space to do that?

[00:23:09] (Bidy) I like to do that. For me, that is what works best. I know that everyone is different. I have a lot of friends who build a routine and that works really well, especially if you have a steady routine as it is, to carve out, some people like to do it before they really start their day, so they do something before breakfast. They would get on their mat and do a few stretches and a few conscious breaths. For me, I have a very irregular schedule because I teach at all different hours all throughout the week. So what I do is I, usually on Sunday, I will grab my planner and I will see, okay, so what am I doing this week and where can I plan five to ten minutes where I step on my mat and I will see what happens. So, one day I will actually move and other days sometimes I just lay down to rest. But I will carve out that time already, so you can even do that and think, okay, so I want to watch this thing on Netflix, but I also need to plan my five minutes of yoga time. So, plan it around that, plan it after your dinner or before you call your mom or, but it helps to have an idea of when you'll make time and consider it a date with yourself. And if you are a very

organized person, which I would love to be, but I really am not. You can also make it a same thing, like every morning at 8 a.m., I'm just blurting out a time or 2 p.m., whatever works for you, but make sure you write it down somewhere. Put a reminder on your phone or post it on your mirror. Whatever works for you, just that little reminder, and you know, you can be flexible with yourself. You can also reschedule with yourself, if you can reschedule with your friends you can do it with yourself as well. But then it's a conscious act. You think, okay, I can't do it right now, but I will do it in a few hours from now. And that commitment to yourself makes it easier. And then what really helped me do that is I rolled out my yoga mat in a spot in my house where I can stay rolled out. So, then it's easy, so, whether you have a yoga mat or not, maybe look around your house and find, even if it's just a little corner where you feel comfy, and you build that to be your spot, your yoga place. And if you can leave that almost untouched, if that's possible in your house, that makes it so much easier to just think, okay, so now I have my five minutes, I'm just going to go there and then it helps you already set the tone before you even do anything.

[00:25:46] (Robert) So when we started this conversation, you started with just a very simple breath and a little exercise around moving the hands and the arms and bending at the waist and stuff. Can you give us something that we could maybe take away from this to try to start, something simple that people can do on their own as a way of, you know, introducing them to doing this? And then that will maybe inspire them to go look for some other resources to do it online.

[00:26:11] (Bidy) I would love to show you seated.

[00:26:14] (Robert) Yeah, sure. Yeah. I mean, people can't see us, so they'll have to take our word for it.

[00:26:18] (Bidy) I'd like to start with making sure that wherever you are, you're comfortable, so you can come into a seat on the ground if that's comfortable for you, you can come into a seat on your chair, and if you're more comfortable standing, feel free to stand. Whichever version of this practice you choose, seated or standing, take a moment to settle and fidget and wiggle and just make sure that it's as comfortable as it could be right now. And that means it might not be 100 percent perfect, but if it's good enough for now then we're fine. And then if you are seated, allow your hands to rest on your legs, no matter where they rest, maybe on your knees, maybe a little higher on your thighs. The only thing that matters is that your arms can rest, because when the arms can rest, the shoulders can relax. Now we're going to allow the palms of the hands to come up, so the backs of the hands are resting on your legs, palms are facing out, which then allows the fingers to soften. So maybe take a moment to look at your hands, wiggle your fingers just a little bit and then allow the fingers to come into stillness. If you feel safe doing so close your eyes. And if you are not comfortable closing your eyes, then just peek a little bit through your eyelashes, but see if you can help yourself to make it easier to bring your attention inward.

[00:27:51] And then we'll take a nice long and slow inhale in through the nose, taking your time as you breathe in.

[00:28:01] Gently sigh it out.

[00:28:07] We'll take two more of these, inhaling in through the nose and gently sighing everything out.

[00:28:18] One more deep inhale. And as you sigh it out, soften your shoulders. And then allow the breath to return to a natural rhythm without you steering or trying to control it. Let your thoughts, your awareness, go to your face. Notice if there's any tension that you're holding onto in your face. There's a lot of tiny muscles that help you move your eyes and your lips. But see now if you can allow them to soften.

[00:29:01] Hopefully you're sitting somewhere where no one is expecting anything of you.

[00:29:07] So you can relax the mouth and the eyes.

[00:29:13] And then we slowly bring your attention to the spine, allowing the spine to grow just a little bit taller. Imagine that by sitting up just that little bit more straight. Let you find maybe one or two extra inches or centimeters as you grow taller. But then as you exhale, allow the shoulder blades to slide down in the direction of your hips. Sometimes it can feel as if you've almost grown the size of your head one more time. Taking a nice deep breath in here.

[00:29:50] And sighing it out once again.

[00:29:54] We'll bring the palms of the hands together in front of your heart and we'll interlace the fingers and then gently allow the palms of the hands to really push against each other quite strongly. That will make your elbows probably come out wide. And then just finding that connection of the palms pushing together, we breathe in again. Then as you exhale, the hands stay where they are, but we release the tension.

[00:30:23] And then couple that movement to your own breath as you inhale, push the hands close together. As you exhale soft.

[00:30:34] Then one last time, pushing firmly, maybe you even feel a little bit of a shake in the arms as you put pressure on the palms. Then as you exhale, you release the tension, fingers stay interlaced and then we gently push the hands forward, we open the palms away from us. So, we're looking at the backs of our hands as we stretch the arms right in front of you. Take one more deep inhale, push the hands a little bit farther away. And then as you exhale, the hands stay where they are, but the shoulder blades slide down. Beautiful.

[00:31:06] Take a moment to notice how this feels and then use your next inhale to bring the hands slowly up. Fingers still interlace, but we find that nice stretch where the hands reach towards the ceiling. Arms are stretched alongside your head. Just imagine yourself growing even taller one more time.

[00:31:25] One more breath in here. Nice deep inhale. Exhale, we'll let go of the fingers and then gently allow the hands to swipe out left and right, going all the way down. Take your time, see if you can slow yourself down as you allow the hands to slowly come alongside your body. And then once the arms are all the way down again, just take a moment to notice how you feel. Inhaling the breath nice and slowly. Exhaling one more time.

[00:32:07] And then when you're ready. Gently open your eyes, allow the outside world to come back in and take a moment to notice how it feels, if maybe you feel a little bit of a shift that happened inside, maybe your body feels different. And whenever you're ready, you can get back into the rest of your day.

[00:32:31] (Robert) Wow. I don't want to go back to the rest of my day, that was fantastic.

[00:32:39] (Bidy) Isn't it amazing how just a little bit of movement and breath in can change everything?

[00:32:44] (Robert) Well. And also, you know, I mean, people probably will have heard me breathing and following along. And, you know, when I started, I was I wouldn't say tense, but I was definitely tight. And even within that first minute, I felt right away that loosening, physical loosening. And the weird thing is and I'm just noticing this now. I don't remember hearing anything other than your voice when that was going on. And I live in, there's a lot of stuff around me and there's a lot of noise in the neighborhood. I didn't hear any of it.

[00:33:16] (Bidy) I love that you say that, because that's one of the things that I love so much about the practice that it brings all your focus inwards. Oh, I'm so happy to hear that. You know, it's a beautiful thing to just for a moment, forget about the world, because we're allowed to. We sometimes think we're not, but you're allowed to give all your attention to yourself every now and then.

[00:33:42] (Robert) Bidy Messchaert in Delft. She's part of the Curatio community and you can also find her web site at www.yogavayu.nl. This podcast and the Stronger Together app is brought to you by Curatio, the private social network for health used in over 85 countries. The Stronger Together app is designed to help you cope and thrive during Covid-19. You can download it for free from iTunes or Google Play. For more information about Curatio, including links and show notes to this episode, visit us online at Curatio.me. For the team at Curatio and the Stronger Together app, I'm Robert Ouimet, thanks for listening.