

## Yoga, meditation as 'active therapy'

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**H**ow many classes will it take until my hip is fixed?"

Sally's first gentle yoga class was a case of mistaken identity. Her goal was to dispense with the pain and then go out to resume running marathons this year.

We advised her to go back to her doctor for some sort of treatment to fix the problem she wanted solved.

Yoga is not about fixing what is wrong. It is about enhancing what is right.

It helps us remember how to breathe with a bit more ease, move more freely, think with more clarity and be more accepting of how life shows up. Welcome side effects can be a softening of life's unpleasantness, whether it occurs as pain, sour mood, anxiety, illness, anger or some other manner of suffering.

Through a yoga practice, Sally might have found greater strength and less pain, though maybe not. She may have discovered that marathons were no longer possible, only to find new joy in some other dimension of her life. Maybe her hip would still throb, though it might not trouble her so much.

In this respect, yoga and meditation practice are therapeutic but not in the



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Local yoga students Tom LaVoie (left) and Kerry Powers practice Side Warrior Pose in a therapeutic chair yoga class.

same way as treatments or therapies that are aimed at fixing problems.

Dr. Lauren Fishman, author of "Yoga for Osteoporosis," classifies therapies three ways.

We receive "passive therapies," such as physical adjustments, medication or surgery, without much effort on our part, passively. She regards physical therapy and psychotherapy as "interactive therapies" because we work in partnership with a therapist.

Yoga and meditation are "active" therapies, where we work toward a therapeutic outcome actively and independently, except for periodic instruction. It is what we can do for ourselves.

Good evidence for the effectiveness of active therapies is growing by leaps and bounds.

A recent local study at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland that was published in the medical journal Pain showed that yoga was very effective in helping

patients with fibromyalgia. A 2005 study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine compared standard treatment to yoga practice for back pain and found that yoga was more effective.

Another study recently showed that yoga is better than exercise in decreasing anxiety. In fact, a board-certified doctor of internal medicine, Timothy McCall, recently wrote the comprehensive book "Yoga as Medicine" in order to share the diverse therapeutic powers of yoga and meditative practices.

Local college student Tom LaVoie, whose accident six years ago was nearly fatal, first received the passive therapies and surgeries that saved his life. The interactive therapy of physical therapy helped him recover mobility.

For four years now he has practiced the active therapy of yoga. Tom continues to enhance strength, balance and patience through his yoga practice.

However, all yoga teach-

ing is not therapeutic.

Our associates in the medical community sometimes have patients arrive with minor injuries from an inappropriately aggressive yoga class. As you consider venturing to learn the therapeutic dimensions of yoga practice, we advise you to select teachers with years of experience and solid training.

Yoga teachers registered with the Yoga Alliance ([www.yogaalliance.org](http://www.yogaalliance.org)) will have good basic training, and yoga teachers who emphasize therapy are often members of the International Association of Yoga Therapists ([www.iayt.org](http://www.iayt.org)). See both websites for listings of teachers near you.

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