

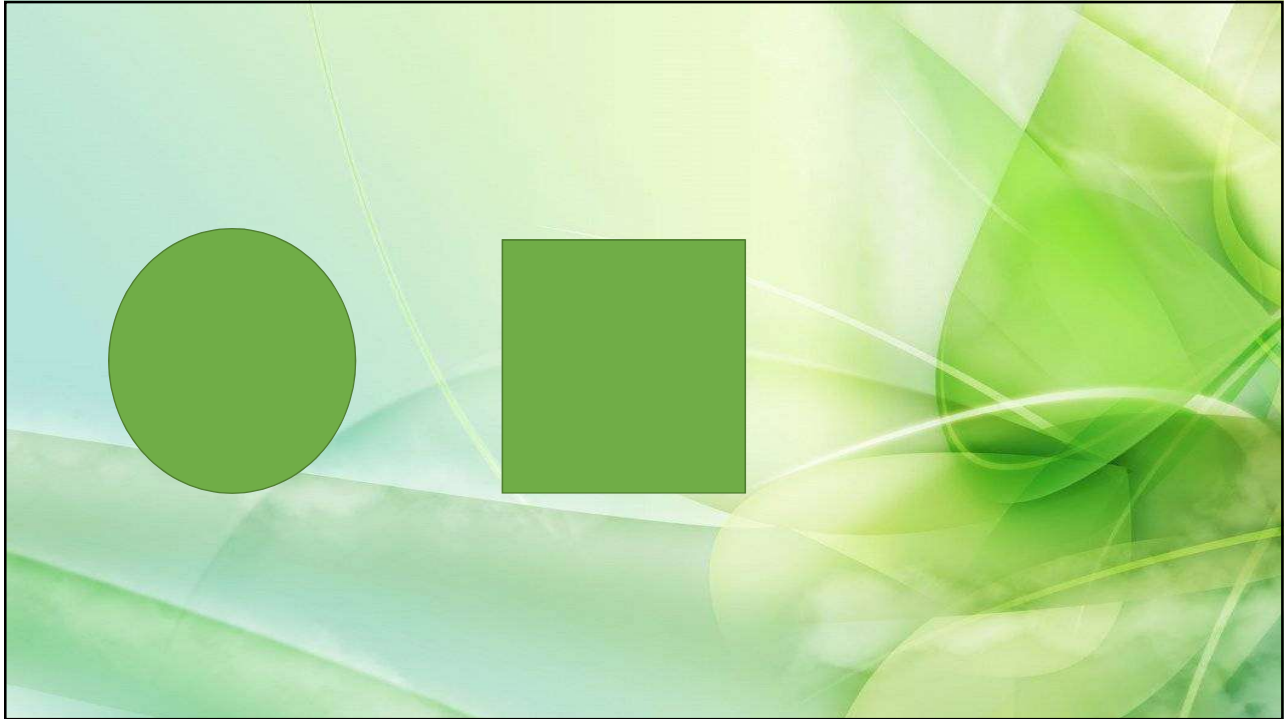
Utilizing Yoga and Meditation Therapies

Embracing Positive Embodiment

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*Yoga is the Journey of the Self,
through the Self, to the Self*

Anonymous



DISCLAIMER: If much of this sounds familiar – it is! You may already be practicing many of the tenets of Yoga by a different name. Yoga has been around for thousands of years and has been adopted across many cultures and ideologies. The first formal writings of Yoga Philosophy (The Yoga Sutras) were compiled sometime between 500 – 400 BCE. For thousands of years before that, it was an oral tradition with a wide variety of interpretations. The Yoga Sutras were written to formalize the philosophy into a cohesive study. Today, most people only associate Yoga with learning to put your foot around your head, but the essence of Yoga philosophy is learning to put your arms around the world – beginning with yourself!

Learning Objectives:

Describe the Mind/Body disconnect created by Eating Disorders (ED) and other mental health issues

Explain the 8 limbs of Yoga Philosophy and their positive, multi-dimensional effects in ED and other mental health therapies

Discuss simple Yoga and Meditation techniques to create or reconnect to positive embodiment

Eating Disorders and Physical Disconnect

As with the question “which came first, the chicken or the egg”, it is often difficult to identify which came first, the ED or the desire to disconnect. There are several types of physical disconnect that occur with ED and other mental health issues

- Disconnect from physical awareness of the body (e.g.: feeling the waistband of pants, feeling “jiggly” movement of body parts, etc.)
- Disconnect from emotions associated with past trauma that may manifest in the physical body
- Disconnect from expectations and other mental judgments

Yoga therapies are uniquely suited to restore embodiment connection – beginning with Chakras and Yoga on the mat

Chakras – Making the Connection

You may be familiar with the word “Chakra”. It is a Sanskrit word that means “wheel” and is used in many therapeutic modalities. Chakra sound association is used in Music Therapy, Chakra color association is used in Art Therapy and Chakra movement association is used in Yoga Therapy. While all of these associations are part of Chakra study, they merely reflect the main issue – physical engagement with emotions.

Chakras – Making the Connection

Simply stated, Chakras are the physical map of how emotional energy affects our physical body. “Where” we feel emotions can often be attributed to “why” we feel emotions. Understanding this emotional map can give us insight into mind/body disconnect and associated avoidance patterns.

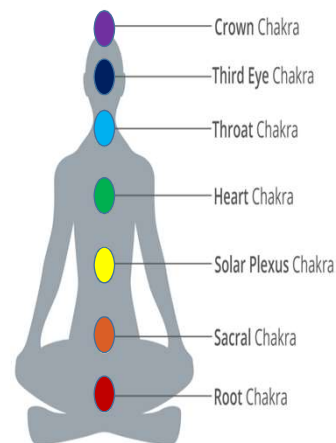
Chakras – Making the Connection

- Working through the physical aspect of emotional energy is often a road to breakthrough
- Recognizing emotional patterns can help identify incorrect/negative thinking patterns and association
- Chakras may also align with emotional stages of development – this is called “age of resonance”

Chakras – Making the Connection

There are 7 main emotional ideas:

- Root: survival – I HAVE (0-7)
- Sacral: personality – I FEEL (7-14)
- Solar Plexus: power – I CAN (14-21)
- Heart: relationships – I LOVE (28-35)
- Throat: communication – I SPEAK (35-42)
- Third eye: wisdom – I SEE (35-42)
- Crown: spirit – I KNOW (42-49)



Patterns of physical/emotional avoidance can often be identified by using the Chakra Map with clients. This information will shape the use of Yoga on the Mat (Asana).

Yoga on the Mat

Yoga Asana is one of the most challenging therapeutic techniques to engage in when suffering from ED

You have to slow down and recognize how your body feels right now – there is no mindless, excessive movement

You have to quiet the mind and pay attention to the present moment – there is no mental “zoning out”

You have to relax breathing and heart rate – there are no typical “markers” of success such as calories burned or heart rate achieved

Yoga on the Mat

You have to let go of imposed expectations and listen to what feels right/comfortable today

You can't run away – you have to sit with all aspects of yourself

Yoga Asana is an important key for connecting with positive embodiment

Creating Positive Embodiment

Embodiment is the subjective experience of the world through the physical body as a holistic being. In other words, it is the state of mind/body/spirit congruency in connection.

While Chakras can give insight into why there is physical disconnect and Yoga Asana can reopen the dialog with physical sensation, there is more that must happen to create a positive experience with embodiment.

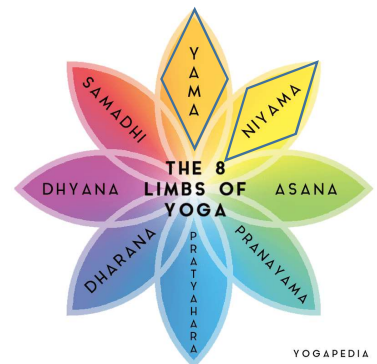
The Whole Picture for the Whole Person

Yoga comes from the word “YEUI/YUK” and means “to yoke or bind”. While we may be familiar with “contortion” postures associated with Yoga on a mat, this is only one small area of Yoga. As a matter of fact, the physical practice on the mat is considered so insignificant to Yoga philosophy, it is only mentioned 3 times in the Yoga Sutras – the foundational text of Yoga. There are 8 limbs or areas of study which make up Yoga philosophy. These can be studied separately or, for maximum benefit, in ascending order - similar to climbing a tree.

8 Limbs of Yoga

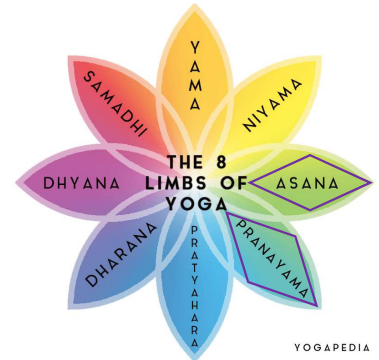
- **Yamas** – abstinences/external discipline
 - Concepts that inform interaction with the world
 - Recognizing the correlation between thought and action (e.g.: non-violence, non-attachment)

- **Niyamas** – observances/internal discipline
 - Concepts that inform interaction with the self
 - Identifying core values/beliefs and learning to live congruently (e.g.: cleanliness, self-study)



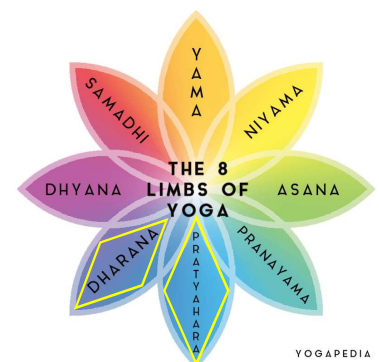
8 Limbs of Yoga

- **Asana** – physical postures on the mat
 - Movements to connect the mind and body
 - Learning to accept the physical body without judgment
- **Pranayama** – breathing patterns
 - Practicing a wide variety of breathing patterns to move energy in different ways
 - Learning to breathe effectively regardless of the situation (e.g.: anxious, angry, depressed)



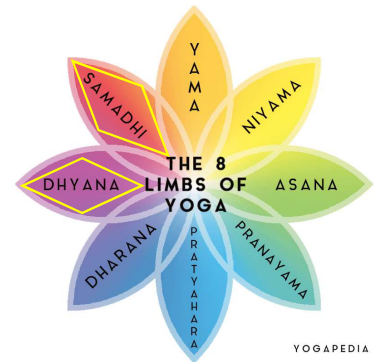
8 Limbs of Yoga

- **Pratyahara** – sensory withdrawal
 - Learning to live from the inside-out
 - Letting go of rigid external influence regarding expectations
- **Dharana** – contemplation
 - Asking questions about the self and the world
 - Allowing the mind to contemplate, rather than ruminate
 - Creating new neuropathways in the brain



8 Limbs of Yoga

- **Dhyana** - meditation
 - Listening for what comes next
 - Moving away from habit – into mindfulness and being in the moment
- **Samadhi** - inspiration
 - Being fully aware and present
 - Acting on intuition/insight
 - Finding purpose outside the self



Philosophy in Practice

There are many ways to incorporate the 8 limbs of Yoga within the therapeutic process:

- **Mindful Stretching:** utilizing simple yoga stretches while asking questions (e.g.: what do you feel when you move this way, etc.)
- Accepting “down time” as part of health and wellness
- Embracing ebb and flow of mind, body and spirit.
Recognizing that we are not “always on” or “always off”

Philosophy in Practice

Yoga on the Mat and Breathing Techniques: these go hand-in-hand and support each other. The body moves because we breathe/we breathe because the body moves.

- It is not enough to experience body awareness, we must use physical movement to reconnect to body sensation and reestablish appropriate body responsiveness
- Rumination leads to disconnection. To slow the mind, you must slow the heart; to slow the heart, you must slow the breath. When the breath slows down, awareness and mindfulness occur

Trauma-sensitive Yoga Asana tips:

- Be aware of room alignment (e.g.: doors, windows, other participants)
- Be aware of sound interaction (e.g.: need for “mental landing”)
- NO HAND’S –ON ADJUSTMENTS
- Be aware of postural alignment (e.g.: laying down, forward folding)

Philosophy in Practice

Living from the inside-out: ED is often driven by external expectations and social cues. Giving permission for self-discovery and self-affirmation builds positive embodiment.

- Contemplative Journaling: asking questions of the self; identifying and affirming core values/beliefs
- “Checking in” throughout the day and mindfully noticing how it feels to inhabit the physical body
- Studying anatomy and physiology allows for a different self-perspective than the reflection in the mirror

Philosophy in Practice

Relaxation & Meditation: Re (again) Lax (loose) & Meditate (listen). Relax and meditate simply means to get loose again and listen for what comes next.

- It doesn't have to be done in a reclining position with quiet music and low lighting. It's about letting go of “stuff” and becoming connected to the present moment
- It is a learned skill, just like playing the piano or riding a bike. You have to practice and explore. It is difficult to master and easy to give up – but worth the effort!

Relaxation and Meditation tips:

- Allow participants to remain seated and keep eyes open
- Discuss what works for the participant and what doesn't
- Anything that draws the mind and body into the present moment is a form of relaxation and meditation
- Formal Meditation techniques take practice to facilitate

Formal Relaxation and Meditation techniques

- Metered breathing practices (e.g.: count to 10, breath in for 4 counts/breath out for 4 counts)
- Guided Imagery
 - Open imagery
 - Directed imagery
 - Hypnotherapy
- Yoga Nidra – Isolated Body Connection (e.g.: PMR)
- Transcendental Meditation

Philosophy in Practice

Incorporating Yoga Philosophy throughout a wide variety of modalities:

- Movement Therapy – Chakras, breathing, meditation, connection to physical sensation
- Music Therapy – Chakras, meditation, breathing
- Art Therapy – Chakras, journaling, meditation

Creating positive embodiment is crucial to countering negative body image and rumination.

Yoga and Meditation Therapies are uniquely designed to support this endeavor in the ED recovery environment

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