

# 'Mindful yoga' as therapy?

## HELPFUL |

Practitioners say the discipline reduces stress, enhances recovery from injury and promotes overall wellness

By BRANT ROGERS  
 AND PAUL SALMON  
 FOR THE NEWS-TIMES

"My doctor says I should practice yoga" is a common refrain as students come to class these days.

Even though yoga often evokes the sleek, acrobatic images found in glossy magazines, there is increasing recognition that this artful science can be modified to help manage symptoms of chronic illness and restore functional capabilities.

Physicians are turning to adaptive forms of yoga as a complement to medical care and therapy. Well-known surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz, whose syndicated television show is watched by thousands each week, acknowledges that while high-tech biomedical interventions are valuable, they can only do so much. He routinely recommends yoga to patients as a way to enhance recovery and promote wellness.

Over the past year we have been collaborating to help define the dimensions of yoga that have the greatest relevance for medical professionals, psychotherapists and patients alike. We group these findings under the term

## MEET THE PRACTITIONERS



■ **Brant Rogers** and his wife, Marie Pielage, own and operate Yoga Hillsboro and The Stress Reduction Clinic, where they teach mindful yoga and mindfulness-based stress reduction.

■ **To learn more**, visit [yogahillsboro.com](http://yogahillsboro.com).



■ **Paul Salmon, Ph.D.**, is an associate professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Louisville in Kentucky. He is a licensed psychologist and co-directs the BioBehavioral Laboratory, a mindfulness-oriented research facility. He is also a Health Fitness Specialist (American College of Sports Medicine).

'mindful yoga,' to emphasize the connection with mindfulness, a meditation-based practice emphasizing moment-by-moment, non-judgmental awareness of life experiences.

Mindfulness-based interventions are now practiced in many healthcare settings. Practicing yoga mindfully offers several benefits to patients, including: enhanced recovery; countering "disuse atrophy"; cultivating openness and curiosity about one's capacity to heal; fostering awareness of the effects of movement (strength, balance etc.); and enabling better collaboration between patient and healthcare provider

through greater awareness and interest.

Evidence continues to mount that an adaptive yoga practice can be beneficial. For example, a November 2011 article in the medical journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* showed that a yoga regimen was more effective than usual care for back pain. The journal *Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation* recently reported relief for shoulder injury using a simple yoga posture. Studies now touch on potential positive results for those who suffer depression, anxiety, pulmonary disease, cancer, arthritis, Parkinson's disease and more. The very broad

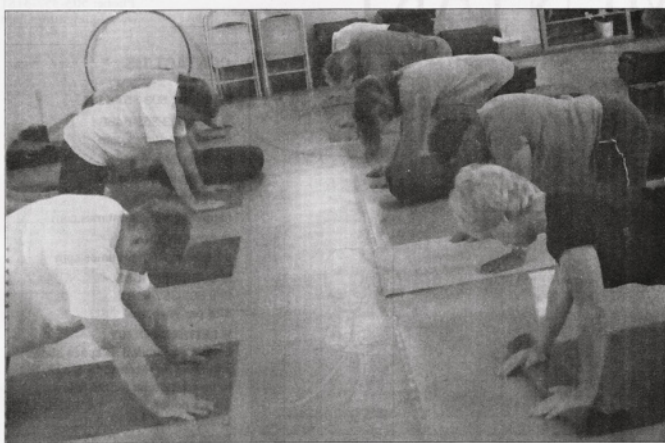
effects documented in these studies show that this practice affects our life as a whole. Those effects extend beyond fixing what is wrong to enhancing what is right in our inherent and global capacity for healing through heart, mind and body.

We have found the most helpful approach to yoga practice, particularly for individuals facing health challenges, is to minimize emphasis on complex poses and ritualized elements and instead focusing more on creating a safe, attentive and relevant personal experience for each individual.

We refer to this approach as "mindful yoga" to reinforce its way of making conscious the physical experience of life moment by moment. The result is a global form of self-care that uses our understanding of how mind and body interact. Although we have emphasized the relevance of mindful yoga in medical contexts, we find it is equally applicable in work with individuals at many levels of physical and mental health.

This approach is helpful for triathletes, those with anxiety, folks using walkers, and even couch potatoes.

We have been invited to present our work on mindful yoga for healthcare professionals and teachers at the Spring 2012 Annual Scientific Conference on mindfulness sponsored by the Center for Mindfulness, an affiliate of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.



Mindful yoga students benefit by bringing awareness to the physical experience of gentle movements.

Courtesy photo