

# THERAPEUTIC YOGA

## FAST FACTS

- A survey conducted by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) found that yoga is one of the most sought after and used forms of healing complementary medicine.
- A 2020 report by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality evaluated 10 studies of yoga for low back pain involving 1,520 total participants. They found that yoga improved pain and function for up to 12 months, with similar effects to other exercises and massage.
- The U.S. military has adopted yoga as one of many mind-body therapies used in training service members and for the military community as a whole for and resilience.

## WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC YOGA?

Numerous studies attest to the benefits of yoga, the centuries-old mind-body practice, for a wide range of health-related conditions—particularly stress, mental health, and pain management.

This has led to the development of a new form of yoga: therapeutic yoga. In therapeutic yoga, yoga postures are applied to treat chronic health conditions. Certified yoga therapists receive extensive training in body mechanics, organ systems, medications and their side effects, and disease symptoms and progression.

While yoga teachers typically teach classes as well as working with individuals, yoga therapists usually work with patients one-on-one, often in a hospital or clinic settings.

## WHAT CONDITIONS DOES THERAPEUTIC YOGA TREAT?

Yoga therapists often work with people who have musculoskeletal problems, such as back and neck pain or arthritis. They can also help treat anxiety, symptoms of cancer and treatment, and long term effects of COVID.

## WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

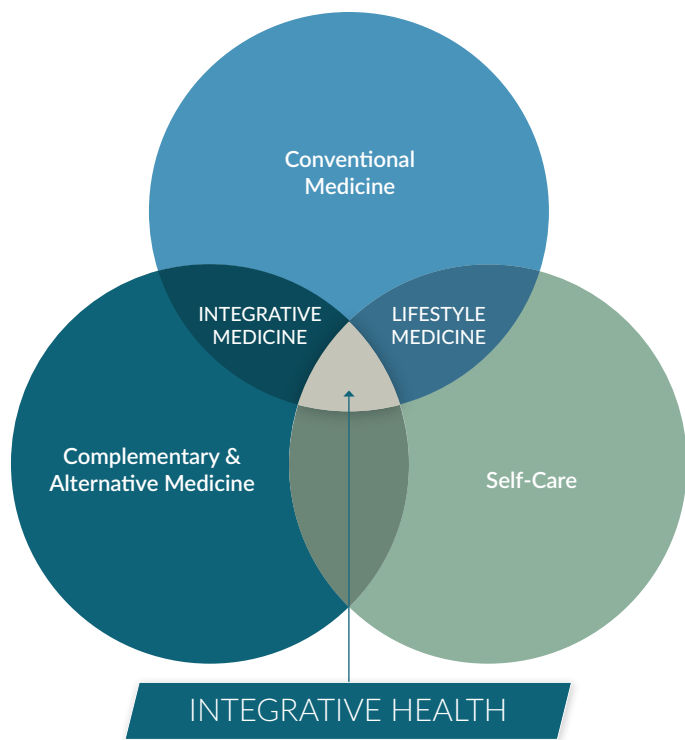
Studies find therapeutic yoga can relieve stress, lower breathing and heart rate, reduce blood pressure and cortisol levels, and improve quality of life. The stretching and flexibility that comes with yoga therapy provides pain relief, with studies demonstrating its benefits in patients with arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and back pain. It has also been shown to improve anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, major depression, and insomnia, and may help people with Parkinson disease.

Significant benefits of yoga were reported in arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders, as well as in cardiovascular endurance in healthy individuals. In patients with COPD and asthma, yoga programs focused on breath control and meditation significantly improve objective measures of lung function.

There is also good evidence that yoga practice mitigates risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including weight and blood pressure.

Yoga therapy can be helpful for symptoms of cancer and treatment and for recovery after cancer treatment. It has benefits for both physical and psychological symptoms. Some of the best medical centers in the country now offer yoga therapy, including the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and the Mayo and Cleveland Clinics.





#### Sources:

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. Yoga: Effectiveness and Safety. Updated August 2023. Available at <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga-effectiveness-and-safety>. Accessed January 27, 2025.

The Yoga Therapy Institute. What is the difference between yoga and yoga therapy? June 15, 2023. Available at <https://theyogatherapyinstitute.org/what-is-yoga-therapy-and-what-is-the-difference-from-yoga/>. Accessed January 27, 2025.

Brunet J, Hussien J, Pitman A, Wurz A, Conte E, Polskaia N, Seely D. Yoga therapy as an intervention to improve patient-reported outcomes among adults after treatment for cancer: preliminary findings from a trial using single-subject experimental design. *Integr Cancer Ther*. 2024 Jan-Dec;23:15347354241233517. doi: 10.1177/15347354241233517.

Danhauer SC, Addington EL, Sohl SJ, Chaoul A, Cohen L. Review of yoga therapy during cancer treatment. *Support Care Cancer*. 2017 Apr;25(4):1357-1372. doi: 10.1007/s00520-016-3556-9. Epub 2017 Jan 7.

Zhang T, Liu W, Bai Q, Gao S. The therapeutic effects of yoga in people with Parkinson's disease: a mini-review. *Ann Med*. 2023;55(2):2294935. doi: 10.1080/07853890.2023.2294935.

Woodyard C. Exploring the therapeutic effects of yoga and its ability to increase quality of life. *Int J Yoga*. 2011;4(2):49-54.

Granath J, Ingvarsson S, von Thiele U, Lundberg U. Stress management: a randomized study of cognitive behavioural therapy and yoga. *Cogn Behav Ther*. 2006;35(1):3-10.

Bharshankar JR, Bharshankar RN, Deshpande VN, Kaore SB, Gosavi GB. Effect of yoga on cardiovascular system in subjects above 40 years. *Indian J Physiol Pharmacol*. 2003;47(2):202-206.

Woolery A, Myers H, Sternlieb B, Zeltzer L. A yoga intervention for young adults with elevated symptoms of depression. *Altern Ther Health Med*. 2004;10(2):60-63.

Kolasinski SL, Garfinkel M, Tsai AG, Matz W, Van Dyke A, Schumacher HR. Iyengar yoga for treating symptoms of osteoarthritis of the knees: a pilot study. *J Altern Complement Med*. 2005;11(4):689-693.

Javnbakht M, Hejazi Kenari R, Ghasemi M. Effects of yoga on depression and anxiety of women. *Complement Ther Clin Pract*. 2009;15(2):102-104.

Shannahoff-Khalsa DS, Ray LE, Levine S, Gallen CC, Schwartz BJ, Sidorowich JJ. Randomized controlled trial of yogic meditation techniques for patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder. *CNS Spectr*. 1999;4(12):34-47.

Raub JA. Psychophysiologic effects of Hatha Yoga on musculoskeletal and cardiopulmonary function: a literature review. *J Altern Complement Med*. 2002;8(6):797-812.

Cote A, Daneault S. Effect of yoga on patients with cancer: our current understanding. *Can Fam Physician*. 2012;58(9):e475-479.

Huang AJ, Rowen TS, Abercrombie P, et al. Development and Feasibility of a Group-Based Therapeutic Yoga Program for Women with Chronic Pelvic Pain. *Pain Med*. 2017.

Muhammad CM, Moonaz SH. Yoga as Therapy for Neurodegenerative Disorders: A Case Report of Therapeutic Yoga for Adrenomyeloneuropathy. *Integr Med (Encinitas)*. 2014;13(3):33-39.

Rogers KA, MacDonald M. Therapeutic Yoga: Symptom Management for Multiple Sclerosis. *J Altern Complement Med*. 2015;21(11):655-659.

Schmid AA, Miller KK, Van Puymbroeck M, DeBaun-Sprague E. Yoga leads to multiple physical improvements after stroke, a pilot study. *Complement Ther Med*. 2014;22(6):994-1000.

Vizcaino M. Hatha yoga practice for type 2 diabetes mellitus patients: a pilot study. *Int J Yoga Therap*. 2013(23):59-65.