

## Yoga for Emotional Health

There are infinite definitions of yoga. However, Bija Bennett, author of *Emotional Yoga*, explains it simply when she says, “Yoga is the art of linking to all parts of yourself – your body, your thoughts, your awareness, and your emotions. Each time you attempt to link with any aspect of yourself or your world, you are doing yoga.” For me, yoga is not about bending into ridiculous contortions; instead it is about connecting to the core aspects of oneself.

Yoga connects you to every aspect of your being through the vehicles of breath, movement, and meditation. Cutting-edge research in neuroscience is confirming what ancient yogis knew; yoga is a complete system that allows you to shift habitual patterns in astounding ways that can profoundly impact your physiology. Yoga has been shown to regulate hormones, restore natural circadian rhythms, increase heart rate variability (a key indicator of health), and rewire the brain. This is no small feat. Many chronic emotional disorders are the result of chemical imbalances and/or impaired neurological functioning. Therefore, yoga provides an effective means for addressing depression, anxiety, PTSD and the chronic stress that is so prevalent in our modern society.

Yoga also works to help rebalance both the right and left hemispheres of the brain. By doing cross-lateral movement, you are repairing functioning to your brain and improving communication between both hemispheres.

Yoga works on the physical, emotional, mental, energetic, and spiritual levels to effect lasting change. As you connect and link to all levels of yourself, you are internally facilitating powerful mind-body communication that can radically change your life. You may discover that you sleep better, find more balance through life’s ups and downs, and feel more fully alive than ever before.

Additionally, your emotional life will reap the benefits. Bija Bennett says, “As you connect with your emotions, you begin to accept them for what they are, instead of resisting them. You begin to explore your perception of reality – the fears and habitual responses, which you believe to be real. This exploration initiates a shift from a *defensive reaction* to a more *conscious action*.”

Overall, you will find that a consistent yoga practice provides a sense of internal spaciousness. This spaciousness will leave you feeling both calm and empowered, knowing that you always have the ability to make choices for yourself and your relationships. In turn, this can help you be more proactive, productive and effective in your daily life.

Most importantly, yoga can be for everyone. One of my teachers, Amba Stapleton, says, “If you have a spine, you can do yoga.” Even if you are simply watching your breath as it enters and exits your lungs, you are doing yoga. Certainly, not all types of yoga are appropriate for every person. There are many different styles of yoga out there, and some are more conducive to therapeutic work than others. When choosing a yoga class, be sure to choose something that is a good fit with your physical ability level and accommodates to any special needs you may have. Chair yoga is surprisingly effective for many people, whereas other people require a highly rigorous practice.

Whichever style you choose, know that a properly suited yoga practice can benefit your entire system. You are never stuck without choices. With careful attention, you can shift your physiology and emotional responses over time to discover a life that is more deeply fulfilling and enjoyable.