



The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care

Edited by Sat Bir Singh Khalsa, PhD, Lorenzo Cohen, PhD, Timothy McCall, MD, and Shirley Telles, PhD

Reviewed by Gurjeet Birdee, PhD

In the last 30 years, yoga has spread globally in popularity for physical exercise and to promote personal wellbeing. This has spurred interest within the scientific community to study the benefits of yoga for health. Recently, the scientific literature of yoga for health has grown substantially. However, the quality of yoga research has been uneven, with many studies lacking rigor, sufficient size, and/or appropriate analyses and reporting. Among this literature some research meets the high standards of modern medical science. As health professionals, yoga therapists, and practitioners of yoga consider how to integrate yoga into healthcare, there is a need to evaluate and compile the yoga literature to date. This book, edited by Sat Bir Singh Khalsa, PhD, Lorenzo Cohen, PhD, Timothy McCall, MD, and Shirley Telles, PhD, fulfills this need by sifting through published studies and producing an impressive medical textbook and reference on yoga therapy. Numerous authors from the fields of research and yoga therapy contributed their expertise in creating a compendium of yoga as applied to healthcare.

The editors usefully organized the book in the format of a medical science textbook. Following a brief introduction on the history and philosophy of yoga and yoga therapy, subsequent sections are by health condition: mental health, musculoskeletal/neurological, endocrine, car-

diorespiratory, cancer, and special populations (e.g., pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology). Each section contains chapters about specific health conditions (17 clinical chapters in total). The reader will find in each chapter a brief overview of the condition from a biomedical perspective, the rationale and/or mechanisms for yoga as applicable, and a review of clinical yoga studies for the specific condition. The reviews are accompanied by tables at the end of each chapter that list each study cited and key characteristics of the study. These tables provide a quick visual reference to scan the literature. Importantly, each chapter highlights limitations to studies and gaps in the research field. The last section of the book discusses practical application of yoga therapy and future research needs.

The introduction of the book provides an excellent foundation on yoga for health and provides a succinct description of yoga styles. Recent academic historical references are used along with traditional yoga texts to provide a balanced view on contemporary yoga. For individuals not familiar with yoga and/or its history, the initial section will provide a sufficient primer. This book has drawn on the expertise of leading researchers in yoga; the result is a critical appraisal of yoga for health. The range of health conditions covered is impressive and captures the breadth of yoga research. Sections with more substantial and high-quality literature stand out (Mental Health, Musculoskeletal, and Cancer) as compared to others.

Yoga therapists will find the overviews of each condition and surveys of the literature helpful to reference and orient their clinical practices. Yoga therapists and teachers often ask me about the evidence of yoga for specific conditions so they can cite the literature to clients and healthcare professionals such as physicians. Therapists may use this book to find such references to support and validate their clinical practices.

As yoga therapy grows, more patients may seek advice from healthcare professionals regarding the use of yoga for specific conditions. Also, healthcare professionals may find yoga therapists practicing in their healthcare organization or community. This textbook will inform physicians, nurses, physical therapists, and others about the potential of yoga therapy and guide potential referrals to yoga therapists.

Each chapter ends with practical considerations of yoga for the specific conditions titled “Clinical Insights.” These were written by Dr. Timothy McCall along with other yoga therapists and teachers with experience treating specific conditions. Since yoga has many different styles, these compile different perspectives on how to use yoga based on the experience of practitioners. Readers will find useful tidbits regarding clinical applications, but not comprehensive explanations on yoga theory or approaches for health.

While the format and content will be familiar to healthcare professionals with conventional biomedical training, others such as yoga therapists may find the details and evaluation of studies cumbersome. The book would benefit with an overview of how clinical research is done, including research design, reporting, and evaluation of quality. Also, some clinical textbooks provide a summary grade of evidence, such as A, B, C, and D with decreasing quality of research respectively. These could have potentially helped readers not familiar with clinical studies to better contextualize results and translate to their clinical practice. Lastly, the “Clinical Insights” at the end of each clinical chapter are not linked to the scientific content of each chapter. These portions provide a refreshing break from the review of scientific literature, but lack the critical evaluation and organization provided by the biomedical sections.

This is the first medically oriented textbook of yoga that comprehensively reviews the scientific literature of yoga for healthcare. It will be the standard reference for medical evidence of yoga therapy. Yoga therapy and research continues to grow, and this book represents the culmination and impact of yoga therapy today. Yoga therapists, health professionals, and researchers will find this book invaluable as they apply yoga for clinical healthcare. **YTT**

Gurjeet Birdee, MD, MPH, is a physician scientist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He performs research on the clinical applications and mechanisms of mind-body practices. He practices internal medicine, pediatrics, and yoga therapy at Vanderbilt.