

How to Use Yoga to Alleviate Stress, Anxiety and Panic Attacks

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Healthy Heart Yoga Studio

HW499 – Bachelors Capstone in Health and Wellness
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Using Yoga to Relieve Stress, Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Course Syllabus

General Information

Instructor: Lisa Lines Gregor

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Class Meetings: South Fellowship Church, 6560 S Broadway, Littleton, CO 80121

Course Description

This class series is designed to help people improve their quality of life, reduce the harmful effects of stress, anxiety and avoid panic attacks.

Course Prerequisites

None

Course Objectives

1. How to use your breath to calm the nervous system.
2. How to use meditation and mantra to combat stress before it escalates to anxiety and panic attacks.
3. What to do if you feel a panic attack coming on.
4. How to use prayer journaling to release fear and negative emotions to a higher power.
5. Discovering which essential oils are best for clearing nasal passages for breathing exercises, and which are best for calming the nerves.
6. Empowering each student with confidence to better handle life's daily stresses.
7. Releasing muscle tension to reduce stress physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Required Materials

- Yoga Mat, Blocks and Strap
- Water

Recommended Materials

- Holy Bible, any version

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- Essential Oils – lavender, peppermint or spearmint, and your choice of Bergamot, Clary Sage, Frankincense or Chamomile.
- Mala Beads

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Class Outline

Day 1: Introduction

- My story and how this might help you
- Professional Standards of Yoga Instructors
- Physiological Effects of Stress
- Physiology how breath helps calm the nervous system
- Ujayii breathing exercise
- Yoga Asana

Day 2: Meditation

- How to Meditate
 - Different types of meditation
 - Focusing on breath
 - Guided meditations
 - Mindfulness meditations – walking, eating
 - Meditation exercises
- What is Mantra
 - How to use scriptures for mantra
 - Using mala beads for mantra and meditation
 - Mantra exercises
- Yoga Asana

Day 3: Prayer journaling

- Training our minds.
- Schedule a time to “worry” in our prayer journals.
- Writing and releasing emotions.
- 4-5-6 breathing exercises.
- Yoga Asana

Day 4: Community - one of the primary reasons for Holy Yoga!

- The power of talking to a trusted friend or counselor.
- Yoga Asana
- Community yoga poses.

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Day 1 Practice – Introduction and Pranayama

Introduction

In today's stressful world of technology where expectations are high with increased demands of productivity, people's stress levels have increased considerably. We now know that stress increases cortisol levels to soar, which leads to increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease (McCall, 2015). With this knowledge, it is imperative we learn how to reduce stress in our lives.

According to Dr. Dean Ornish's "Undo It" plan that been proven to reduce cardiovascular disease, there are four main modalities he uses:

1. Proper nutrition – mainly a vegan diet.
2. Stress Management – using yoga and meditation.
3. Fitness – how much you move, cardio vascular exercise.
4. Love and Support.

Ornish's program has been so successful, that Medicare now covers it (Ornish, 2017).

The purpose of this course, "How to Use Yoga to Alleviate Stress, Anxiety and Panic" is to help those plagued with anxiety and panic.

My Story Dealing with Panic Attacks

My Mother always said if you really want to learn something teach it, which is why I chose this topic for my community project. I have dealt with panic attacks off and on for 29 years. My first panic attack occurred when I was 27 years old after my Grandma went to Heaven. I come from a multi-generational family of (mostly) women who also have dealt with panic attacks – my Mom, brother, Grandma and even my Great Grandma. My main fear stems from seeing my step grandfather having a heart attack, and the paramedics working on him when I was eight years old.

Sometimes I feel like a fraud because here I am dealing with panic, yet I'm a Yoga Instructor teaching people how to deal with stress. Sometimes I ask myself, who am I to be helping others deal with the same issue I have struggled with over half my life? Yet then I think, who better to help others who can empathize with their struggle. I can relate first-hand the struggles with panic attacks. I know the terrifying moments a person goes through, and I know the shame and embarrassment afterwards. I know some people who are not plagued with panic attacks cannot understand, and think if I had more faith I would not experience panic attacks. I know the frustration of not being as adventurous as I would like to be. I KNOW what it's like to carry a tranquilizer, even on short hikes or bike rides just in case I have a panic attack. Or carrying one while going down the elevator just in case it gets stuck, and I have a panic attack. I KNOW what it's like to live in fear, and hiking and biking is a victory each time I get out and accomplish it. I also know what it's like when I am not victorious, and have to turn around and retreat home. Last

November my son and I had tickets to a Transiberian Orchestra concert, but instead I wound up in the ER and missed concert.

God uses our weaknesses to show His power and glory, and for us to be able to empathize and help others who have the same struggles. He chose Moses who was slow of speech to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He chose Jonah who originally ran the other direction and was swallowed up by the whale. Jesus chose the woman at the well to spread the word about him to the Samaritans. Women in that culture were not much more than slaves, and this particular woman had been with five men, and was currently living unwed with a man. I thought I had conquered panic attacks three years ago during my yoga teacher training, yet here they are back again after incurring a long-lasting concussion. However, maybe the purpose of this concussion and my set-back in dealing with panic attacks will serve the purpose of writing this, and hopefully help others to a more peaceful life.

Professional Standards of Yoga Instructors

A little background about the professional requirements to conduct yoga classes. Most studios and gyms require at least a 200 hour Registered Yoga Teacher (200 hr RYT) or a similar training such as a 225 hour Holy Yoga Instructor (R-HYI) training. More advanced certifications are available to further the learning and expertise of a Yoga Instructor such as a 500 hour Masters Yoga Teacher training, which I will complete in June, 2017. Other courses such as Yoga As Medicine (YAM) have also been helpful to increase my knowledge on my path to become a Certified Yoga Therapist (CYT). Dean Ornish has a program to teach healthcare professionals and Yoga Instructors to implement his program at health clinics across the nation, which are now covered by Medicare. This year Yoga Alliance now requires an instructor to either apply and be grandfathered in to call themselves a Yoga Therapist, or complete a 800-1000 hour approved CYT school approved by the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT). The IAYT's goal is to make Yoga an accepted modality in the healthcare field, covered by insurance similar to Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT). It is important to seek an experienced Yoga instructor who has been trained in a 200 hour program, preferably with at least one year of experience to keep students from injury.

As with most other healthcare fields, a Yoga Instructor should have liability insurance in case a student is injured in their class. They should also have each student complete a New Student Information form with basic contact information, pre-existing conditions, their goals in participating in yoga and have them sign a liability waiver.

Physiological Effects of Stress

God designed our bodies in such a miraculous way. He created two different types of nervous systems within our bodies:

1. Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) known as the fight or flight response to deal with stress. During moments of fear or anger, the body responds by increasing the heart rate, blood pressure, increases pupil size, constricts the blood vessels and increases sweating in preparing the body for "fight or flight".

2. Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) known as the rest and digest response to recover and nourish us after the stressful situation is over.

The problem is, in today's modern society typically we no longer have to use physical means to deal with stressors such as running from a tiger or fighting a wolf for food. In ancient times, man burned off the excess cortisol not used up in fight or flight. Furthermore, if we continue to worry frequently throughout the day, day in and day out, our cortisol levels remain high. After several days, weeks or months of stress without exercise or stress relieving activities such as yoga and meditation, our bodies can experience adrenal fatigue from a constant high cortisol level. Adrenal fatigue can cause high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and even osteoporosis (McCall, 2015).

How Pranayama/Breath Can Calm the Nervous System

One of the most effective methods to bring the body out of an SNS response as in a panic attack, is breath control. By slowing the breath through breathing exercises, we have control to take the body out of the SNS (fight or flight mode) into PNS (rest and digest mode).

- Ujayii breathing exercises – slightly constrict the back of the throat helping to slow down the breath, and bring the body back into the calming PNS.
 - Spearmint essential oil to help clear the nasal passages.
- Yoga Asana – Asana is the 3rd limb of yoga, which is the poses and postures most people think of in yoga. Moving and stretching the body with the breath not only helps burn off excess cortisol, but also releases tension from the muscles. It's amazing how releasing physical tension from muscles, can also release emotional tension.
 - Yoga Flow example: <https://goo.gl/photos/YzcXuepsXhvGjEyf8>
- Essential Oil for Savasana – Frankincense

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Day 2 Practice – Meditation and Mantra

What is Meditation?

Meditation is a spiritual discipline used to help calm the nervous system and bring order to the mind (Leaf, 2013). There are many different types of meditation. Here are a few we will explore in class:

- Focusing on breath – feeling the belly and chest rise with each inhale, and fall with each exhale.
- Guided Meditation – listening to someone in person or an audio guiding your thoughts. Holy Yoga produces guided meditations, and there are many other audio meditations can be found on YouTube.
- Mindfulness – bringing your full attention to your current task such as walking, eating or anything else. Using all five senses to experience the moment, such as the breeze on your face when walking, the smell of the lavender bushes, hearing the birds singing and really observing nature.
- Mantra – repeating a short phrase or scripture over and over to allow it to sink deep within.
 - The spoken word is more powerful than only thinking. Mantra is very effective in calming over all stress. It is also helpful when a person begins to feel a panic attack coming on to repeat reassuring scriptures such as:
 - “You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, and whose thoughts are fixed on you!” Isaiah 26:3 (NLT)
 - “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)
 - “Be strong and courageous.” Joshua 1:9A (NLT)
 - “He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.” Psalms 91:4 (NLT)
 - Mala beads can be used to keep track of the number times of repetition, which frees a person from counting or looking at a clock. It is common for a person’s mind to wander at times during mantra. Be patient with yourself, and gently guide it back to the meaning of the scripture.
- Meditation exercises using mala beads
- Pranayama/breathing exercise – peppermint essential oil
- Yoga Asana: <https://youtu.be/ZBLnI3lxIEA>
- Essential Oil for Savasana – Lemongrass

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Day 3 Practice – Prayer Journaling

- The act of **writing your thoughts** down is a very effective way to release stress on “paper”, whether you handwrite on literal paper or key in a Word doc on your laptop (Leaf, 2013). If you believe in a Higher Power, writing your thoughts in prayer is even more effective. According to the Bible, God instructs us to bring our worries to Him:

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT).

- Pranayama or 4-5-6 Breathing Exercise also helps to calm the nervous system.
 - Inhale 4 counts
 - Hold 5 counts and
 - Exhale 6 counts
 - It takes some getting used to, but is calming with practice.
- Training our Minds
 - Schedule a time to “worry” in your prayer journal - try training your mind to only “worry” a certain designated time every day.
 - If you catch yourself worrying at other times, tell yourself you will “worry” about that at the scheduled journaling time.
 - Be like Scarlett O’Hare in the movie *Gone With the Wind*, who was always saying, “Oh I’ll worry about that tomorrow!”
- Yoga Asana
- Essential Oil for Savasana – Bergamot

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Day 4 Practice – Community

- One of the primary reasons for Holy Yoga is to form a **supportive community**.
- Discussing problems and fears with a trusted friend or counselor helps to gain a different perspective. Talking about fears and bringing them into the open, helps diffuse fear (Rohn, 2017)
- Yoga Asana - including Tree Pose.

Community Yoga Poses

- Seated hamstring and upper back stretch
 - Class sits on the floor in a circle with legs straight and feet together.
 - Everyone cross arms and joins hands.
 - Group gently leans back with joined hands, and enjoy the stretch across the upper back.
 - Have group gently begin circling, leaning forward and back for a mild hamstring stretch.
- Seated Straddle Seesaw
 - Have class partner up
 - Partners sit facing each other in a straddle seat w/ feet together.
 - Partners join hands and one leans back while the other leans forward.
 - Good hamstring stretch
- Standing Forest
 - Class stands in circle facing each other.
 - Everyone places open palms against each other.
 - Class then balances on left leg, while bringing the sole of the right foot on the inner left calf into Tree Pose.
 - Students experience how much easier it is to stand in Tree Pose with the help of the group as opposed to solo.
- Essential Oil for Savasana – Wild Orange.

References

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