

The Difference between a Yoga Therapist and a Yoga Teacher

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While there is an inherent therapeutic potential of yoga, there are considerable differences between a yoga teacher and a yoga therapist. It's understandable that there's confusion about the differences between a Yoga Therapist and a Yoga Teacher, given the popularity of Yoga, the plethora of different types of yoga classes, and the well-being many feel after a regular yoga class.

Yoga Classes are often taught in groups by Yoga Teachers and are usually more general in nature. A Yoga Teacher focuses mostly on instruction and guiding students through a practice. They focus on teaching various yoga methods in a correct and appropriate way. Often, their students are seeking exercise to stay in shape and that dictates the yoga class. Identical form and instruction is taught, with some adaptations, but not with the whole individual in mind. Yoga Instructors may offer classes for specific conditions, (pregnancy, runners, seniors) and the purpose for these classes is to teach the students how to practice while respecting their health conditions.

A Yoga Therapist on the other hand, focuses on their client's needs and their goal is to help or relive symptoms/health conditions of their clients. In a Yoga Therapy session or class, the therapist focuses on the specific issue that troubles the client and they work together to figure out what works best for the client to manage the symptoms. The Yoga Therapist empowers the client to take an active role in their healing process.

The term "therapist" itself implies a higher level of training and responsibility than the term "teacher" and, indeed, Yoga Therapists are held to higher and more stringent standards of education, training, and experience than standards Yoga teachers. A Yoga Therapist is a well-trained and experienced yoga teacher with substantial additional training in therapeutic applications and other supporting skills.

Yoga Teachers are trained to lead a group class through asana, the physical movement part of Yoga and the training periods varies from one or two weeks to six months. Yoga Therapy training is typically a rigorous two-year process that is more comprehensive and involves extensive work with musculoskeletal conditions, emotional health, physiologic health, and a clinical practice immersions. Woven through the training are the profound studies of Ayurveda (a system of traditional Eastern medicine and the sister science to Yoga), the Yoga Sutras (Yoga Philosophy), and valuable Yoga tools such as chanting and mudras (hand positions that influence energy). Yoga Therapists are trained to assess each individual student, establish appropriate goals, and teach the student an intervention practice that will address his or her unique needs.

In summary, A Yoga Therapist is a well-trained and experienced yoga teacher with substantial additional training in therapeutic applications and other supporting skills. They incorporate a multidimensional approach to caring for individuals. A Yoga Therapist's goals include reducing the symptoms of suffering that can be reduced, managing symptoms that can't be reduced, rooting out causes wherever possible, improving life function, and shifting attitude and perspective in relations to our condition. Yoga-Cikitsa (Yoga Therapy) is a seemingly new field in the United States, but it has long been a part of the Yoga tradition. Yoga Therapy is all about treating the whole person: mind, body, and spirit. It's based on the belief that human beings are born with the ability to heal and need only remove physical, emotional, and spiritual locks in order to let that natural ability shine through.

Resources:

International Association of Yoga Therapists
Essential Yoga Therapy
Yoga Therapy Today
International Journal of Yoga Therapy