

# ASU researchers study impact of yoga on PTSD

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ASU graduate student Jeni Matthews, who is researching the impact of yoga on depression, demonstrates yoga can be done anywhere - even in the labs at the School of Nutrition and Health Promotion. Credit: Tim Lewis

According to the Centers for Disease Control, there are 26,000 stillbirths in the United States each year. Stillbirth is defined as a fetal death that occurs any time after 20 weeks of pregnancy until date of birth.

Jennifer Huberty, associate professor in the School of Nutrition and Health Promotion, is especially passionate about the matter after delivering her stillborn daughter at full-term four years ago. She sought healing and peace through yoga.

"Yoga is about being embodied, present, compassionate and expressing gratitude. It's about having a relationship with the self and just 'being,'" Huberty said. "The principals that you learn on the mat and the relationship you build with the self enrich the life you live off of the mat."

Huberty, who has studied stillbirth and its emotional impact, says the death of a baby is highly traumatic and can incite negative mental, emotional and physical health consequences lasting years after the loss. She says bereaved mothers dealing with a stillbirth are four times more likely to experience depression and a much higher risk for [post-traumatic stress disorder](#). She also says physical activity may serve as a unique opportunity to help bereaved [women](#) cope with depression after a stillbirth.

"There aren't many treatments beyond medicine and support groups for women who have experienced loss, and since yoga has been a big part of my mental and emotional wellness and recovery, I wanted to conduct a study to see if others would benefit from it," Huberty says.

Huberty and her graduate student, Jeni Matthews, developed the Perinatal Loss Yoga study with the help of Jules Mitchell, a yoga therapist from Udaya – a yoga company that offers online [yoga classes](#) – to test how yoga might help those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder; an anxiety disorder Huberty says is commonly associated with perinatal loss.

In order to get a broad gauge, Huberty wanted to open the study to women around the country. Knowing access to a yoga studio for participants joining from around the country would be a challenge, Huberty approached Yariv Lerner, CEO of Udaya, about providing their classes to the participants.

"It didn't take much convincing," Huberty said. "Yariv Lerner was extremely supportive of our research premise and donated all of the memberships to our study participants for free. I could not be more grateful of Udaya's support and generosity."

Participants in the 12-week study use an ASU researcher-prescribed yoga regimen and report their progress by using daily and weekly logs. Some women are randomly selected to wear a GENEActiv physical activity monitor, an accelerometer which provides minute-by-minute data related to sedentary, light, moderate and vigorous activities. Throughout the study, women also complete mental health questionnaires and have an opportunity to interview about their experiences at the end of the study.

Huberty says the results of the study will provide data to inform health care providers about the potential role of [physical activity](#) in bereavement and recovery for women who have experienced a stillbirth.

Matthews, an exercise and wellness [graduate student](#) and certified yoga instructor, manages the program by tracking the online class web analytics, surveying participants and tracking their activity. Matthews says providing the yoga classes to the participants online through Udaya provides them with a convenient way to participate in yoga without having to leave their own home.

"I love working directly with women to help them in their healing process and try to establish a sense of peace. The ability to bring yoga to women all over the country through the internet, without having to step foot outside is amazing," she said. "This allows us to connect with people through yoga without even being there."

Huberty and Matthews are still recruiting participants for the study and are looking for women who have experienced a stillbirth within the last

two years and are not regularly practicing [yoga](#). Interested [participants](#) may contact the research team at (602) 827-2314 or by emailing [PLYogaASU@gmail.com](mailto:PLYogaASU@gmail.com).

Provided by Arizona State University

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