

Yoga Therapy: What Is That? Is It for Me?

By Janet Hennard, E-RYT500/C-IAYT

“My doctor prescribed yoga.” You may have heard someone say this, or perhaps your physician prescribed yoga for you. Medical professionals, many of them yoga practitioners themselves, are increasingly aware of the benefits that yoga and meditation provide in helping to improve or manage some diseases and conditions. For example, clinical studies have shown improvements in anxiety, depression, and insomnia through a regular yoga practice. Yoga has also been shown to positively impact low back pain, osteoporosis, and arthritis, and to help regulate blood glucose levels.

You may see improvements in some physical or emotional issues simply by attending classes for the general population. But in many cases, a small yoga class or private session designed for a particular condition is safer and more effective.

That is where yoga therapy comes in.

Small classes led by qualified yoga therapists target special populations. For example, you may find yoga therapy for breast cancer, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, fibromyalgia, emotional distress, substance abuse issues, and many more. In these one-on-one or small group sessions, the yoga therapist works closely with you on your individual goals, and assesses your current situation and limitations.

Your yoga therapist may:

- Lead you through healing breathing exercises
- Guide you in meditation
- Lead you through a set of gentle to challenging yoga poses customized for your situation
- Provide instruction on using yoga tools at home and in daily life

If you and your medical professional believe yoga therapy is right for you, your physician may be able to recommend someone. Some yoga therapists work in clinics or hospitals; others are in yoga studios or private practice. Besides a referral, how do you find one?

The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) is the worldwide organization that grants yoga therapy certification. You can contact IAYT to find certified yoga therapists in your area.

Founded in 1989 and focused on “yoga as a healing art and science,” IAYT provides accreditation for yoga therapy training programs in addition to yoga therapy certification. This means certified yoga therapists have in-depth training so they can assess (not diagnose) their clients and safely guide them in using yoga tools to help alleviate, manage or improve physical or emotional issues. **fyi50+**

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FINDING A YOGA THERAPIST

- Go to the IAYT website: iayt.org
- Select “Find A Member” and enter your location
- From your search results, look at the member profiles to find background and experience that seem appropriate for your health issues
- For a certified yoga therapist, look for “C-IAYT Certified” on the member’s profile