



By Ena Burrud, Certified Yoga Therapist
(All names are changed for privacy)

Has your Doctor Prescribed Yoga?

Mary rubbed her neck softly while she stepped away from her doctor's office and carefully maneuvered herself into her car. After a severe automobile collision a year ago, several surgeries later, she was still in pain-and sick of it. The doctor knew that Mary really needed to regularly stretch her neck and she was frustrated with her circumstances. He suggested Yoga.

But what kind of yoga, Mary wondered. She was a member of the gym and saw huge classes with sweaty people in headstands. The studio on the corner always smelled of incense, chants spilling from its windows. Mary was confused as to where to begin. She went home and typed therapeutic yoga into her laptop's search engine. She found Yoga Therapy and that led her to me.

Mary and I chatted on the phone and decided we would give this a whirl. I emailed her the intake questionnaire and in our first visit, she detailed her journey. Mary has six academic degrees and her own private practice tutoring children, a vocation suited well to her patient nature. But, the modern medical route had worn her out and she was ready for something different.

We formulated our approach of modified poses, breathing exercises for inflammation, philosophy to help reframe the event, yoga nidra to calm the trauma in the body and a form of meditation that helped her

return more fully to the practices of her faith. Her express goals were to get out of pain and to return to Bible Study. After the first session, she emailed to say that her son had commented on how different she seemed over the next few days.



What is Yoga therapy?

This is a very common question at my office. After all, I am tucked in between lawyers, therapists, and other executives. Since selling my yoga studio some two years ago, I thought it might be a provocatively unusual place to bring in barefoot clients. On the bookshelf, ancient texts are sandwiched between the new DMS-V, best sellers on brain science and depression. People walk by my open door and ask if they can just stand there a minute to feel the peace. It makes me smile.

Yoga Therapy is a field of complementary and alternative medicine governed by the International Association of Yoga Therapists, or IAYT. To date, yoga therapy trainings are typically 300-1200 hours above the traditional 200 hours of a basic teacher training. In yoga therapy, training time is spent with doctors, nurses, psychotherapists, physical therapists, PhD's and more. Each school has its own flavor. Beginning 2014, all schools will be held to standards of at least 800 hours and a minimum of two years of study with this specialty.

What does a Yoga Therapist Do?

A yoga therapist assesses a condition and prescribes adaptive breathing and movement techniques. Additional practices may include visualizations, meditation, prayer, sound, nutritional and lifestyle support. A personalized home session is created and drawn out. Short and long term goals are charted and along the way, the practice changes as the client progresses. My school, the Rocky Mountain Institute of Yoga and Ayurveda also includes training in Ayurveda, a sister science to yoga in wellness. This includes the

typing of one's physical and mental constitution, then suggesting herbs, cleansing practices, and seasonal eating advice.



What Other Providers Refer to Yoga Therapy?

Some clients come referred by psychiatrists or therapists, like Arthur. His referring psychiatrist, Dr. Loren, had also been a client. She and I had worked together for years to manage symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis.

Dr. Loren experienced first hand the calming, centering effects of yoga therapy, so she suggested he begin yoga therapy. Arthur was responding to his meds, but his agitation still spiked occasionally. I gave Arthur practices, especially breath work, to calm his anxiety attacks and to help him feel more grounded on a daily basis. Dr. Loren and Arthur both said that the home practices provided empowerment, which helped immensely.

Barbara came to me after having tried group classes with me years before. She was diagnosed with late stage lung cancer, and her therapeutic needs required a personalized approach. Barbara was a devoted Christian, like Mary. Integrating that faith is paramount. Equally important to discuss: different ideas of healing.

The paradigm of healing may mean acceptance rather than a cure.

Barbara wished to be at peace with her condition and to navigate the side effects of her treatments. Her cancer and the chemo made it hard to breathe, left her bones brittle and sapped her energy. But, with yoga therapy, she said her pain was manageable. She also felt more anchored when helping her family cope.

Connie's referral was by a yoga teacher in town. Connie had contracted a blood sepsis disease shortly after the birth of her second child. In order to survive, her doctors amputated portions of her feet and many of her toes. Connie had been a semi-pro athlete and wanted her old yoga practice back. She was optimistic and strong, but raising a toddler and a baby while rehabbing was tough.

I started by suggesting she try wearing reef shoes to feel the mat, rather than the sneakers she had been wearing. We modified her poses and laughed and cried at how difficult a sun salutation was without toes.

We studied some philosophy and found meaning in her experience. After approximately eighteen months, she joined back in with group classes. The inspirational account of her journey back on the mat was

published in Yoga Journal. She wrote in that article, "...toes are over rated".

What is the Future of Yoga Therapy?

Yoga is a mysterious thing. Its roots are some 5,000 years old, and its practices and concepts still hold up today. Organizations like the Samuelli Institute, National Institutes of Health, Duke Integrative Medicine and more, have funded studies with yoga for specific medical needs. We now have evidenced-based protocols, simple and profound. The US Military is using iRest® Yoga Nidra (www.iRest.us) at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research for returning soldiers with PTSD. Hospitals, wellness centers and inpatient centers are incorporating the sharpened skills of yoga therapy for specialty needs such as addictions, suicide prevention, cancer, stroke victims and bereavement. It is mind blowing to know that yogis from millennia ago had such brilliant insights that still open the minds of many today. Our struggling health care system is finally supporting the efforts of those skinny men in caves so long ago. Yoga therapy is trusted and available. You may already know a therapist in your town. She may be the one walking barefoot down the hall of the executive center, Starbuck's chai tea latte in hand.

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Ena Burrud has been teaching yoga since 2000. Her initial trainings were in LA with many luminaries who taught at the renowned Yoga Works, where she also taught for over 5 years. She has the highest designation Yoga Alliance bestows, an E-RYT500. She is also a Certified Yoga Therapist and permanent faculty for the Rocky Mountain Institute of Yoga and Ayurveda in Boulder. She teaches in the 200/500 and 800 hour Yoga Therapy programs. In 2014, she will complete her two year certification program in iRest® Yoga Nidra with Richard Miller, developer of the protocol, that the US Military uses today for Trauma and Anxiety. Upon moving to Colorado she opened Treetop Yoga and after five years sold it to practice yoga therapy full time in private practice. Her style of teaching is greatly influenced by one of her first teachers, Erich Schiffmann among others like Rod Stryker, Gary Kraftsow, Angela Farmer, Sharon Gannon and Leslie Kaminoff. Her arts experience informs her motivational, expressive style. She adores her work and considers herself blessed to live it everyday. Ena is raising two fabulous kids in Fort Collins.

To find a yoga therapist or yoga therapy school in your area, www.IAYT.org

To schedule an appointment with Ena Burrud, www.treetopyogatherapy.com



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