



Although yoga has been a practice of improving physical and mental health for centuries, the specific use of yoga as a therapy is a relatively new application. Started in the 1920s, yoga therapy focuses on the individual and his or her specific well-being. Yoga therapy views the person as a whole – incorporating the mind, body and emotions together. By using both asana practices (yoga postures) and pranayama (breath work), it is believed that an individual's health and well-being can be improved.

But what is yoga therapy? Yoga therapists have two goals: first, to help those who are already suffering and second, to help those who have poor lifestyles. According to Gary Kraftsow of the American Viniyoga Institute: "Yoga therapy, derived from the yoga tradition of Patanjali and the Ayurvedic system of health care, refers to the adaptation and application of yoga techniques and practices to help individuals facing health challenges at any level, manage their condition, reduce symptoms, restore balance, increase vitality and improve attitude." Larry Payne at the Samata Yoga Center (USA) states: "Yoga therapy adapts the practice of yoga to the needs of people with specific or persistent health problems not usually

addressed in group class."

How is yoga therapy different from yoga? Yoga therapy is different in that it specifically targets a physical or psychological problem, using healing practices based on scientific research. Yoga therapy restores the body to its original state. It helps individuals who have disconnected between their mind and body. Using their functional knowledge of the human body and anatomy, yoga therapists modify yoga postures to the individual's health concerns. Yoga therapy sessions are customised to the individual as a curative or preventive practice. In yoga, only healthy individuals practice it, an individual with an injury should not. Yoga teachers teach using a generalised approach for the whole group and usually the same postures are practiced over and over.

What happens in a yoga therapy session? Yoga therapy sessions focus on the individual's needs, therefore you will be required to fill out a questionnaire about yourself, basic medical history and your current lifestyle. The yoga therapist will discuss this form with you, focusing on what your goals are or what you would like to learn during the therapy sessions. During the same session, the

yoga therapist will design and develop a suitable practice for you based on your discussion. Yoga therapists are not able to offer diagnosis for mental or physical health problems and yoga therapy cannot offer the quick relief that medication or surgery can. In between the yoga therapy sessions, you will be required to practice the yoga postures at home. The practice will help you in overcoming your challenges and empower you to take an active role in your health condition. Each yoga therapy session is about 60 minutes.

If you would like to find a yoga therapist in your area, please see the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) website (www.cnhc.org.uk). CNHC provides a list of certified yoga therapists.

If you are interested in becoming a yoga therapist, the British Council for Yoga Therapy (www.bcyt.co.uk) provides a list of the accredited institutions that offer yoga therapy courses.



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