

How to heal emotional shocks through yoga?

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Whether it be reducing stress, improving concentration, reinforcing your body and working on your flexibility, the benefits of yoga are no longer to be demonstrated. But did you know that yoga could also heal emotional shocks? Lesser known, yoga therapy aims to restore good mental and physical health and can be very effective.

The term *yoga therapy* was first used in 1970 by Dr Bernard Auriol, a French psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Yoga therapy no longer treats the symptoms but the pathology itself with various exercises. Where yoga maintains the balance between the body and mind, yoga therapy restores it. However, it does not replace treatment from doctors, but provides a complement to improve the state of health. It uses all the tools of yoga: asanas (postures), the pryanayamas (breathing), yoga nidra (deep relaxation), the kryias (internal cleansing techniques), the mudras (energetic gestures of the hands and fingers), the mantras (sounds and vibrations) and meditations.

Treating emotional shocks

Emotional shocks, which result of a traumatic event and promote the appearance of depression, are a deregulation of the body. These psychological traumas can occur as a result of bereavement, a love disappointment, family issues or an accident. How do you treat them? Many means are possible to treat emotional shocks, and yoga therapy will complement doctors' treatments. For yoga to be effective and to really act on the emotional shock, individual appointments with therapists are preferred. The therapist is going to treat the person in shock and show him/her the most appropriate exercises. The exercises are going to decrease the pressure, whether it be imposed or self-inflicted. Not only can yoga therapy be effective in treating emotional shock, but if continued, it can minimize the risk of relapse. And if you are not in a state of emotional shock (we hope you aren't), you can still practice yoga, it will then have a preventive role and offer multiple benefits in your daily life.

The exercises

Accompanied by a yoga professional, or therapist, you may be asked to perform the first series of Ashtanga. The Ashtanga Vinyasa is a very structured system of postures, composed of three series. According to tradition, you must first master the first series before starting the second one, and likewise for the third series. The first series is called Yoga Chikitsa, which means "*treatment*" or "*cure*" by *yoga* in sanskrit, i.e. yoga therapy. Its aim is to facilitate the purification of the body and soul, by eliminating toxins, tensions and all other imbalances. Patience and perseverance are necessary for the practice of yoga, and specifically for yoga therapy or Yoga Chikitsa.

The first series starts with the sun salutations, which activate muscles and articulations. It then continues with several standing postures, which will stabilize and soften the body, some of which require balance. Then comes the central part of yoga therapy: the sitting postures. They will stimulate the three chakras of the lower body, which are responsible for our instincts, our emotions and our feeling of identity. Finally, the last part will reduce the rhythm of the practice and will focus on breathing.

A healthy lifestyle

In addition to helping in the treatment of emotional shocks, yoga has many other benefits. With regular practice, the quality of sleep is improved, as are posture, balance, flexibility and concentration, the joints are strengthened and the back is toned. However, to benefit from all these effects, practicing yoga alone is not enough. Yoga, or yoga therapy, goes hand in hand with a healthy lifestyle. A good diet, quality sleep, taking your time and above all patience and perseverance are essential.

An effective practice for veterans

Yoga has been successful ever since several studies have proven its effectiveness. This is notably the case of an American study conducted at Harvard in 2010 and funded by the US Department of Defense. This study followed several army veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. For ten weeks, twice a week in yoga classes and 15 minutes every day at home, they practiced yoga. For two-thirds of them, yoga greatly improved their health, for example by reducing their nightmares. The other veterans saw only a slight improvement in their condition, proof that yoga therapy doesn't work for everyone, and that it takes time to find the right treatment. In 2016, a German study proved that yoga has a positive effect on anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. The Indian practice thus surpasses a simple physical activity, but is not as effective as a standard psychotherapeutic treatment. Yoga therapy is not a substitute for medical treatment.

To go further

Today, in France, yoga therapy is represented by two main organisms: the Institut de YogaThérapie (IDYT) and the Fédération Française de Yogathérapie (FFYT).

Several books were published on yoga therapy:

- *Prolégomènes à une Yogathérapie de Groupe*, by Bernard Auriol, ed. Montauban, 1970
- *Yoga et Psychothérapies*, by Bernard Auriol, ed. Privat, 1977
- *Yogathérapie, formation et pratique* (tomes 1 et 2), by Natesan Chandrasekaran, ed. Agamat, 2010-2011
- *Yoga Thérapie: soigner les chocs émotionnels et les peurs*, by Lionel Coudron and Corinne Miéville, ed. Odile Jacob, 2018