

Yoga for Medical Exercise and Lifestyle Management

Everything we do, think, and feel has an effect on the Self and how it functions, yet few of us are able to perceive what is happening within our own mind-body mechanism. As a result, we cannot even begin to understand the vast and pervasive interrelationship between our bodies, minds, and environmental stimuli, and this makes it very hard to figure out what we need to be happy, healthy, and fulfilled. We expect our bodies to be there for us even though we do not treat them with the respect and common courtesy that they deserve and require to thrive. But without proper care, maintenance, and nourishment, both our bodies and our minds can begin to malfunction, which produces symptoms, dis-ease, dissatisfaction, and illness.

Yoga and other somatic-based methods can help heal what ails us. Yoga can teach us to relearn how to relax, stop doing things that interfere with optimal functioning, and help us understand the necessity of including moral and mental development as integral ingredients in a wellness-based lifestyle. As we mend the mind-body schism, we realize that we always have options, and that there always exists the possibility of becoming more awake, more aware, more responsive, and more participative. Health and healing are supported by adapting a wellness-based approach to life that is disciplined, thoughtful, virtuous, and sensitive.

This text introduces a mind-body approach for regaining and rejuvenating health and fitness using a variety of yoga-based protocols. You will study techniques that incorporate yoga and somatic-psychology as preventive and/or potentially therapeutic techniques for effectively managing the stress response, with the intent of restoring health, fitness, and a general sense of well-being. The holistic approach works by improving your capacity for choosing and utilizing effective self-care strategies, and by making them good habits that create a balanced, wellness-based lifestyle. Goals for an integrative psychological approach to Mind-Body Fitness include -

- To clarify and refresh my interest in my life's purpose
- To achieve a greater understanding of all aspects of my Self
- To better serve others in a genuinely positive and productive way
- To become a more competent helping and healing presence for others
- To learn, practice, and teach exercises and techniques that yield an experiential way of Self-knowing
- To gain enhanced knowledge of health and healing using psychological paradigms that include personality, growth and development, bio-spiritual energy, and basic breathwork.

This text advocates the following conditions as the best way to optimize yoga's holistic fitness benefits:

- The postures are practiced in a somatically-based, introspective way.
- The participants become educated and empowered as they progress through the process of physical conditioning and self-discovery.
- The participants understand that the way they practice yoga should not and cannot be static. How you approach your yoga practice must continually adapt and adjust to meet the unique demands of your changing lifestyle and life span.
- Stillness, silence, and steadiness are pre-requisite conditions for creating an optimal mind-body fitness learning environment.
- The health professional and/or fitness professional uses a less intrusive, less directive, and less authoritarian style of teaching. His or her role is an educator and supportive facilitator.
- All yoga is essentially therapeutic in nature.

Yoga for Medical Exercise and Lifestyle Management is designed for Certified Personal Trainers, Group Fitness Instructors, Wellness Coaches, and other therapists, bodyworkers, or medical professionals who would like to incorporate yoga and mind-body fitness modalities into their clients' training protocols for conditions and issues that include stress reduction, pain management, corrective exercise, post rehab, and addictions.

Stress reduction is about learning how to reduce, minimize, and manage uncomfortable symptoms which include undesirable physical sensations and non-productive thoughts. Stress reduction and stress management begin with training in somatic education inquiries that help the client get in touch with his or her body. Though the mind may try its best to repress, ignore, deny, or dissociate from bodily sensations that indicate the presence of internal conflict and strife, the body itself is incapable of mistruth. Bodily tension always indicates unresolved stress that is linked to some type or amount of unresolved emotionally-charged content. Examples of emotionally-driven stress responses include a temper tantrum, chronic anxiety, socially-acceptable suppression of overt emotion expression, and repetitive addictive behaviors. Poor breathing quality is also related to the habitual tension and anxiety associated with the chronic stress response. Re-educating proper breathing mechanics is perhaps the most basic and prudent method for managing stress, because a body that breathes properly is definitively associated with a relaxed state of embodiment and a calm, steady mind. A steady breath, a steady mind, and a relaxed body are all interrelated. Selective attention is another de-stressing technique.

Pain management is really a sub-category of stress reduction techniques that features relaxation. Anything you do can be done better if you are relaxed. Therefore, any type of intervention that occurs at the physical level will be supported by a relaxed body and a calm mind. A relaxed body is a comfortable body. It is a body that is willing and able to seek and participate in physical activities that will support health and fitness. A calm mind is a comfortable mind. A calm mind is willing and able to take direction and learn good habits that support health and wellness. The metaphysical conditions of relaxation and calmness represent equanimity, equipoise, and a non-anxious presence. To minimize pain while maximizing comfort, ease, and calmness, mind-body techniques support the client's ability to identify and eliminate suboptimal or harmful characteristic movements, behaviors, and thought patterns. Relaxation supports pain management by decreasing irrational mental activity, mood swings, addictive tendencies, and general tension in the body. Relaxation training provides a gentle, permissive approach to re-educating the mind-body mechanism. It works by gradually restoring an individual's sense of choice in determining how he inhabits and employs his or her embodiment. Relaxation training helps re-establish an internal locus of control. You always have a choice as to living in a state of tension or relaxation, and you are always free to choose an optimistic or pessimistic attitude. As you begin to relax, you instinctively remember that you have the power to choose, and that your choices determine your experiences. A disciplined approach to life and health, which includes self-empowerment and the ability to make wise choices, serves as a form of adjunct therapy for people suffering from the pain associated with emotional issues, chronic anxiety, structural imbalance, illness, and addictions.

Corrective exercise is the development and implementation of fitness and conditioning services for clients who would benefit from postural improvement and/or those seeking a more balanced (structurally sound) body. Corrective exercise, also known as therapeutic exercise, is prescribed to correct impairment, improve a physical function, or maintain a state of well-being. Subtopics of Corrective Exercise include postural improvement and re-educating proper movement patterns.

Post rehab is the development and implementation of fitness and conditioning services for clients that include special populations and post rehab disorders. The goal of rehabilitative conditioning is to restore a client's level of physical fitness to their pre-injury or pre-disease state. Post rehab does not purport to provide any aspect of medical treatment for a client's condition. Using yoga for corrective exercise and

post rehab, you may provide the following services – strength training, flexibility training, coordination and balance training, posture and gait re-education, functional movement training, spinal stabilization, core conditioning, and movement re-education.

Addictions and Addictive tendencies are compensatory behaviors that are employed as an attempt to deal with the negative repercussions of a highly stressful event or traumatic episode of fear, frustration, anger, anxiety, shame, or grief that has not been resolved in a satisfactory way. Addictive behaviors are repetitive, non-productive, and may involve a greater or lesser degree of self-harming as a means of suppressing or distracting the mind from acknowledging the lingering presence of emotionally-charged issues and symptoms. Addictions are usually provoked by a triggering stimulus and perpetuated by underlying anxiety. Though the precipitating event might be mostly or completely forgotten, the negative effects live on - suppressed into the form of permanent vigilance somewhere within the psyche, and contained into an area of permanent tension somewhere within the body. People can become addicted to all kinds of things, even to seemingly beneficial things like exercise and healthy eating habits. People can also become addicted to another person, perhaps a good friend or a toxic friend, such that you have an uncontrollable desire and compulsive need to be with this person as much as possible. A healthy behavior becomes an addictive behavior when it crosses over into the realm of urgency and obsession. Other examples of addictive tendencies include eating disorders, sex and/or pornography, shopping, drugs, alcohol, internet, money, power, etc. It is important to understand that addictions are fueled by suppressed emotional content which has remained alive, periodically becoming active, and creating havoc within the mind-body mechanism. Until this content is consciously accessed, identified, and dealt with, it is impossible to be freed from psychosomatic bondage, and the unruly addictive behaviors will persist. Yoga can help relieve tension and anxiety associated with addictions and addictive tendencies, and support self-knowledge through somatic education inquires.

Lifestyle Management techniques are practical and appropriate ways to minimize stress and deal with harmful and unhealthy habits. These techniques focus on slowing down, non-competition, and comprehensive self-inquiry. They help you dwell, at least briefly and with heartfelt appreciation, in a contented state of *Being* instead of constantly pushing onward and rampantly pursuing the flux state of *Becoming*. Lifestyle management is about appreciating and optimizing the present state of *Being* while at the same time assuming there will be a future for which you must plan. Remember the old saying “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die?” Perhaps a slight modification will make this statement more appropriate: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we might die – but we probably won’t.” This version reminds us to be mindful and live in the moment, but also to consider and plan for the future because there will most likely be one. Lifestyle management techniques work by replacing an insensitive and frenzied way of being with a sensitive and thoughtful way of being.

Yogic philosophy suggests that we (humans) typically approach their lives in random, hectic, and unhealthy ways because we are not fully awake. We are like sleep walkers that stumble through our lives, not really seeing or caring or knowing what we are doing, how we are doing it, or why we are doing it. We lack priorities, patience, and the ability to remain focused. But if you were to study yoga and adhere to its principles and techniques, you will find that over time the practice of yoga elicits enhanced awareness, and enhanced awareness elicits wakefulness. As you begin to wake up, you will notice that appropriate choices and supportive consequences come naturally, without any struggle, hassle, or form of self-denial. The right behaviors, words, thoughts, and deeds occur relatively effortlessly because you are on the path of enlightenment. As awareness increases, so does the natural motivation to do what it takes to grow and thrive. You will likely find yourself changing, for the better, and in many ways, as you progress toward optimizing your health and fulfilling your life’s purpose.

Certified Fitness Professionals, Wellness Coaches, and other therapists, bodyworkers, or medical professionals may use Yoga and Mind-Body fitness protocols that are described in this text to help their clients in the following ways:

- Assist with stress, anxiety, breathing issues, and other emotionally-driven issues by teaching slow, deep, and mindful breathing.
- Manage symptoms associated with stress using yoga postures that are quieting, calming, and relaxing.
- Teach yoga postures to improve dysfunctional posture, problems with balance, problems with gait, core conditioning, spinal stabilization, and/or muscle tightness or weakness.
- Use concentration, meditation, and guided visualization techniques as part of a restorative practice.
- Educate and coach about the yogic lifestyle and its potential benefits.

Introduction

Let's Talk about Yoga

What is a good definition of Yoga? What can I learn from practicing Yoga?

Yoga is a series of practical, experiential, and esoteric techniques that are designed to promote mindfulness and to enhance awareness, with health (vitality and longevity), fitness, and personal transformation being the natural consequences. Yoga teaches us how to access and examine information and details about the self (thought, movement, posture, and behavioral patterns) that had previously been operating at a subconscious level. Coupled with a sense of personal responsibility, enhanced awareness provides the possibility for creating conscious changes that will result in many levels of improvement, such as physical fitness, functional capacity, behavioral patterns, thought patterns, relationship patterns, and universal (archetypal) understandings. Ultimately, yoga is a series of practical techniques that produce personal transformation on all levels of being. For many people it is a lifestyle that provides an embarkation (impetus to venture), a map (guidance and techniques) and a vehicle (your body and mind) for the journey of self discovery. Yoga is not a 'one size fits all' modality, though in group fitness classes yoga is usually taught that way. By practicing yoga we gain a greater appreciation for individual differences, and for differences that can occur within each individual over time. We learn to appreciate the fact that sentient beings are not static beings, and that we are always changing, always evolving, always *becoming*. Yoga helps us optimize our potential by actively and consciously seeking betterment of our own selves.

What is the most difficult part of practicing yoga?

For most people the main obstacle is finding a way to slow down the pace of their daily schedule. You have successfully internalized the key yoga lessons of calmness and detachment when you are no longer struggling to keep up with your own life. Most people operate at full throttle until they finally crash and burn with exhaustion and resentment. By then, your physical and mental states would both be out of control. Practicing yoga can make you much more aware of minute fluctuations in your energy level and psychological state, so that you can ward off a problem before it becomes an emergency. Overall, yoga helps you learn how to reduce the stress load and let go of the need to perform, succeed, and compete with others. This is a hard lesson to learn in a society that praises the all-work/no-play mentality and judges success by how much you have accomplished in terms of financial status or standards of youthful beauty.

How does our cultural conditioning about the body affect us? Does it affect the way we do yoga?

We don't realize it, but we are deeply conditioned by our cultural upbringing in almost everything we do. Regarding the body, Americans are extremely youth-oriented, appearance-oriented, status-oriented, and sexually-oriented. We want to look good even more than we want to feel good. The fact that we so desperately want to remain attractive, sexy and desirable indicates a pre-occupation with image. For example, our culture is obsessed with thinness, especially for women. Large-framed women and people who are overweight have been ostracized for being weak, worthless, or suffering from low self esteem – though thankfully these attitudes are now changing. Could it be that the typical American diet, which seems to promote poor choices of food consumption and disrespects the significance of attaining proper nourishment, is to blame for our trend toward obesity? After a three week visit to Japan, I came home thinking that we (Americans) should be ashamed of how we eat. Even my own health-conscious, well-balanced, organically-oriented American diet was totally lacking when compared to the Japanese style of

eating. Plentiful salad, seaweed, soup, soft boiled eggs, and fish were always available at the breakfast buffet. There was an absence of sugar. Most foods were offered in a small yet appropriate serving size which was about a 3-bite portion, making it very hard to overeat. In Japan the many details that contributed to the overall enjoyment of the meal were carefully and appropriately addressed. The choice and combination of foods, the arrangement and presentation of the meal itself, and any associated dining rituals had been thoughtfully prepared so that they enhanced the gustatory experience. Sensory stimulation, in terms of colors, shapes, textures, flavors, and presentation provided a different, more satisfying sort of fulfillment. Thus, the urge to overeat was non-existent. This is certainly not the way Americans eat. How many of us wolf down our meals while watching TV or chatting with friends, so that we hardly taste or notice what we are eating? This is a contemporary lifestyle example of how Americans dismiss and devalue sensory (bodily) experiences.

There's no doubt that we live in a culture of social indoctrination. We believe that we must look or act a certain way to be popular, desirable, acceptable, and/or correct. For this reason, many people imitate a celebrity or expert that they've seen in the media, or even someone who is a role model that they encounter in daily life. Every svelte yoga instructor has probably had students ask her if practicing yoga will make them look like her. How silly, unrealistic, and totally appearance-oriented is that? Another example, especially among novice yoga students, involves a strong desire to "do it (the pose) right." These people want their bodies to do what the instructor's body can do. They get caught up in matching the appearance of their body to the appearance of the instructor's body in the pose, and think that this is the goal of learning yoga. Later, sometimes many months or years later, these students finally begin to grasp the esoteric essence of the asana experience. They begin to sense, explore, tolerate, and accept the true sensations that arise from within their own bodies as being valid and reliable. As they tap into the profundity of embodiment, they begin to cultivate an honest relationship with their bodies. This marks the beginning of self acceptance, healing, and true understanding. It also indicates a shift in perspective that questions and/or rejects many so-called truths that were nothing more than social and cultural indoctrination, in favor of seeking and relying on firsthand experience as one's primary way of knowing.

What is the role of the body in spiritual practices and personal transformation?

As a living human being, the body is our vehicle for transformation. In this respect, the body should be treated with reverence and diligent care, for the body is what allows us to be alive and function in good health. Furthermore, the body is a conscious, self-sensing device that offers guidance and feedback in various forms, such as emotional reactions, physical reactions, and mental reactions. As we learn to fine tune our ability to sense the subtle messages that our bodies are always sending, we find that our inner guidance is filled with a vast array of wisdom. Unfortunately, humans seem to have lost the ability to access, listen to, interpret, and act upon the information available in these somatic messages. Disciplined mind-body practices help restore this innate ability. The principle of Mind-body theory recognizes a person's body and mind as two dynamic and interrelated aspects of the same singular spiritual Self. The body operates in a physically manifested form, while the mind operates in the realm of ideas. Combined together the body and mind create an alliance which represents a fully functional Self. This Self is continuously being shaped and reshaped due to the ongoing energetic exchange created by an unbreakable bond between the body and the mind. This means that your body reflects and affects your state of mind, and your mind reflects and affects the state of your body. Furthermore, both the body and the mind reflect and affect the adapting yet essential nature of whom you are as a individual Self that is tethered to the Universal Self.

To what extent is the disconnection from the body responsible for our modern illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, depression, and drug abuse?

From a practical and logical perspective, disconnection with our bodies (not knowing what our bodies need to be healthy and happy) is the underlying reason so many people have unhealthy lifestyles. If people were in tune and in touch with their bodies, they would recognize that the body sends negative feedback after

eating too much sugar - such as a headache, stomachache, aggressive impulses or hyperactivity. Poor dietary choices, lack of exercise, and reliance on artificial stimulants or addictive behaviors are fairly obvious examples of how disconnection to the body can result in illness or crisis. Less obvious examples include things like a lack of designated priorities in our lives, habitual behavioral and emotional responses, and negative relationship patterns that remain unexamined. That nagging, anxious feeling in your gut, a heavy lump in your throat, the regularity of migraine headaches, a chronic aching back, and skin that is overly sensitive to any kind of touch are all examples of somatic feedback that is desperately trying to get your attention by sending an S.O.S. message. If we lack a conscious connection to our bodies, we are not able to access or understand the somatic indicators that were so masterfully designed to operate as a self-regulating mechanism. Too many modern humans operate in a state of denial and disrespect for their bodies, and/or expect and depend on something else or someone else (physician, drugs, etc) to heal what ails them.

How can we bring a more psychological approach to the physical practice of yoga?

We must cultivate the witness consciousness through objective self-observance. Each of us plays the role of the protagonist in our own lives, which is as it should be, but the problem is found in the perspective. If everything centers on Me and my happiness and my fulfillment and what I want and how I want everything to be, the world will never be able to satisfy me. Why should we use such a limited perspective? After all, I am not the only person in the world shopping at the grocery store. I am not the only person in the world driving a car on this street. I am not the only person in the world that has to pay monthly bills. I am not the only person in the world that has to cook dinner and vacuum the house. Yet each of us continues to think that the sun rises and falls around the details (trials and tribulations) of his or her own little life.

Someday each of us will be gone, but this will not present a big problem for the world. The world will continue on just fine without us, and we will be nothing more than a brief memory in the minds of very few people. If we can understand the logical and practical nature of this objective perspective, our personal interests, needs, and desires shrink down to their true level of importance, and all of our problems become a little less urgent. As soon as we can grasp and digest the wisdom in this lesson (that each of us is actually quite ordinary, not particularly unique nor special, and that we are all much more alike than we think we are), the world seems a lot more accommodating, and we feel much more connected to others and to our environment. Though it might not seem so at first, this is a very healthy and positive perspective on life. Perhaps the only reason we want and need others to ratify and confirm the fact that we are beautiful, intelligent, worthy, and valuable is because, deep down inside, we don't really believe it ourselves.

How can we monitor, optimize, and balance our energy level(s) throughout the day – in terms of yoga, diet, relationships, and environment?

Make a concerted effort to spend time outdoors, to breathe fresh air, to expose your skin to the natural sunlight, to eat fresh, healthy foods, and to get out of the city/urban environment. Allow yourself to do less instead of always pushing to do more. Downtime is refreshing, and it is very important for your health. Interact with people whose company you enjoy. You don't have to hang out with people that you don't like, and you don't have to be a friend to everyone. In the long run, it's more important to be true to yourself. Identify your priorities in terms of people, places, and activities, and act on those priorities. About seven years ago my mother was diagnosed with a level 4 malignant brain tumor and told she had a 25% chance of living for two years. (She lived for three years.) Though my mother's illness was a huge crisis in my life, it also had a tremendous impact on how I chose to live my life. On a conscious level, I became acutely aware that every day could be a person's last day on this Earth. This provided the ultimate lesson in getting your priorities straight. Every single day I cherish all that is dear to me, and I consciously choose to 'make it a good day.'

Always remember that life is lived in the moment and that over the course of a lifetime, it is the simple pleasures that count the most - so play with your dog today, because tomorrow he might be gone. Before going to bed, take a few minutes to reflect on the timeline of events for this day, and give thanks for how wonderful it was. If the day seemed to be more miserable than wonderful, you must state at least one item that was wonderful – no matter how insignificant it might seem. For example, “that cup of coffee from Starbucks was exceptional!”

Some of us have a pretty good understanding of the fact that we must ‘walk the middle line’ to remain feeling good. Maybe we have gotten old enough or healthy/unhealthy enough that we cannot trash ourselves in any way without suffering through a period of recovery. Perhaps our ongoing challenge is to ‘walk the middle line’ by balancing activities with down time. To maintain a steady energy level, perhaps we need to ‘walk the middle line’ by eating at regular intervals and eating appropriately. Perhaps we need to get enough sleep and drink a lot of water. Perhaps moderation is more important than we thought! After all, moderation is the antithesis of addictive tendencies. In its many forms, moderation can be calming, regenerating, satisfying, and extremely manageable.

Emotions, especially negative ones, need to be integrated into the mind-body-spiritual path. Which yoga and mind-body techniques can help us work with emotions?

The defining characteristic of a healthy, happy, and content individual is that he operates in an emotionally steady state on a regular daily basis. A happy and healthy individual’s emotions are generally calmer, more stable, more manageable, easily integrated, and not a profound source of anxiety or stress. To accomplish this steady state, keep up the daily yoga practice. Be mindful in every pose. Monitor your breathing. Try to keep your respiration full, slow and steady. Transition into and out of each pose gracefully. Transitions between poses are still part of the yoga practice. Don’t let your concentration wander between poses. An active pose like the Mountain pose is still a pose, and a resting pose like the Corpse is still a pose.

Live each moment as best you can. Do at least one thing every day that you have been putting off doing. You will find that the boring or menial chores aren’t really so bad after all, and that procrastination consumes and wastes a lot of energy. Consciously acknowledge how fortunate you are instead of ruminating about what you lack or what you dislike or what inconveniences you. If you have food, a roof over your head, and a good friend or two, you are fortunate. Many people in the world don’t have those luxuries. If you are relatively healthy and pain-free, be thankful. Many people in the world don’t have those luxuries. Don’t make the mistake of letting the wanderings of your own mind drive you crazy or lead you astray. As healing and transformation occur, the outrageous extremes of both highly negative and highly positive emotions become subdued. As healing occurs, the steady state of moderation (and contentment) becomes the norm.

What can be done within the context of a yoga program that will help transfer mind-body lessons into our daily activities?

Learning to create the witness consciousness is an essential part of yoga, and exercises or activities that promote the witness consciousness and mindfulness should be included in yoga training. Techniques of Asana (postures), Pranayama (breathing exercises), Pratyahara (sensory discrimination), and Dharana (concentration) are all ways that help develop the skill of self observation and global observation. The witness consciousness is what carries the lessons learned in yoga class into one’s daily life.

Asana (yoga postures) practice provides a good starting point for learning to be mindful in everything you do. When you are practicing a yoga pose, you should be absolutely present in your body practicing the pose. When you are driving the car, you should be absolutely driving. When you are eating, you should be absolutely eating. When you are talking with other people, you should be absolutely talking with them. Developing the habit of mindfulness has a huge impact on making each moment count. Mindfulness teaches

you to appreciate the value of each activity and each person you encounter. The best way to cultivate the habit of mindfulness is to consciously reduce the amount of distractions present in your life. For example, you can suggest that your clients turn off the car radio, because it is only a distraction. When you are driving the car, you should be paying attention to driving the car. Too many people have unknowingly conditioned themselves to require and accept overstimulation as normalcy. The addictive need for overstimulation (such as multi-tasking and using multiple devices) are examples of how people typically distract themselves through a socially-acceptable avenue. Advanced yoga practitioners do not play music and do not use props during their practice because they understand that music and props are distractions that keep your mind and body busy so that they are unable to encounter themselves.