

## YOGA AS THERAPY

“To the question, why should an Ancient Eastern concept attract millions of practitioners at the end of the twentieth century, there is only one answer – **because it works.**”

Howard Kent(1)

The Yoga for Health Foundation under the directorship of Howard Kent has pioneered the use of yoga as a therapeutic approach to illness. It has been operating since 1978 from its residential centre in Bedfordshire, England. Their work has been recognised world-wide and it is accepted by the BMA as a complementary approach to the treatment of disease. No previous experience is necessary and it is for people of all ages.

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It is well-known these days that illness is not purely physical. ‘ Our minds, bodies, emotions and spirit are inextricably linked – a unit bound together via messenger molecules and they work together in every aspect of life.’ (2)

Neurobiologist, Dr Candace Pert (3) has demonstrated that anxiety, depression and stress have a detrimental effect on the immune system whereas positive thoughts stimulate it. Feeling good, happy and peaceful are essential for our bodies and therefore our health.

So what has this got to do with yoga?

Yoga postures, correct breathing, relaxation, visualisation, meditation and a positive attitude to life allow body, breath and mind to work as one, integrating them and harmonising the natural energy in our bodies. We are using the knowledge of the mind, body relationship to strengthen ourselves from within, including the functioning of the immune system. Yoga and its different aspects are very powerful tools for encouraging health and well-being.

It is essentially a self-help therapy, enabling us to play a part in our own healing process. We have been educated to leave our fate in the hands of experts, particularly with regard to our health. The opinion of the expert is of great value and we need to take advantage of the very best that science can offer us in the way of medical treatment. However conventional medicine can only provide a part of the answer. A person’s willingness to participate in his or her own healing is essential for any type of treatment to be effective.

With the practice of yoga we are taking back our own power, giving the person a creative and active role in the recovery of illness; sharing responsibility for treatment with the medical profession.

Symptoms are in fact messengers and are generally not the problem. At best the traditional approach successfully treats the symptoms and the person recovers. But this has not taken into account the emotional and psychological stresses that are also a part of the illness. If the deeper issues are not addressed the illness will probably recur or manifest in a different way.

So how does the therapeutic process work?

We are challenging the illness by encouraging the life force within us concentrating on our strength and vitality, the health and life that is always there. Energy is always seeking health, but we are constantly weakening ourselves by our doubts and fears and negative attitudes and beliefs. These can have a detrimental effect on the body and if one is already ill, can reduce the level of healing.

We are using the body in relation to the mind, integrating them and consciously letting go of our stresses and tensions. We are initiating a communication with ourselves, listening to our bodies and acknowledging our feelings and emotional needs. The resulting peace and harmony enables us to cultivate a positive attitude to life. It is a step by step process working towards peace, happiness and fulfilment.

This is very empowering and creative and **we all have this capacity**. The starting point is now, where we are at this moment in time. Accepting ourselves and our limitations, so we can move forward and embrace the life we have, rather than be weighed down by the situations that present themselves.

By working with the whole person, yoga can help many conditions from stress and tension to chronic conditions such as depression, hypertension, heart problems, multiple sclerosis, asthma, back pain, Parkinsons disease and ME.

It is a way of life that requires commitment, patience and perseverance and correct and regular practice. Requirements that are not always popular.

However it offers a practical solution to remedying our life situations, helping us to make sense of what we are experiencing and to find purpose and meaning and giving the body the best possible chance of healing itself.

1. The Complete Yoga Course: Howard Kent
2. Peace, Love and Healing: Bernie Siegel
3. Molecules of Emotion: Candace Pert

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