

EATING DISORDERS:

Yoga for Prevention
and Recovery



How can yoga teachers **safely** and **impactfully** support students with eating disorders?

“Yoga was **never** intended to treat illness. The aim of yoga is to understand the nature of regular **human suffering**, which is overlaid on top of, or underneath, eating disorders.”

Laura Douglass, PhD

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies
Lesley University



BEFORE WE BEGIN...

IF YOU SUSPECT AN EATING DISORDER, CONSIDER:

- ▶ **PHYSICAL SAFETY:** Could the student be at risk of severe complications?
Remember: Weight is not a good criteria for assessment.
- ▶ **TREATMENT RESISTANCE:** Is the student unable to access treatment, or unwilling to see a conventional provider?
- ▶ **SCOPE OF PRACTICE:** Do you have the knowledge, qualifications, and experience to work with the student w/o medical/psychological providers on the team?
- ▶ **PSYCHOLOGICAL STABILITY:** Might yoga and meditation destabilize the student further, and what is the risk if there is not a team in place to support?

MEDICAL CLEARANCE

WHEN SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED?

- ▶ **LOW BMI:** If the student is visibly underweight and self-reports an eating disorder, seek medical clearance from a physician.
- ▶ **RAPID/SIGNIFICANT WEIGHT LOSS:** Rapid weight and/or significant recent weight loss is associated with higher risk of cardiac complications.
- ▶ **FREQUENT PURGING:** Including laxative abuse, diet pills, water loading, excessive exercise.
- ▶ **CARDIOVASCULAR SYMPTOMS:** Fainting, breathlessness, blackouts, palpitations, and/or self-reported history of heart problems

BEST PRACTICES

CONTRAINDICATIONS FOR EDS

- ▶ **DETOXES & CLEANSSES:** Off limits entirely; do not offer or encourage any type of detox or cleansing regimen to a student with an eating disorder.
- ▶ **HEAD BELOW HEART:** May cause fainting and dizziness in students who are underweight, undernourished, or purging
- ▶ **HEATED/VIGOROUS PRACTICES:** Can exacerbate electrolyte imbalances and put undue strain on the heart
- ▶ **COACHING:** If you're worried about your student, encourage them to seek mental health treatment; do not offer counseling/coaching

BEST PRACTICES

TEACHING STUDENTS W/ EDS

- ▶ **MEDICAL CLEARANCE:** When in doubt, ask for medical clearance from a knowledgeable physician*.
- ▶ **PHYSICAL EXERTION:** Don't offer vigorous or heated practices to students who have recently purged, are underweight, or are using laxatives
- ▶ **SAFETY AND STABILITY:** Consider psychological impact of yoga and contemplative practice
- ▶ **PROFESSIONAL REFERRALS:** Develop relationships with local eating disorder specialists; refer students you're concerned about

A young woman with dark, curly hair is sitting on a bed with white, quilted bedding. She is looking down and to the right with a thoughtful or somber expression. Her arms are crossed over her lap. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the side, highlighting her hair and the texture of the bed.

COMMON CHALLENGES

IN EARLY RECOVERY

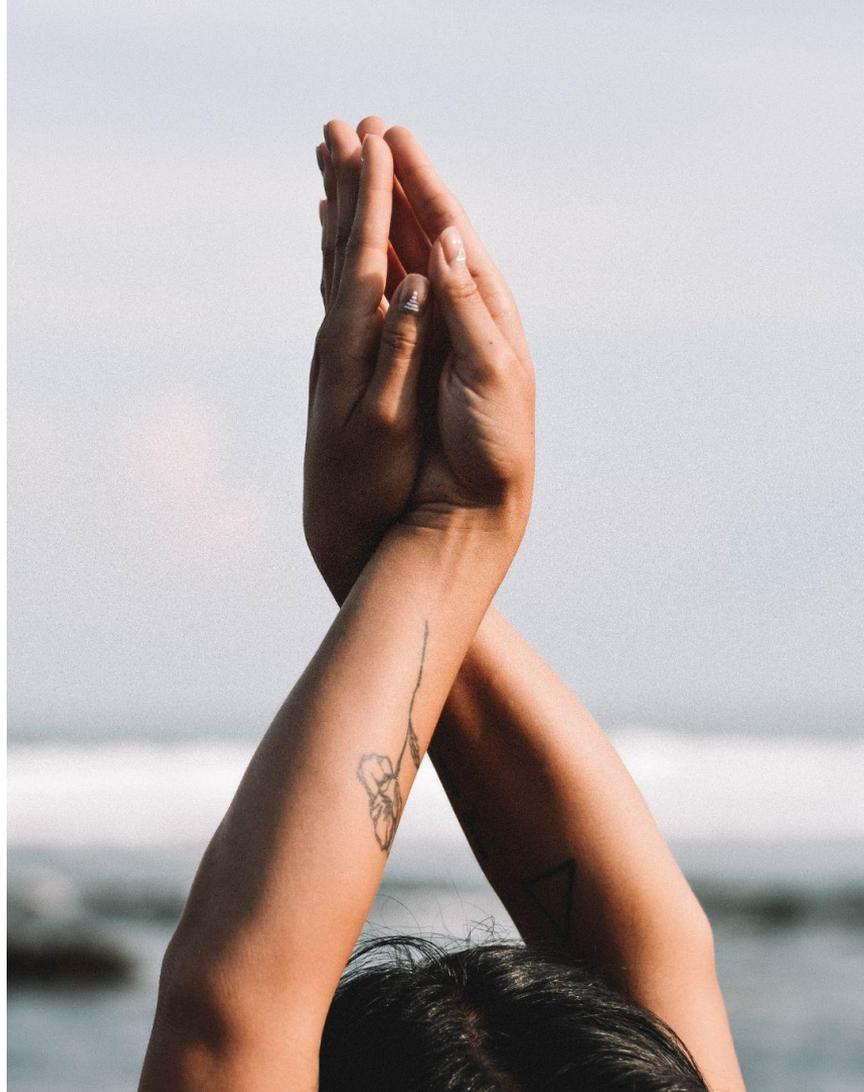
Disembodiment

Disrupted interoceptive pathways,
especially hunger and fullness



Dysregulation

Emotional overwhelm, anxiety,
depression, panic attacks, nightmares



Disconnection

Dissociation, isolation,
“disease of the lost self”



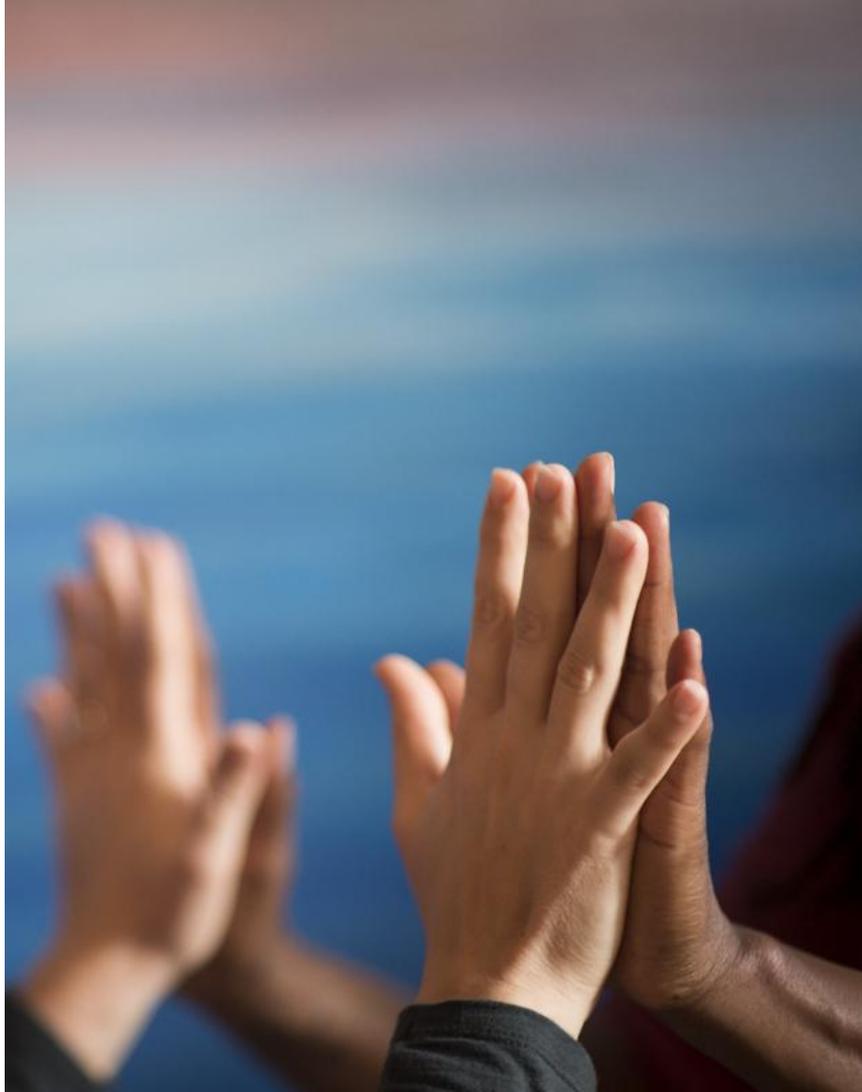
Discomfort

Bloating, constipation,
gastrointestinal distress



Distrust

Self-criticism, self-hatred,
hopelessness, lack of belief in self



EATING DISORDERS

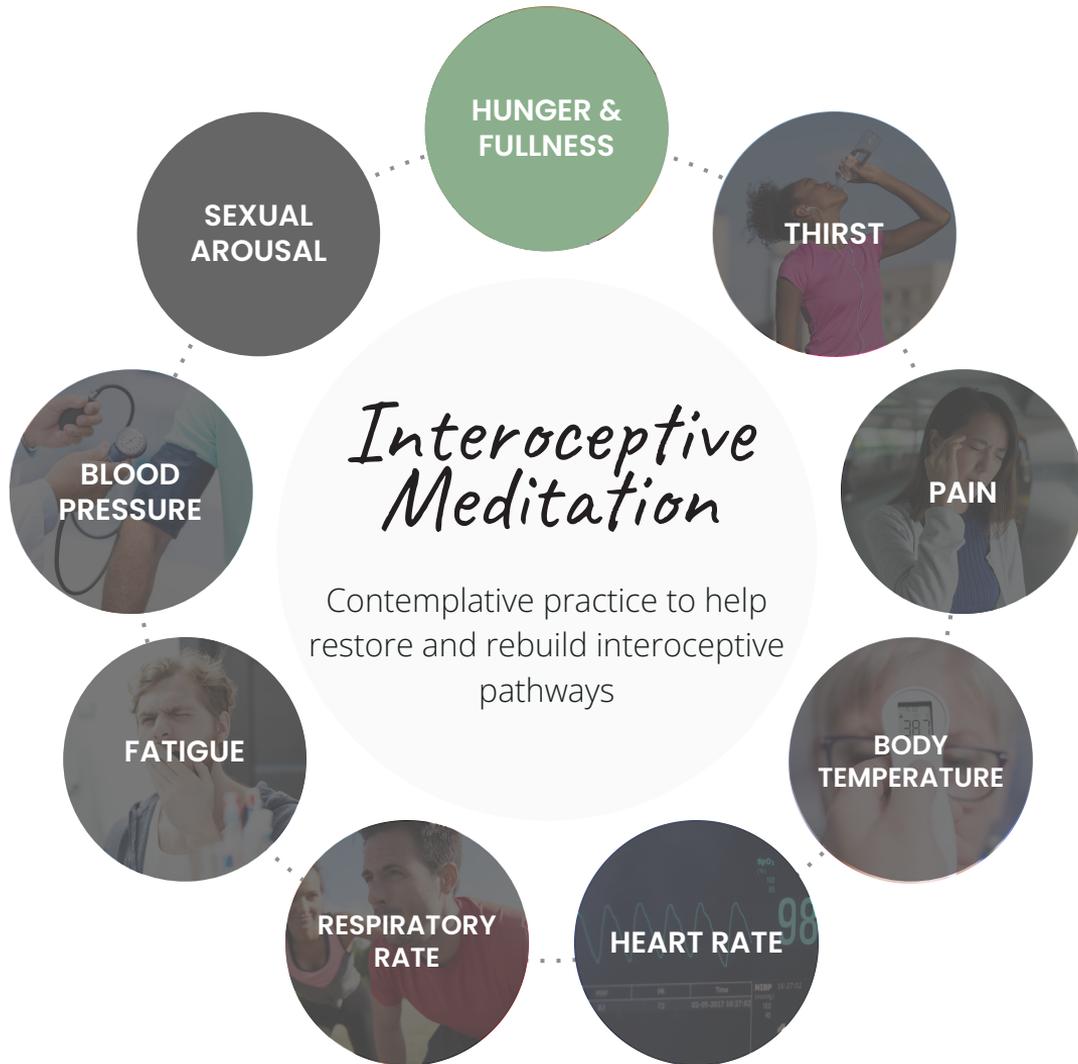
HOW CAN YOGA HELP?





YOGA PRACTICES

TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH EATING DISORDERS



YOGA PRACTICES

FOR DISCOMFORT & DISTRESS

Abhyanga

Bandha

Asana

Self-Soothing

Mudra

Nadi
Shodhana

Ujayii

Grounding

THE TOOL: Bring all of your attention to what is solid beneath you. Notice the sensations of gravity, solidity, and support.

HOW TO PRACTICE AT HOME: Notice your feet on the floor when you're standing, notice where your seat makes contact with the chair when you're sitting, or walk outside and feel your bare feet on the grass.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL: Go outside, find a tree, and sit down with your back against it. Take off your shoes and socks, and place your bare feet on the earth. Spread your toes and dig them into the soil. Imagine your feet have roots that grow deep into the earth.



Orienting

THE TOOL: Bring attention to you can sense in your immediate environment, right now. Notice what you see, hear, smell, and feel with your body with all five senses.

HOW TO PRACTICE AT HOME: Look around and observe the colors or quality of light in your space, notice any sounds happening around you, or walk outside and notice the temperature/sensation of the air moving across your skin.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL: Get an item from the freezer — it doesn't matter what, it could be a bag of peas, or a cube of ice, or tub of ice cream. Find a place to sit down, and hold the item in your hands. Notice the sensations in your hand. If your mind wanders, turn the item over a few times, and invite your mind back to focus on the sensations in your hand.

Resourcing

THE TOOL: Use your mind to imagine and bring to mind positive emotions, vivid, or sources of love. Allow the sensations of these mental images to expand and fully materialize into your experience in the present moment.

HOW TO PRACTICE AT HOME: Picture in your mind someone you love dearly, think about the last thing that made you laugh, or remember a time you felt overcome with gratitude.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL: Write a thank you letter to someone who you love and feel deeply grateful for. Describe in detail all the reasons that you appreciate them, all the gifts they have brought to your life, and what you feel when you think about them. Be specific, and focus on how you feel.

YOGA FOR STUDENTS W/ EDS

BEST PRACTICES & CONTRAINDICATIONS



ASANA & MOVEMENT

Supportive: Focus on body functionality, joyful movement, attuned self-care of the body

Contraindicated: Heated and overly vigorous asana; head-below-heart for students w/ BP issues



PRANAYAMA & MEDITATION

Supportive: Interoceptive meditations, Nadi Shodhana, Ujjayi, Three-Part Breath, Yoga Nidra

Contraindicated: Kapal bhati (for students with anxiety)



PSYCHOEDUCATION & INTEGRATION

Supportive: Interoception, psychophysiological effects, yoga philosophy & practices

Contraindicated: Providing counseling/therapy (if beyond your scope), making prescriptive recommendations (dietary, pharmaceutical, behavioral),

CHELSEA ROFF

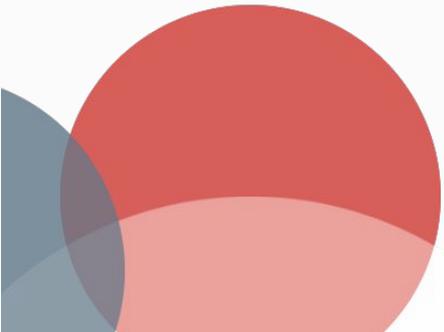
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CONTINUE YOUR STUDY

ONLINE COURSES & EVENTS

YOGA & EATING DISORDERS: A FREE SHORT COURSE

Features interviews with three leading experts in the field of yoga and eating disorder recovery. Discover how their insights can help you make your classes a safe space for students in eating disorder recovery.

EDS: HOW YOGA SUPPORTS PREVENTION & RECOVERY

Empowers yoga teachers with skills to support students at risk of EDs. Discover what causes eating disorders and how yoga bolsters protective traits that prevent EDs from taking root in the first place.

EAT BREATHE THRIVE ONLINE IMMERSION

Allows you to experience the entire curriculum in a single transformative weekend. Discover an evidence-based yoga program shown to prevent and help people recover from eating disorders.

EAT BREATHE THRIVE FACILITATOR TRAINING

Includes videos, 1-1 mentorship, self-study, and practicum teaching experience. The course is self-paced and experiential, offering you an opportunity to teach with supervision as you learn.

CONVERSATIONS AT THE INTERSECTION OF YOGA & HEALING

Features conversations between the leaders of five nonprofits working to bring yoga to veterans, prisoners, cancer survivors, and people in recovery from addiction and eating disorders, respectively.

HEALING ADDICTION & EDS: YOGA & RECOVERY SYMPOSIUM

This international conference convened leading thinkers to disseminate research, share practices, and foster dialogue about how yoga can help people heal from addiction and eating disorders.



A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a light green tank top and purple leggings, is sitting in a meditative lotus position on a grassy lawn. The background shows a brick building and trees with yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid across the middle of the image. In the top right corner, there is a red circular callout box containing text and a black arrow pointing downwards towards the banner.

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