

# Yoga Therapy: An Emerging Modality



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## History of Yoga Therapy

The emerging field of Yoga therapy is steeped in the history and tradition of Yoga, though one can say that modern Yoga and Yoga therapy began development about 200 years ago when western science and medicine began to notice and study Yoga.

According to Mark Singleton, author of the book *Yoga Body*, there is little or no evidence that Yoga postures, other than seated postures for meditation, were ever a primary part of traditional Indian Yoga practice. In fact, the first institutes of modern Yoga began in the 1920s while India was still under British rule. During that time, new teaching forms were brought in from the English education system. This led to the teaching of Yoga to people who were not spiritual seekers and the introduction of group classes instead of one-on-one study with a guru. So, modern Yoga and modern Yoga therapy are in many ways new creations, rather than a continuation of a specific Indian spiritual tradition.

## What is Yoga Therapy?

The current 'short' definition developed by the International Association of Yoga Therapists is:

"Yoga Therapy is the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and wellbeing through the application of the teachings and practices of Yoga."



The practice of Yoga therapy is aimed at developing self-knowledge through a process of personal witnessing and understanding the self. From the Yoga perspective, self-knowledge is health in the most complete sense. It focuses on healing at all levels of the person: physical, energetic, psycho-emotional, and spiritual. It's a modality that can be applied to groups or individuals with specific health challenges. Yoga therapy is non-sectarian and non-hierarchical.

Yoga therapy recognizes that relief of symptoms is just one facet of the healing process and that not all illness and disease can be cured. It does, however, provide a methodology to heal lives, reduce pain, and stress, and relieve physical symptoms and psychological suffering. Yoga therapy recognizes that the healing journey is unique to each individual and so selects, adopts and modifies all practices appropriately for the individual and/or group depending upon age, physical condition and ability, religion and culture.

## What is the Difference Between Yoga and Yoga Therapy?

All Yoga is considered therapeutic but Yoga therapy is Yoga with a specific focus on health and healing. It is distinct from other systems of Yoga where the class structure and content may be pre-structured and the student molds him/herself to the form of Yoga being taught. Yoga therapy is based in creative, student-centered education, where the teachers are facilitators rather than gurus in the traditional Indian sense, because it is only by awakening the student's connection to his or her own true source of wellness that healing can occur.