

# Yoga Therapy: Practice of Promoting Self-Healing

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### What is Yoga Therapy?

Yoga therapy is an applied yogic science which, in recent years, has become widely recognized as an effective, and integrative method to rehabilitate patients suffering from a variety of chronic diseases, injuries and emotional imbalances. Unfortunately, patients commonly seek yoga therapy as their last resort after giving up on years of conventional medical treatments and enduring debilitating side effects of drugs. The principles of yoga therapy are no different to that of all yoga practices. Yoga is an invaluable means to protect and heal the body, mind, and soul through a holistic three-fold approach to health management of recovery, maintenance, and prevention.

However, for some yoga practitioners, the primary focus of yoga is on the asanas and achieving complicated practices, thus reducing yoga to a competitive exercise. Benefits of yoga can only be reaped when practiced with the right awareness, approach and attitude. Awareness is far more important than perfection of form. Yoga practiced with awareness assists the body to recover after acute or chronic illness and injury by strengthening the weakened muscle, promoting efficient oxygen circulation, increasing flexibility in the spine, which allows for free flow of energy.

The practices are designed to create space within the body to promote a natural flow of prana (energy) and blood circulation and to relax the body and mind so that healing may take place. Yoga speeds up the process of regeneration and rehabilitation, mainly by reducing inflammation, the natural reaction of the body to injury and irritation, and by purifying the body of toxins.

## Yoga Therapy: Integral Approach to Yoga

Yoga therapy is an integral practice of asana (postures), pranayama (breathing), detox, relaxation and meditation practices to facilitate self-healing. The sequence of practices is deliberate to attain a calculated effect on the practitioner depending on the nature of the ailment. Among the practices, ***pawanmuktasana*** series (PM Series 1-3), developed by Swami Satyananda, founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, are suitable for practitioners of all physical aptitudes. PM Series revolutionized yoga therapy by making practices accessible to everyone and allowing individualized combinations of practices to suit particular conditions. All PM series are effective in improving the elasticity of muscles in the area of focus and thus promoting healthy circulation of blood and energy and setting forth a powerful healing force.



It is important to remember that yoga and modern medicine are not mutually exclusive. In some cases, medical diagnosis, surgical procedures and or medications are necessary for a patient. However, maintaining a healthy body through the practice of yoga will enhance the effectiveness of medication with less dosage and speed up the recovery process. The basic difference between yogic treatment and modern medicine is that yoga focuses on the root of the problem and does not isolate the symptoms from the person, whereas modern medicine focuses on suppressing the symptoms of the disease with the use of external intervention or drugs. With yoga, patients learn to take charge of their own recovery rather than becoming dependent on foreign substances.

### Suggested Yoga Therapy Practices

Depending on the nature of the patient's health issue, a trained yoga therapist designs practices to suit the individual's needs. However, the following practices are suitable for most people with chronic diseases or recovering from other ailments.

#### 1. ***Pawanmuktasana Series:***

**(a) *Pawanmuktasana Part 1:*** Simple joints rotation practices (wrists, hip, and ankles) to encourage the flow of blood and prana to each and every part of the body. Releases accumulated stress and tension from joints, nerves and muscles to induce relaxation in body, and mind. Improved blood circulation allows for proper functioning of all organs. Suitable even for patients with high blood pressure and heart disease.

**(b) *Pawanmuktasana Part 2:*** Abdominal practices to improve strength of digestive system and core muscles by using leg movements. Simple leg lifts and leg rotations are some examples of PM2 practices. Burns extra calories and builds strength and confidence.

**(c) Pawanmuktasana Part 3:** Improve *prana* flow in lower body by stretching and twisting pelvic organs. Easy to do but effective in improving function of reproductive and urinary organs and tones other abdominal organs.

**2. Backward Bending:** Tones and massages all abdominal organs, opens up heart and lungs to enhance the immune system and makes the spine more flexible and stronger for better body mind coordination. Examples: cobra, bow, wheel poses etc.

**3. Forward Bending:** Releases tensions from the spine, back and legs. Stretches all abdominal organs and improves the functioning of digestive and reproductive systems. Examples: – *rabbit and head to knee poses*. Caution: Those having back pain should not do this group without guidance.

**4. Spinal Twist:** Most important group of practice for diabetics to squeeze the pancreas, kidneys, liver, intestine and other organs to rejuvenate and revitalize them for optimal and balanced functioning. Examples: waist rotating, and half lord of the fishes poses and variations according to the capacity of the practitioner.

**5. Other Groups of Asanas:** Lateral bending and variations, balancing poses, inverted poses are also suitable. Caution: Those having hypertension, heart problems and other severe complications should avoid inverted poses.

**6. Sun Salutation:** Combination of 12 postures to enhance the metabolism and stretches all muscles and nerves to create space for the free flow of *prana* and blood. Effects the endocrine glands for balanced hormone secretions. Caution: Those having hypertension, heart problems or having symptoms of hypoglycemia should avoid this practice or only under expert guidance.

**7. Pranayama:** Breathing practices purify the blood and carries energy to every cell in the body. An important detox for the management of diabetes which enhances the metabolism. Daily practice from each of the following groups is recommended.

**(a) Bhastrika/Kapalbhati (rapid abdominal breathing):** Counters obesity and stress. Activates the fire element and increases metabolism. Caution: Avoid the practice if having symptoms of hypoglycemia, hypertension or heart ailments.

**(b) Svan Pranayama (dog panting):** Massaging and toning effects on abdominal organs. Strengthens abdominal muscles and burns belly fat. Improves respiration quality and enhances lung capacity. Caution: Avoid if suffering from hypertension and heart conditions.

**(c) Ujjayi (throat breathing):** Reduces stress and balances hypertension, heart and thyroid issues. Suitable for all.

**(d) Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril breathing):** Recharges and purifies each cell and nerve passages. Suitable even for those bedridden.

**(e) Bhramari (Humming Bee):** Best stress buster and effective for a good night's sleep.

**8. Yoga Nidra (“sleeping” meditation):** A laying down guided meditation practice to reach a state of deep physical and mental relaxation to speed up healing and to enhance awareness and mental strength. Effective for emotional issues.

**9. Detox:** *Neti, kunjaj, and laghoo sankhaprakshalana* are health promoting detox practices to be done in conjunction with *asanas* and pranayama practices. Must be done under expert guidance. *Laghoo* naturally cleans the digestive tract and rejuvenates digestive organs by throwing out all accumulated toxins from the intestine. *Neti* is good for reducing mental stress and *Kunjaj* remedies emotional imbalances.



### ***Steps to Recovery***

Yoga gives various health management options for patients according to their needs and capabilities. By choosing one or two practices from each group of asanas, pranayama and relaxation, along with observing a moderate diet, people can enjoy their daily life to its full potential. However, for successful yogic healing to take place, the patient must first take a resolve to dedicate him or herself to the discipline. Regular practice is imperative for the body, mind, and spirit to create an internal balance which is healing. Secondly, finding an experienced and qualified yoga teacher who can accurately diagnose the problem and prescribe the appropriate method of treatment is crucial in the healing process.