

## Yoga Therapy

Every year, an estimated 1.7 million Americans sustain traumatic brain injury (TBI), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most people who have experienced a TBI are treated in emergency rooms and released.

But that doesn't mean they return to life as usual.

The lasting effects of TBI may only be repaired step-by-step through strategic application of traditional therapies, and new therapies such as the up-and-coming, clinically-based yoga therapy. Combining the age-old wisdom of yoga with the latest medical evidence, Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers has paired up with YogaMedics to run custom classes and individual sessions for clients to help them handle life after brain injury.

*(see sidebar pg. 8)*

Many factors impact health. Social support, stress management, coping ability and the immune system all play a part in a person's health. Mind-body medicine addresses all of these.

Mainstream medicine traditionally looks at injury and illness as separate from the person, mind-body medicine considers the cumulative impact of many factors in a person's wellness picture.

The National Institutes of Health defines mind-body therapy as "interventions that use a variety of techniques to facilitate the mind's capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms." Some people are more familiar with the term "alternative medicine," which refers to any healing practice that falls outside the scope of conventional medicine.

Societies around the world have long associated good health with more than just taking medicine. Daily diet, exercise, social habits and other factors contribute to a person's wellness.

Why use yoga to treat TBI? Yoga helps improve flexibility and muscle strength, and promotes relaxation.

But there's more.

- Yoga decreases anxiety and depression.
- Yoga regulates dopamine levels. Research shows that low dopamine levels contribute to addiction and anxiety disorders as well as Parkinson's Disease.

- Yoga increases the release of endorphins, natural mood enhancers housed in the brain.

Simply put, yoga helps people relax, eliminate stress and increase feelings of well-being.

For TBI patients, the values and practices of yoga help profoundly in healing. Yoga's breathing techniques increase brain activity, focus and awareness.

For those with frontal lobe or forehead injuries who often experience loss of simple movement and the ability to multi-task, medically-based yoga builds the physical body and reteaches skills needed to successfully sequence.

Parietal lobe injuries near the back and top of the head can eliminate one's sense of body awareness, causing challenges in self-care. Yoga increases awareness and removes distractions.

Other types of brain injuries also benefit from yoga. Whether it's balance, coordination, movement or simply seeking calmness, yoga is one way to strength and wellness. *(ezinearticles.com)*

Because mind and body are linked, teaching control of the mind helps the body get better. Traditional medicine addresses symptoms of injury or illness. Mind-body medicine addresses the whole person for total wellness. *(National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine)*

While these methods are gaining in popularity and public attention, they are not new. Until 300 years ago, every medical system treated mind and body as one. During the 17th century, Westerners separated mind and body — the body as a machine with replaceable parts and the mind as a self-sufficient emotional entity. *(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind)*

While such a perspective led to advances in surgery, trauma care, pharmaceuticals and more, it also diminished the amount of inquiry doctors put into a patient's emotional and spiritual life, impeding total ability to heal.

Stanford University Integrative Psychiatrist James Lake, MD, said: "Extensive research has confirmed the medical and mental benefits of meditation, mindfulness training, yoga, and other mind-body practices."



## Yoga Therapy *continued*

### Yoga Therapy at Rainbow

Every Tuesday and Thursday, YogaMedics therapist Elizabeth Schafer comes to Rainbow's Apartment Program to serve clients there. She follows a specialized protocol over 12 weeks, combining messaging, education and physical poses to help students with healing. She works with Rainbow's interdisciplinary therapy teams to ensure that yoga is integrated into a client's plan of care. She is also responsible for documenting the experience that each client receives during therapy.

"Each week builds upon the week prior," said Schafer, who studied public health and worked with the U.S. Government but knew nothing about treating TBI until she came to YogaMedics.

"When you start talking about car accidents and veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq, you're finding problems that may never go away," she said. "We combine science and medicine and the practice of yoga that we know to be so beneficial physically and mentally, and take it to a clientele that experiences a range of limitations and struggles. YogaMedics is a beautiful combination of yoga and public health."

The messaging in YogaMedics brain injury classes relates yoga to TBI recovery.

"At the beginning, we talk about motivation to live differently. We work on building trust and safety and security within the group," said Schafer. "We talk about building awareness of physical sensations and ultimately accepting thoughts that clutter the mind."

Physical poses used in yoga enhance confidence and self-control. "Child's Pose" relieves anxiety. "Back Bends" open the heart and chest while easing anxiety and depression.

Through the sessions at Rainbow, "people have gotten stronger, and have realized improved range of motion, balance and flexibility," said Schafer. "Our clients use deep breathing techniques to handle anxiety."

Guided imagery helps them envision the life they want, maintain motivation and believe it into existence.

Rainbow also has a Yoga Group at its Pediatric program in Oakland County. Run by a Rainbow therapist, children and young adults alike actively participate in the group and realize the benefits of yoga.

#### References:

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