

5 Ways Yoga Can Make Your Recovery Easier

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Yoga is an ancient spiritual practice that originated in India thousands of years ago, and is encouraged for everyone to practice today as a way to connect the mind, body and spirit through breath, movement and postures. The word 'yoga' is Sanskrit for 'unite', 'join', or 'attach'.

Although it's a physical practice, yoga is much more than exercise, and increasing your flexibility and strength. It's a way of life that encourages you to feel connectedness and compassion to yourself and others by focusing your attention inward, silencing the mind, and controlling your breath. This is why yoga is an invaluable tool for recovery and maintaining sobriety: it can help silence the inner voice that may keep you stuck in negative thought patterns—which can trigger addictive behaviors—and increase your mental strength and awareness.

Why Yoga is an Essential Tool for Addiction Recovery (And Your Overall Well-Being)

1. Yoga Increases Your Self Awareness (Which Leads to Lasting Change)

Addiction is a form of escapism from pain and emotional trauma you've experienced in the past, which causes a disconnect between the body and mind, and takes you out of the 'here and now'. Controlling and connecting with your breath in yoga postures is how you begin to establish a greater connection with your mind and body. This awareness of breath encourages you to be in the present moment — on and off the yoga mat — which can prevent you from living in the past, or experiencing anxiety about the future.

By practicing this breathwork regularly, you'll become more self-aware of when you've stepped out of the present moment, and how that's causing you worry and grief—and may lead you to thoughts or temptation of using a substance or behavior to numb the pain and discomfort.

As you can see, increasing your self-awareness is a fundamental tool for promoting meaningful, lasting change in your recovery.

2. Yoga Is a Natural Mood Booster

One of the most challenging aspects of recovery is facing the emotional pain that's at the root of addictive behaviors, without a numbing agent. Since yoga is a form of exercise, it naturally releases the feel-good chemicals in your brain (endorphins), which leaves you with feelings of happiness and euphoria in a much healthier way.

3. Yoga Helps Release Stress and Tension in a Healthy Way

Recovery can be a stressful time. Your body is going through a huge transformation, and without the coping mechanisms you're used to leaning on, your body may initially experience increased stress and cravings. It's also common in recovery to experience unpleasant feelings of shame, anger, regrets and fears.

As mentioned above, yoga allows you to be present with yourself, physically and mentally, and encourages you to quiet your critical mind— but many yoga postures can also help release physical stress and tension, too.

In fact, many people report experiencing strong emotional releases in certain postures, especially if they have a lot of suppressed emotion stored in their body (for example, in the body's tissues), which hasn't been properly dealt with.

With the stress-relieving qualities of rhythmic breathing, present moment awareness, and gentle movement, yoga can quickly promote relaxation of the mind and body.

4. Yoga Teaches You How to Have Acceptance for Yourself and Others

Since yoga is a practice (it's not about perfecting each posture), it encourages you to let go of what your ego says about where you should be, or how you should feel, and to accept everything as it is in the present moment— including where you're at in your recovery.

For example, some days you may feel energetic and flexible in a yoga class, and other days you may feel sluggish and lethargic, and want to stay in child's pose. This is much like how we feel in our daily lives and how you may feel in recovery— your mood, thoughts and feelings will fluctuate, and that's okay. The important thing is that you showed up to your yoga class, you're showing up in your recovery, which means you're accepting things as they are, and showing up for yourself in life.

This acceptance helps you give up the need and desire to control outer circumstances, and encourages you to feel more appreciation and gratitude for the present moment. This is an excellent tool to have when it comes to staying the course of sobriety.

5. Yoga is a Way to Love and Care for Yourself

Yoga is an incredible gift to yourself because in your practice, it's all about you.

Yoga is about taking time to connect with your whole being (mind, body and spirit), and learning to appreciate the being that you are. Caring and conditioning for your physical and mental being in this way is a form of extending love towards yourself, and recognizing that you are worthy and deserving of love.

In the beginning of your recovery, it can be difficult to extend love inwards, especially with the emotional conflict that can sometimes be present. But learning to love and care for yourself in healthy ways is essential for maintaining sobriety and your overall well-being.

We recognize yoga as a powerful, natural way to strengthen the mind, body and spirit, and to build resiliency in recovery, which is why it's one of the tools we use in each one of our programs for addictive behaviors and/or depression and anxiety.