

Introduction



*We weave the cloth of our everyday
By what we do and give.
The fabric of our everyday
Is made by how we live.*
—C. Alexander Simpkins

At their heart, yoga and mindfulness hold to the idea that you can cultivate well-being by what you do and how you live. Meditation is a practice, something you do to train the mind and body in ways that bring about a shift in consciousness. Recent research has found that practicing these meditative methods changes your brain and rebalances your nervous system. You experience increased calmness and happiness and can regulate your emotions and behavior, goals that psychotherapy aims to foster. Thus, integrating yoga and mindfulness can facilitate the therapeutic process.

Yoga and mindfulness are practices whereby *doing* brings *knowing*, and so, this experiential workbook is intended as something you *do*, which means we encourage you to actively engage with the material. You will find many different ways to get involved that will evoke a variety of experiences. The chapters contain tips to guide you, information boxes to add more details, lists for easy access, exercises to perform, and illustrations to follow. We also supply journaling guidance and charts to fill out, which will provide feedback as you progress. Case examples show how other people have benefited from using these methods, which serve as inspiration for your own change process. We are excited to bring you this practical workbook!

The learning is offered at two levels. First, you will find that the techniques and methods, with explicit and easy-to-follow instructions, elicit a specific change or a particular response. Then, on a deeper level, nonspecific effects, such as experiencing well-being or changes in your energy level, will occur. Through the process, you will learn how to individualize these methods to suit your personal needs.

WHO CAN USE THIS WORKBOOK?

This book speaks directly to the reader: clients in therapy, individuals seeking self-help, or therapists who wish to apply these methods with clients or on themselves. Therapists seeking to use yoga and mindfulness with clients can combine the methods we describe with conventional therapies. In some cases, these practices can be used as a stand-alone approach.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Your *Yoga and Mindfulness Therapy Workbook* is divided into three parts. Part I provides background and preliminary information. Quick tips get you started and answer some of your questions. You will learn about the philosophy that underlies yoga and mindfulness practices, the neuroscience that explains the positive way these methods alter your nervous system, and the research that has shown yoga and mindfulness to be effective methods for therapy. The final chapter in Part I guides you in developing yoga and mindfulness tools: sensory tools, attention tools, and body tools, all of which facilitate practice.

Part II offers clear instructions in the basic practices of yoga and mindfulness. You will learn how to apply the yamas and niyamas (the dos and don'ts of yoga), some basic asanas (postures), and practice pranayama (breathing methods). Meditation skills improve as you learn pratyahara (how to withdraw your attention), dharana (keep your focus where you choose), and dhyana (allow the open free flow of awareness). Mindfulness practice teaches you how to have open focus, changing the object of your focus moment by moment. Case examples show how people have used each of these practices for therapeutic change.

With the knowledge and skills you attained in Part II, you will be ready to apply yoga and mindfulness therapeutically. Part III offers separate chapters for each of the following problems: stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, and substance abuse. We recommend yoga and mindfulness protocols, but we encourage you to use exercises from any or all of the chapters. Experiment, feel your response, and let it develop. Be patient and allow the time that change takes. Your mind-brain-body system will shift as healthier habits form and you find balance. Trust yourself and enjoy the process!

The appendix is for therapists. This section explains how to seamlessly integrate yoga and mindfulness into your treatments. You will find answers to questions you may have about how and when to introduce the techniques, ways to adapt your office, and tips for working with clients. And there are special techniques for children and adolescents who do very well with these methods. You will also find a section specifically designed for therapists' well-being. As helpers of others, we often neglect ourselves, and this part offers easy-to-use methods for our own personal care and actualization.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

We have been working with these methods for more than 40 years, using them in our own lives and guiding clients in applying them for therapeutic change. We teach yoga and mindfulness workshops to professionals and have written numerous books on Eastern meditation methods and how to use them therapeutically (please see the bibliography). We also teach and write about neuroscience and hypnosis, both of which we have integrated into our clinical work and our teaching seminars around the world. We have conducted psychotherapy research and are currently researching unconscious processes. It is our sincere hope that you will find this workbook helpful, meaningful, and transformative!

Part I

The Why and How to Get You Started

When in worldly activity, keep attentive between the two breaths, and so practicing, in a few days be born anew.

—Malini Vijaya Tantra

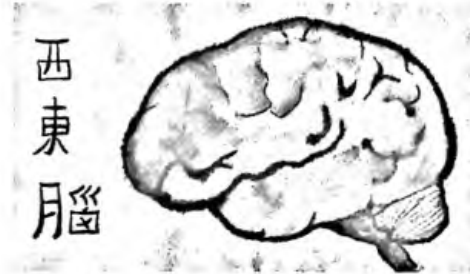
IN PART I

- Introduction to the philosophies inspiring yoga and mindfulness practices
- How yoga and mindfulness improve brain structures and functions
- Overview of research showing the efficacy of yoga and mindfulness for therapy
- Quick tips to get you started
- The tools you need to delve into your meditative practices

Yoga and mindfulness derive from rich traditions that have enhanced the quality of life and enriched the wisdom of the soul. These practices can be valuable additions to most current forms of therapy. As a mind-body practice, yoga and mindfulness change the brain, alter thinking, balance emotions, open sensory experiencing, and foster awareness. With the ever-growing body of neuroscience and research, you can feel confident in making yoga and mindfulness part of your therapeutic journey.

CHAPTER 1

Foundations in Philosophy, Neuroscience, and Science



From the roots, we get the essence.

—Zen saying

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Philosophies of yoga and mindfulness
- Therapeutic effects on the brain, both functional and structural
- Brain changes that all forms of meditation share
- Distinctions between the various meditation practices found in yoga and mindfulness
- Review of the efficacy research

INTRODUCTION

Yoga and mindfulness have many positive effects on the mind and body. Their practices lead to a calmer and more alert mind and a healthier and more flexible body. Their healing effects have been experienced for millennia, and give us a rationale for incorporating these practices into psychotherapy. Modern neuroscience provides even more evidence. Research helps to pinpoint the ways yoga and mindfulness are therapeutic. We describe the ancient philosophies and contemporary research. This chapter also provides a strong and well-researched rationale for why yoga and mindfulness are useful interventions to integrate into commonly used therapeutic approaches.

PHILOSOPHY

It is light inside, light outside, a light along and holier than holy. It is the light that lights all light, uncaused. And it is the light of the self.

—The Upanishads (ancient Hindu texts)

The West is known for having a practical, behavioral orientation to life. We take pride in doing what is efficient and effective. Pragmatism, a philosophy that guides Western thought, is concerned with what is useful, what works. In the East, the driving effort has been toward enlightenment, higher knowledge, and spirituality. Working together with East and West, you harvest a vast, deep reservoir for psychological growth.

Yoga: Yoking the Mind to Seek Truth

*Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff from taking various forms.
At that time, the seer rests in his own (unmodified) state.*

— Patañjali in the Eight Limbs of Yoga

Yoga is ageless and timeless. What makes yoga unique is that it is a practical system, not only a philosophy or religion. The result is that you get something out of practicing yoga: health, self-discipline, and raised consciousness.

Yoga disciplines the mind and body by combining physical exercise and meditation. By doing the exercises, you learn how to hold your mind and direct it at will wherever and to whatever you choose.

The word *yoga* means “yoke” or “union.” According to yogic tradition, you succeed best when you train persistently, disciplining your mind and body to gain control, yoking mind to body, and withdrawing from the illusory world of the senses. By searching inward, you discover the true knowledge of reality that links you as an individual to something greater—the universal.

Yogic theory, drawn from Hinduism, holds that we all have a soul, or self, called *Atman*. The goal of yoga is to connect *Atman* to *Brahman*. *Atman* is like a drop of water, the individual. *Brahman* is like the ocean, the universal. Through enlightened knowledge of your true self, your individual soul becomes one with universal consciousness.

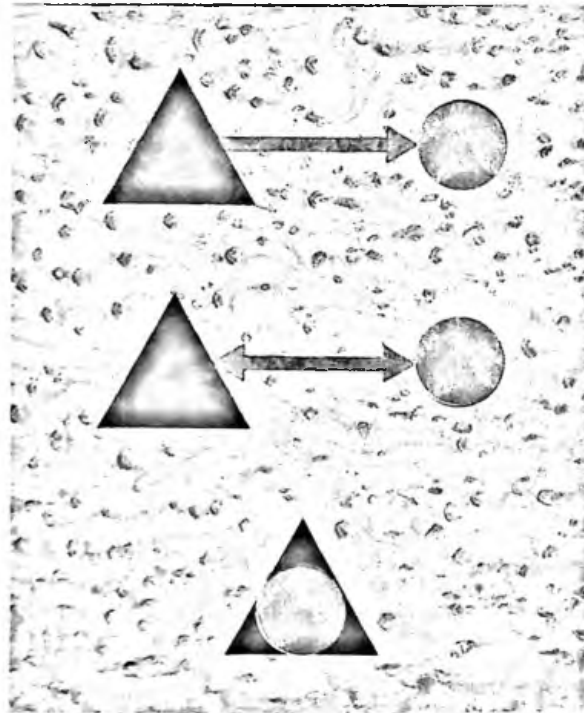


FIGURE 1.1 Union: The drop of water returns to the sea.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

The Eight Limbs are a system codified by Patañjali, in the second century BC. He was careful to point out that he had not created this system, but rather was gathering and organizing wisdom that preexisted for centuries. The Eight Limbs take you on a stepwise journey to reach higher consciousness and inner peace.

- Limbs 1 and 2 (the *yamas* and *niyamas*) change your mental attitude to live morally according to rules of conduct, stopping you from engaging in harmful actions, while adopting healthy habits. The *yamas* and *niyamas* also guide you in actualizing your potential, to become the best you can be.
- Limb 3 (*pranayama*) controls the breath. *Prana* is universal vital energy. Breath control is the key to taking in and harnessing the energy of *prana* for health, vitality, and higher consciousness.

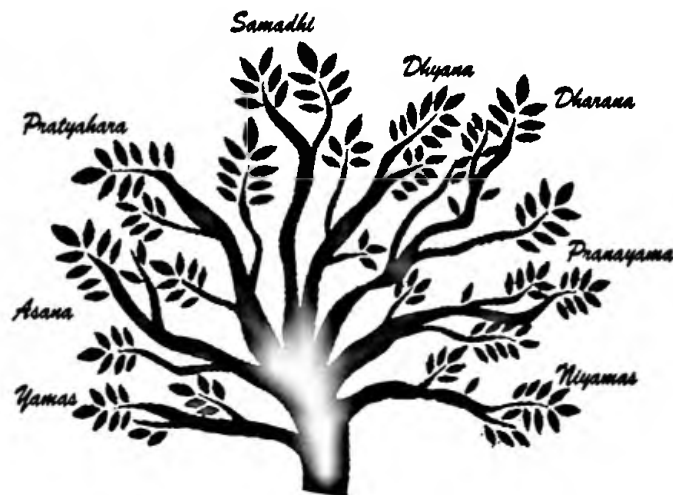


FIGURE 1.2 The Eight Limbs

- Limb 4 (*asana*) involves body postures. The body is the vehicle of the soul, and so the body is as highly valued as the mind. Most people think of yoga as merely postures, but this is only part of the picture. Yoga fosters a mind, body, spirit unity, which includes, but is not limited to, physical postures.
- Limb 5 (*pratyahara*) teaches you how to withdraw your attention from everyday matters to free your consciousness for higher pursuits where the deeper essence of reality is revealed. This skill also has many practical and therapeutic applications, especially when you have to endure something you can't or perhaps shouldn't change.
- Limb 6 (*dharana*) trains you in focused concentration. You learn to keep your attention steady and delve deeply. Restraint through exercising the will is one of the central principles employed in yoga. This control of the *mind stuff*, as Patañjali called it, brings great freedom from the ever-roaming monkey mind that jumps around from thing to thing. As you become the master of your mind, you gain a kind of mind-over-matter power.
- Limb 7 (*dhyana*) is possible after you have mastered the earlier steps. Yoga is freedom. Once you have the ability to control your mind, you can also let it be free. Empty of thoughts and absolutely open, you become like the cosmos.
- Limb 8 (*samadhi, enlightenment*) is the culmination. Yoga practice takes place on three planes: first, the physical; second, the mental (the mind and intellect); and finally, the absolute. In yogic meditation, you become part of the total field of concentration, just as a mirror reflecting the color blue appears blue. Through the discipline of meditation, you acquire health, longevity, and extraordinary powers. A modern yogi, the Swami Rama, demonstrated these powers when he showed Menninger Foundation researchers that he could create atrial flutter (a dangerous accelerated beating of the heart that often leads to blood clots and stroke) with no harmful effects (Green, Green, & Walters, 1970). But these benefits are considered secondary. The highest aim of yoga is enlightenment. By means of the eight limbs, you can unite with the greater whole, the true self.

Mindfulness: Truth Is Mind

Buddha, the originator of mindfulness, started out as a yoga practitioner. Even though he ultimately rejected yogic philosophy, he incorporated many of its principles into his new religion, Buddhism. Much of Buddhist meditation and codes of conduct derive from yoga, and so you will find that the practice of yoga and mindfulness fit well together, giving you a clear path to develop not just your mind, but also your heart, your brain, and your entire body!

Buddha was looking for a way to end suffering. He discovered the solution through his own enlightened meditation, which he shared with the world as the Four Noble Truths.

- The First Truth is that we must recognize suffering and frustration as a part of life. We suffer from pain, sickness, and inevitable death. This is an inescapable truth for all living beings.
- The Second Truth is that this suffering comes from clinging, craving, and grasping. The world seems to offer many comforts and pleasures, but these external things never bring lasting happiness.
- The Third Truth reveals that the cause of suffering can be eliminated when we give up craving for pleasures and comforts and expecting them to last. Nothing endures, all is transitory, and recognizing this truth can set us free.
- Finally, the way to let go of these cravings is to follow the Eightfold Path, the Fourth Truth. This path is a therapeutic journey of eight steps.
 - The first two steps on the path—right views and right aspirations—involve understanding the human condition.
 - The next four—right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, and right effort—entail abandoning unwholesome entanglements and living a healthy lifestyle.
 - The final two—right thoughts and right contemplation—include developing the skills of mindfulness and meditation, the inner mental practice that brings an end to suffering and the cultivation of wisdom. Like Socrates of ancient Greece, Buddha valued wisdom as the highest good.



FIGURE 1.3 Buddha

Mindfulness Practice

Meditation is an effective pathway to wisdom. Truth is found through the mind, detached from the problems of everyday life. And yet, truth is not something like the typical things we seek. The fundamental idea of mindfulness may seem foreign to the Western way of thinking. We are accustomed to putting things into concepts and hierarchies in order to know them. But mindfulness gives you another tool for knowing yourself and the world. As Buddha taught, truth is “undeclared.” The practice of mindfulness will take you to this “undeclared” truth, a wordless insight that is beyond rational thought. Paradoxically, by nonconceptual, nonrational mindful practice, you attain deep knowledge of yourself and the world.

Mindfulness is an approach to life, a way of orienting yourself with alert awareness and complete presence. The word *mindfulness* implies its meaning: mind FULLness is a method for filling the mind so fully and completely with each moment that it becomes empty of any distractions or extraneous thoughts. Mindfulness is not just a matter of *what* you do or think, but rather *how* you apply your mental attention and involvement. You use your body, feelings, and thoughts. In time, your awareness spreads into every moment, like a light that illuminates the darkness, to reveal a vast vista of potential for wisdom, freedom, and compassion.

RESEARCH: HOW YOGA AND MINDFULNESS CHANGE THE BRAIN

You have seen how yoga and mindfulness transform the mind, but these practices also change the brain in both its functions and structures. For example, a study using mindfulness showed an increase in regional gray matter density (Hotzel et al., 2011). These structural changes were located in an important brain area for psychological health, the anterior cingulate gyrus. This part of the brain helps to monitor conflicts and regulate emotions. Deficits in this brain area have been associated with depression, ADHD, and schizophrenia. Hotzel’s research and many other

studies will be described in this section to show you what neuroscience is teaching us about meditation's helpful therapeutic influence.

What All Forms of Meditation Share

Dual Effect: Neuroscience studies have revealed an interesting effect of regular meditation practice: It both activates and relaxes the nervous system simultaneously, that is, the mind and body relax while attention and perception are sharpened (Bhatia et al. 2003).

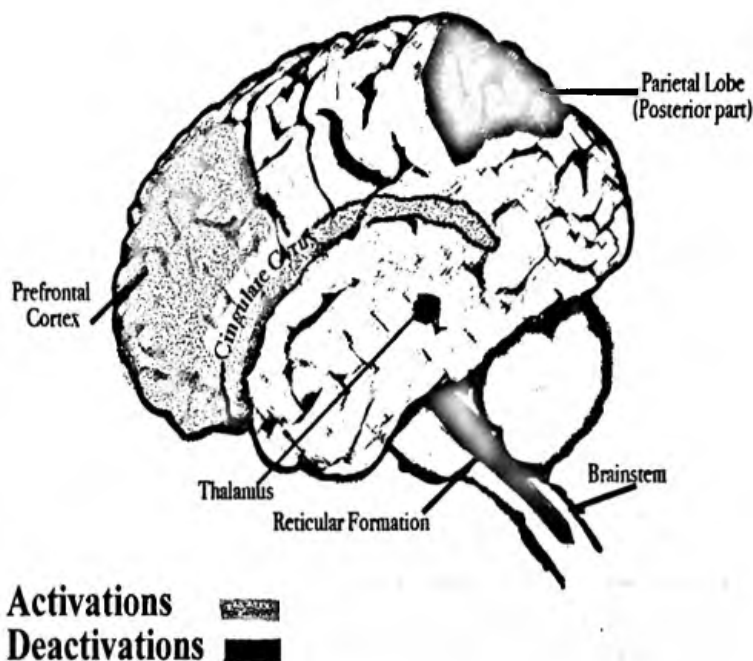


FIGURE 1.4 Meditating Brain Dual Effect

If you pay close attention to something, you tense up as your brain is stimulated. By contrast, when you meditate, you are highly alert and aware, and yet, simultaneously, you tend to have a low heart rate and slow breathing, qualities of relaxation. You gain the ability to direct your attention to whatever is needed without being tense.

- **Relaxation:** Researchers have long known that meditation is superior to simply resting for calming the nervous system. When you practice meditation, you activate a relaxation response from your parasympathetic nervous system (the calming part of your nervous system). Thus, simply taking some time to meditate can result in calmness. Dillbeck and Orme-Johnson gathered thirty-one studies, each of which found meditation to be beneficial for calming down (Dillbeck & Orme-Johnson, 1987).
- **Alertness:** Meditation enhances your ability to focus. This has been confirmed by fMRI and EEG studies (Hugdahl, 1996).

Affect Regulation Improves with Meditation

Yoga and mindfulness make real and lasting changes in the emotional and thinking centers of the brain. These meditative practices stimulate attentional areas in the frontal lobes, which are key for helping you to think more clearly and make better decisions.

- People who meditated regularly for around 45 minutes a day over a number of years had thicker prefrontal cortices (an area that regulates attentiveness) than nonmeditators of the same age. Furthermore, they found increased thickness of the insular cortex, an area involved in empathy, compassion, fairness, and cooperation. Greater thickness in these areas promotes cognitive and emotional well-being (Lazar et al., 2005). This study showed that the structure of the brain changes in helpful ways following years of meditation practice.

- The cingulate gyrus, where moods and emotions are regulated, is also affected by meditation.
 - A recent meditation study measured the physiological and brain changes of subjects before, during, and following five days of meditation training. These subjects were compared with a control group who practiced relaxation, but not meditation. The meditation group was better able to regulate their emotional reactions than were those in the control group (Tang et al., 2009).
 - In a more recent study, this same research group found that structural changes in the brain had occurred from a brief meditation course. They discovered that, in the meditation group, the white matter connectivity increased between the front part of the cingulate gyrus and other structures of the brain (Tang et al., 2010). Thus, meditation was shown to enhance the neural networks that help regulate emotions.
 - And in their most recent continuation of this work, Tang and Posner (2012) traced out specific white matter increases in the anterior cingulate gyrus from meditation. They showed greater axonal density, which accounts for more interconnections between neurons. They also found expansion of the myelin covering on axons. These changes improved subjects' ability to regulate their emotions.

Different Forms of Meditative Practice Have Different Brain Effects

Each type of meditation has a different effect on how you feel and think. They also have distinct effects on the brain, as measured by EEG, which vary depending on the type of meditation used. Thus, you can pick and choose, to apply the best form of meditation for your purposes.

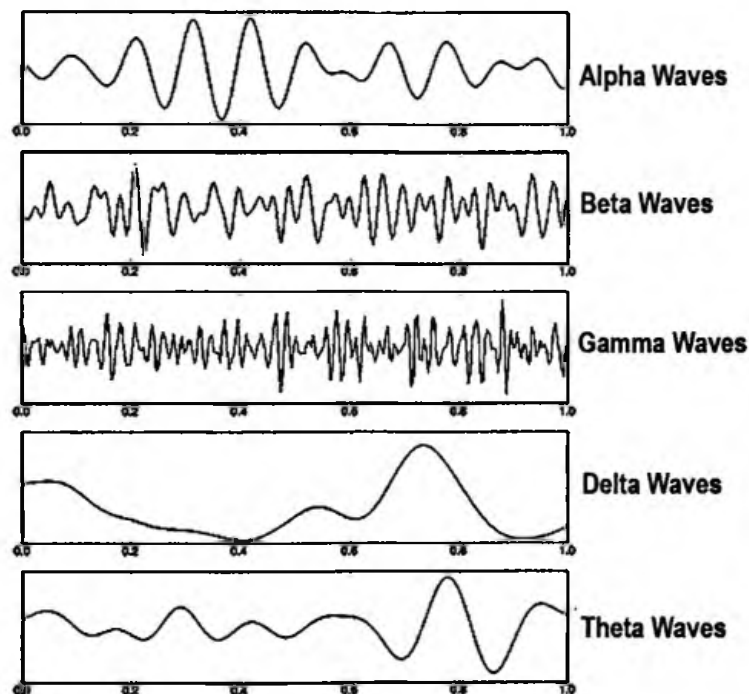


FIGURE 1.5 EEG

- **Focus Meditations:** *Dharana*, postures (*asana*), and breathing meditations (*pranayama*) are examples of focus meditation where your attention is concentrated on one thing. Subjects doing focus meditation were measured with EEG, and they recorded gamma and beta waves. These short, quick brain waves correlated with deliberately paying attention. Thus, this form of meditation activated the attention centers of the brain. You can learn to direct your thoughts away from disturbing ruminations and toward more positive and hopeful thoughts. Focus meditations, such as concentration on breathing, also bring relaxation and generally reduce stress.

- **Open-Focus Meditations:** Mindfulness and compassion meditations are examples of open-focus meditation. These practices open the focus of your attention. The object of focus is continually changing and moving, moment-by-moment. When the brains of people who practiced open-focus meditation were measured, they showed an increase in theta waves in the frontal and temporal-central areas of the brain, so crucial for regulating emotions. Theta waves correlate with relaxed attention, creativity, tranquility, and restful alertness. Subjects also showed an increase in alpha waves. Alpha waves are associated with relaxed attention. It makes sense to find theta and alpha waves correlated with these nondirected forms of meditation where you are monitoring your ongoing experience in a relaxed, flowing, and open way. You might apply open-focus meditation to help you become more aware and present amid the ever-changing flow of your life.
- **No-Focus Meditations:** Dhyana and Zen are examples of no-focus meditation, characterized by an absence of both focus and effort. As you learn to center in the present moment, free of obstructions from intruding thoughts, you become open to new possibilities. As a result, you can simply respond automatically and effortlessly to stimuli. The EEG associated with no-focus meditation was shown to correlate with a very intense type of alpha wave (Travis and Shear, 2010). These alpha waves are associated with relaxed attention, while the person meditating remains alert with little effort. Increased activity of these waves indicates well-being and comfort. No-focus meditations are helpful for clearing away obstructions and meeting situations with an open mind.

THERAPEUTIC EFFICACY OF YOGA AND MINDFULNESS

Research on yoga and mindfulness has increased exponentially over the past decade. We have outlined a few key studies. Please see our books, *Meditation and Yoga in Psychotherapy* (Simpkins & Simpkins, 2010) and *Zen Meditation in Psychotherapy* (Simpkins & Simpkins, 2011), for further descriptions of the therapeutic efficacy of yoga and mindfulness methods.

Effects of Meditation on Well-being

- Studies of many different forms of meditation have found that the practice improves the quality of life in terms of better memory and productivity, reduced anxiety, improvements in hypertension and sleeplessness, as well as converting loneliness, usually felt as a troubling emotion, into solitude, which can be a source for personal growth and even enlightenment (Dhar, 2002).
- A healthy group of men and women, 18 to 30 years old, participated in a three-month long course in yoga. For 30 days, they practiced yoga breathing exercises. During the last two months, they added a series of yoga postures. Both women and men showed positive improvements and reductions in risk factors for metabolic and cardiovascular diseases, as measured by reduced levels of total cholesterol and triglycerides following the breathing segment of the study. The subjects maintained that improvement when measured following the addition of postures in the third month of the study (Prasad et al., 2006).
- The Transcendental Meditation (TM) project (known as the Maharishi Effect) tested the outcome of meditation on violence and producing a feeling of inner peace and well-being. Four thousand practitioners of TM assembled in Washington, DC, from June 7 to June 30, 1993. The local police monitored the crime rate for the district and found that crimes had decreased 15% during the TM experiment and remained lower for some time after the 21-day event (Hagelin et al., 1999).

Improved Cognitive Capacity

- The ancient yogis believed that yoga techniques combining stimulating postures with calming relaxation meditations would bring about a state of mental balance. Recent studies have found that this claim may be true. The researchers measured the peak latency and peak amplitude of P300 auditory event-related potential (elicited in the decision-making process) in 47 subjects, before and after these combined yoga practices. P300 is an indicator of cognitive processing. The results showed an enhancement of the P300 wave, indicating that

the combined practice of stimulating and calming yoga methods improved cognitive functioning (Sarang & Telles, 2006).

Enhanced Compassion

- A recent study found that compassion and altruism can be fostered through meditative training. Following an eight-week training in compassion meditation, participants were invited to participate in an experiment on memory and attention. They entered a waiting room with three chairs, two occupied by confederate experimenters. The subject sat in the empty middle chair. Another experimenter entered on crutches, wearing a boot from an injured foot, groaning in pain. Only 19% of nonmeditating subjects gave up their chairs, whereas 50% of meditators did so. In addition, certain brain areas were correlated with increased altruism: the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), used for executive control; the inferior parietal cortex for sensing another's suffering and connectivity between the DLPFC; and an area involved in processing reward, the nucleus accumbens for regulating emotion. These activations indicated greater understanding of another's suffering and greater executive and emotional control (Weng et al., 2013).

Enhancements in the Brain Help Combat Psychological Distress

- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs have proven to be helpful for stress, anxiety, depression, and addiction. But how does mindfulness help? The Hotzel research team, mentioned in the introduction to the research section of this chapter, observed the brain changes in 16 subjects who underwent an eight-week MBSR program compared to 17 subjects in the control group. They found increased gray matter in the cingulate gyrus, the hippocampus, the temporoparietal junction, and the cerebellum. These areas are involved in learning, memory, emotion regulation, and the sense of self (Hotzel et al., 2011).
- Yoga postures were found to increase levels of the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the brain. Eight subjects performed 60 minutes of yoga, compared with 11 control subjects who did a 60-minute reading session. Yoga practitioners had a 27% increase in GABA levels with no change in the group who read. People with depression and anxiety disorders have lower GABA levels, and so yoga may be a helpful addition to their therapy (Streeter et al., 2007).

Stress and Anxiety

- The ability to focus attention, which meditation trains, can improve stress toleration. Vaitl and Ott (2005) found that all altered states involve changes in the focus of attention. These changes can vary from a narrow focus of attention to a broad, extended awareness that includes all in a single grasp. Control of attention span has been shown to have many therapeutic applications: lessening stress is one of them.
- A yoga treatment based on kundalini yoga methods was compared with a stress management program based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). The 33-member subject pool was drawn from a large Swedish company. All subjects were given 10 sessions over a period of four months. The results showed that kundalini yoga was as effective as cognitive behavioral therapy for stress management. All subjects showed significant improvement in psychological effects, such as self-rated stress and stress behavior, anger, exhaustion, and quality of life. Both groups also improved on physiological measures (blood pressure, heart rate, urinary catecholamines, and salivary cortisol). The researchers concluded that like CBT, yoga offers promise as a method for stress reduction (Granath, Ingvarsson, Thiele, & Lundberg, 2006).
- Yoga was used with a group of women who were experiencing anxiety and stress. The subjects underwent a program of postures identified as reducing anxiety and stress by the Iyengar yogic system. The subjects attended two 90-minute sessions per week for eight weeks. When compared with those in the control group, subjects showed significant reductions in anxiety, stress, fatigue, depression, headaches, and back pain along with significant increases in well-being (Michalsen et al., 2005).
- Yoga treatment for veterans who suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder was studied with a group of 62 outpatient veterans, 90% of whom were men. They participated in five, 90-minute sessions given once a week

and were measured pre- and posttreatment. The treatment consisted of one-pointed awareness where each subject focused all his attention on a personally chosen mantra. Following treatment, all subjects showed significant improvement in all outcomes, including anxiety, stress, anger, quality of life, and spiritual well-being, with the largest improvement in anxiety and well-being. The study further found that stronger results were associated with increased frequency of practice (Williams et al., 2005).

Depression

- Mindfulness helps stop overreactions to negative emotions associated with depression and bipolar disorder. But how does that happen? A recent study proposed that mindfulness reduces your self-focus. If you are feeling depressed, you may have an increase in self-focus as you ruminate about yourself and your problems. Depression interferes with a person's ability to reappraise negative emotions. Brain scans show more left hemisphere activation in the language areas and lowered activation in somatosensory areas, such as the parietal lobe, insula, and anterior cingulate, which are involved in the appraisal of emotion (Johnstone et al., 2007; Ressler & Mayberg, 2007).

Mindfulness subjects expressed feeling sadness, but their brains responded differently. Mindfully attending to the present moment changes neural activity when a person responds to sad stimuli. Activation of the left-hemisphere reappraisal areas of self-focus was lessened in the meditation group, where a shift toward brain areas that correlate with sensory integration occurred. Thus, the researchers concluded that meditators' brains were less involved in self-focus and more engaged in sensing (Farb et al., 2010).

Meditation offers an alternative to reinterpreting your situation in a more positive way. Instead, you can use other parts of your brain that involve sensory awareness to shift the neural balance and start feeling better. Meditation brings feelings of well-being, which also helps with recovery.

- Several studies have recommended that yoga and mindfulness be added to the treatments for depression. A group of researchers from Brown University reviewed the literature and proposed that these practices offer an attractive alternative for treating depression, because they include some of the active ingredients of treatments that work well for depression: awareness and exercise (Uebelacker et al., 2010).
- A meta-analysis of five studies using different types of yoga interventions for depression examined the severity of the depression, ranging from mild to severe, in yoga practitioners. All five studies found that yoga was helpful and had no adverse effects. One of the studies involving severely depressed subjects showed that rhythmic breathing and relaxation exercises lowered subjects' levels of depression (Khumar, Kaur, & Kaur, 1993).
- Another study gave depressed subjects classes in postures alone and found that the subjects' moods improved as they performed a set of postures (Shapiro, Cook, Davydov, Leuchter, & Abrams 2007).

Substance Abuse

- Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs have been used to help with addiction. One exemplary project taught Vipassana meditation, a form of mindfulness training, to subjects who were in jail. Upon their release, they had a significant reduction in their use of marijuana, crack cocaine, or alcohol as compared to those who had the typical treatments. They also had a decrease of psychiatric symptoms and an increase of an internal locus of control around the substance. In addition, they felt increased optimism (Bowen et. al., 2006).
- Focused meditation has also been shown to help with substance abuse. In an impressively large study of over 1,800 subjects, early researchers in meditation, Herbert Benson and Robert Wallace, showed that a form of focused meditation, Transcendental Meditation, was measurably helpful for overcoming substance abuse (Benson & Wallace, 1972).
- Cravings and impulsivity are two of many difficult challenges that addicts need to overcome. Focused meditation on breathing was shown to increase activity in the prefrontal cortex and particularly in the attention areas of the anterior cingulate cortex. Both parts of the brain are involved in impulse control (Hotzel, 2007). These findings suggest that meditation can play a role in curbing impulses.

CHAPTER 2

Tips for Bringing Yoga and Mindfulness into Your Therapy



The journey of 1000 miles begins with one step.
—Lao-tzu

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Finding tips that will aid you in taking your first steps on the journey to successfully bringing yoga and mindfulness into your practice and your life
 - How to begin
 - Where to practice
 - Timing
 - Precautions
 - General advice
- Journaling to start your yoga and mindfulness process

INTRODUCTION

Yoga and mindfulness offer a *way*, a set of practices that you can easily incorporate into your life. When the famous existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre said that existence precedes essence, he meant that what you do and how you live shape what you become. Yoga and mindfulness share in this understanding, and take it one step further, by providing things you can do to foster your well-being. The practices engage your body through postures and breathing and activate your mind through different forms of meditation and mindfulness. As you step on this path and follow the way, you invite your mind-brain-body system into a healthy lifestyle. You literally initiate a process that will rewire your brain, balance your nervous system, clear your thoughts, and calm your emotions.

The tips that follow will answer some of your questions and guide you as you begin. Trust the process and step confidently onto the long-traveled therapeutic path of yoga and mindfulness practice!