

Can yoga help those experiencing depression, anxiety or PTSD?

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Across the country, health and human service providers have shown a growing interest in using yoga as an option for treating people who experience mental health problems. But a recent study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that while there are some promising benefits to using yoga, there isn't yet enough evidence to support the practice as a standalone solution for improving mental health

and well-being.

"I really wanted to know if [yoga](#) is something we should be suggesting to people who have [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), or depression, or anxiety or various traumas. What does the evidence really say?," said Rebecca Macy, a researcher who works with violence and trauma survivors who headed up the study at the UNC School of Social Work.

For their study, Macy and her colleagues analyzed 13 literature reviews to conduct a meta-review of 185 articles published between 2000 and 2013. Overall, the researchers found that yoga holds potential promise for helping improve anxiety, depression, PTSD and/or the psychological consequences of trauma at least in the short term.

The study, published recently in the journal *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, also suggested that clinicians and service providers consider recommending yoga as an intervention in addition to other "evidence-based and well-established treatments," including psychotherapy and medication.

"Even though I do think yoga is, in general, incredibly beneficial, I also think there needs to be a whole lot more education about how to use yoga specifically to treat survivors of trauma in order to be the most effective and helpful," said Leslie Roach, a certified yoga instructor and massage therapist who co-authored the study. "So as a standalone treatment right now, it's just not viable. However, I think with more education, more research, and more experienced instructors, it will be."

Macy and Roach are considering several possible future studies, including one that would examine the use of yoga within a rape crisis center or domestic violence shelter. However, because yoga is a holistic practice, researchers must be careful not to "undermine yoga's approach," Macy added.

"One of our recommendations was that researchers and yoga instructors partner together so that we use holistic methods in future research," Macy said. "We need to ask ourselves if we're taking these Western research methods and trying too hard to fit a round peg in a square hole. As a researcher, I don't want to undo the potential benefits of yoga by making the practice unnecessarily standard and systematic."

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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