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Yogic therapies

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Abstract

Yoga therapy may be defined as the application of Yogic principles to a particular person with the objective of achieving a particular spiritual, psychological, or physiological goal. The means employed are comprised of intelligently conceived steps that include but are not limited to the components of Ashtānga Yoga, which includes the educational teachings of yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāranā, dhyāna, and samādhi. Also included are the application of meditation, textual study, spiritual or psychological counseling, chanting, imagery, prayer, and ritual to meet the needs of the individual. Yoga therapy respects individual differences in age, culture, religion, philosophy, occupation, and mental and physical health. The knowledgeable and competent yogin or yoginī applies Yoga Therapy according to the period, the place, and the practitioner's age, strength, and activities.

Keywords: Yoga therapy, yogic principles, spiritual goal, psychological goal, physiological goal

Introduction

Yoga therapy is a type of therapy that uses yoga postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and guided imagery to improve mental and physical health. The holistic focus of yoga therapy encourages the integration of mind, body, and spirit. Modern yoga therapy covers a broad range of therapeutic modalities, incorporating elements from both physical therapy and psychotherapy. Yoga therapy is a growing field and scientific evidence has begun to emphasize its efficacy. It is used to treat existing mental and physical health issues, but can also be used as a self-care strategy for prevention and maintenance. Yoga therapy is well established as a treatment for depression and anxiety. A meta-analysis cited in the Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders found that yoga therapy also shows promise for the treatment of posttraumatic stress (PTSD) and schizophrenia. Additionally, yoga therapists have begun to develop treatment modalities to suit children with autism. The book *Yoga Therapy for Children with Autism and Special Needs*, written in 2013 by yoga teacher Louise Goldberg, is already considered a critical text for novice and experienced yoga therapists alike. While any type of yoga can bring health benefits, yoga therapy involves employing a variety of yoga practices to try to improve a health condition or to ease a natural process, such as pregnancy or menopause. Among the yogic tools used therapeutically are asana (the physical postures), Pranayama (breathing exercises), meditation, and guided imagery. Although many people don't realize it, yogis also consider diet an integral part of yoga and therefore of yoga therapy.

Why Yoga?

Therapeutic yoga is an inherently holistic approach, simultaneously working on the body, mind, and spirit. Various yoga practices systematically strengthen different systems in the body, including the heart and cardiovascular system, the lungs, muscles, and the nervous system. Yoga practices can improve function of the digestive system, foster psychological well-being, and improve oxygen delivery to tissues. Yoga also can help the body more efficiently remove waste products, carcinogens, and cellular toxins.

Most people in the West live stressful lives, and yoga—and by extension yoga therapy—is perhaps the best overall stress reduction system ever invented. Stress has been linked to a wide variety of medical problems, from migraine headaches and irritable bowel syndrome to potentially life-threatening conditions such as diabetes, osteoporosis, and heart disease. Since persistently high levels of stress hormones, particularly cortisol, can undermine function of the

immune system, here too yoga can help.

History of Yoga Therapy

Yoga therapy is rooted in the ancient practice of yoga, which originated thousands of years ago in India. Yoga made its way to the United States in the late 1800s, but yoga therapy emerged in a formal manner in the 1980s as the result of a study conducted by Dr. Dean Ornish. The study illustrated how the implementation of a healthy lifestyle program could reverse heart disease. Ornish's program included therapeutic yoga and was the first of its kind to highlight the benefits of using yoga in this way. This program for treating heart disease was approved for insurance coverage in 1990 and it marked the beginning of the medical field's acceptance of yoga as a treatment option.

In 1983, the Biomedical Yoga Trust was founded to further develop and standardize the field of yoga therapy. The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) was founded in 1989 and has since hosted yoga conferences, published the Journal of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, and contributed to the creation of yoga therapy training standards. Both organizations have facilitated research to explore the extent of yoga therapy's potential.

What to Expect from Yoga Therapy

When a person decides to initiate yoga therapy, the therapist will first conduct an initial assessment. This assessment is designed to do the following:

- Identify health problems
- Assess lifestyle and physical capability
- Discuss reasons for seeking therapy
- Create a course of treatment

Once the treatment plan is established in this first consultation, the frequency of sessions is agreed upon and sessions are scheduled. From this point, therapy sessions will most likely include the following components:

- **Breathing Exercises (Pranayama):** The therapist will guide the person in therapy through a series of breathing exercises ranging from energizing breaths to balancing breaths.
- **Physical Postures (Asana):** The therapist will teach the person in treatment appropriate yoga poses that address problem areas. For example, the "Legs Up the Wall" pose is used to treat things like anxiety and insomnia. In this pose, the person lays on his or her back with legs positioned up against the wall.
- **Meditation:** Relaxation and mindfulness are the focus of meditation when it is combined with yoga poses.
- **Guided Imagery:** The yoga therapist attempts to calm the body and mind by providing a guided visualization intended to bring inner peace.
- **Homework:** An important element for any yoga practice is to find a way to incorporate it into daily life. Yoga therapists provide instructions on how to use what has been learned in treatment at home.

Who Offers Yoga Therapy

The most well-known professional title to describe a yoga therapist is Certified Yoga Therapist, credentialed as CYT. However, because the field of yoga therapy is fairly young, no official, formalized certification process exists. However, there are many organizations and education programs accredited by the IAYT that offer training and certification. Some well-respected training programs include:

- Integrative Yoga Therapy
- American Viniyoga Institute
- Essential Yoga Therapy
- Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy
- YogaLife Institute
- Any training program accredited by the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT)

Though therapists vary in education and experience, most well-trained yoga therapists have a strong knowledge base in:

- Yoga philosophy, techniques, and education
- Therapeutic yoga techniques
- Anatomy and physiology
- Diet and nutrition
- Basic understanding of medical care and first aid
- Basic understanding of business ethics

When deciding on a yoga therapist, it is important to know that there are many types. Some are yoga teachers, yogis, and gurus while others are psychotherapists, psychologists, and physical therapists. The Yoga Journal website suggests seeking out word-of-mouth referrals and yoga studio recommendations. The most crucial thing is to find a therapist who has solid experience and training, and with whom you can develop a positive therapeutic relationship.

What Yoga Therapy Can Help With

Yoga therapy can be helpful in the treatment of mental health conditions such as:

- Alcohol dependence
- Anxiety and panic disorders
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Autism
- Bipolar disorder
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Insomnia
- Phobias
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Stress
- Substance abuse

In addition, yoga therapy can be particularly effective for treating body-focused conditions, caused due to chronic pain, stress, or trauma that has been stored in the body and manifests through anxiety or depression-related symptoms, says Romanoff.

Effectiveness

"Yoga therapy does not have as much empirical evidence of its efficacy due to limited randomized control trials relative to more established forms of therapy," says Romanoff. However, there is a growing body of research demonstrating that yoga therapy may offer benefits.

Yoga can help treat conditions like anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol dependence, and schizophrenia. Yoga could be a complementary form of therapy for mental health illnesses, with fewer side effects than medication.

Things to Consider

"An important consideration is to find a therapist who has adequate training and credentials. You would want to ensure

that your therapist is a certified yoga therapist or has comparable training at a reputable training program,” says Romanoff.

Because yoga therapy is quite green, there is some variability in training, explains Romanoff. For instance, she says yoga therapists often begin as psychotherapists, psychologists, physical therapists, or yoga instructors and supplement their work by integrating other elements into their practice.

Romanoff recommends making certain that you are working with someone you trust and can form a strong therapeutic alliance with, whose work you believe in.

How to Get Started

If you would like to explore yoga therapy, you can look for a certified yoga therapist near you, or ask friends, family, or your healthcare provider for a referral.

According to Romanoff, yoga therapy is typically used as an adjunct therapy in addition to other forms of therapy. So, if you are currently seeing a therapist, it may be worth consulting them about whether or not yoga therapy can be helpful to you and discussing how it would work in parallel with your current form of therapy.

It's important to note that you can participate in yoga therapy regardless of your age, flexibility, or strength. Sessions can be simple or advanced, depending on your abilities and needs. We've tried, tested, and written unbiased reviews of the best online therapy programs including Talk space, Better Help, and ReGain. Find out which option is the best for you.

Yoga therapy is a type of therapy that draws on yoga exercises, practices, and philosophies, to improve mental and physical health. While the practice of yoga is commonly associated with stress-relief, yoga therapy can be helpful in the treatment of several other mental health conditions as well. It may be recommended to you in combination with another type of therapy.

Conclusion

Yoga therapy is practiced in a wide range of formats. Physical therapists, for example, often implement yoga techniques in their delivery of massage and other treatments. Yoga therapy practice can resemble physical therapy, rehabilitative therapy, and/or psychotherapy. Unlike a standard yoga class, yoga therapy sessions are typically conducted in one-on-one or small group settings. Yoga therapy can be provided as an adjunct therapy to complement other forms of treatment, or it can be used to directly treat a specific issue. Yoga techniques range from simple to advanced, and can be enjoyed by people of all ages. Potential benefits from yoga therapy include stress reduction, psychological well-being, improved diet, and efficient functioning of bodily systems. The findings not only indicated that yoga therapy effectively reduced subjects' anxiety, but improvement across several dimensions of physical and mental health including physicality, relaxation, and mindfulness.

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