

[Home](#)
[Manage Stress](#)
[What is Stress](#)
[Stress Symptoms](#)
[Definition of Stress](#)
[Natural Stress Relief](#)
[About](#)

Tips and Techniques

[Yoga](#)
[Meditation](#)
[15 Minute Routine](#)
[Awareness](#)
[Techniques](#)
[Fit For Life](#)
[Tips](#)
[Time Management](#)
[What You Eat](#)

Types of Stress

[Types of Stress](#)
[Work Stress](#)
[Teenage Stress](#)
[Holiday Stress](#)
[Marriage Stress](#)
[Family Stress](#)

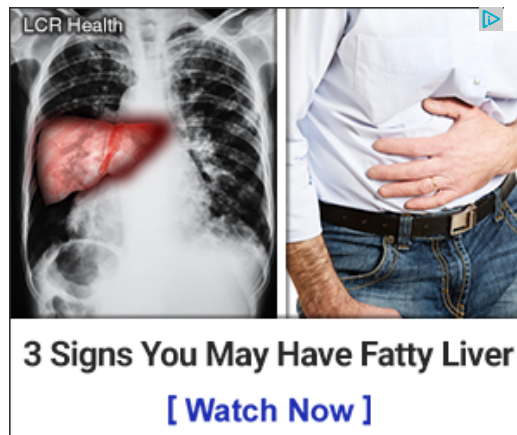
Resources

[Articles on Stress](#)
[Book](#)
[Blog](#)
[Free Audio](#)
[Free E-zine](#)
[Free Stress Test](#)
[Resources](#)

Integrating Yoga Therapy into Eating Disorder Recovery

by Beverly Price
(Royal Oak, MI)

Conversation can be a barrier to intimacy. You can talk your way out of feeling. For individuals struggling with weight and food issues, many have learned that a diet or psychotherapist alone cannot solve the root of



these concerns. Only you can look inside and discover what your soul needs to learn. For someone with an eating disorder, disordered eating, or a food addiction, the benefits of yoga can be a powerful tool to uncover your attachments and move forward with awareness.

As the owner and operator of Reconnect with Food®, a yoga-based eating disorder treatment program at Inner Door Center, Royal Oak, MI, I see many people who come to integrate yoga into healing their relationship with food. In addition, many practitioners train with us in order to learn how to integrate yoga into their eating disorder recovery programs. Most eating disorder treatment facilities and professionals that I interviewed have not looked at yoga beyond a basis class or basic stretching.

None, that I am aware of, integrate a yoga practice with yoga philosophy to facilitate healing. Most programs are very compartmentalized. The Reconnect with Food® program at Inner Door Center integrates the yoga practice on all levels of healing in the following ways:

The eight fold path is helpful to gain insight as to how you treat yourself and others, while working towards personal disciplines and attitudes, withdrawal of the senses, inward focus and letting go of old attachments, including attachment to illnesses, that keep you stuck. The Yamas and Niyamas particularly intertwine with eating disorder recovery as many individuals with eating issues often have other related addictions. If one were to examine closely, the first two limbs of the eight fold path parallel the 12-step recovery program that is helpful for many struggling with related addictions.

The chakras are also very useful in getting to the root of eating disordered behavior. Often, when emotional pain is unresolved, this emotional imbalance manifests itself through physical pain based on the emotional energy or block and is associated with a specific chakra. An interesting parallel may be created with the chakras to incorporate discussion on a physical, emotional and spiritual level and may be examined as follows:

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The first chakra, muladhara:

Your roots and external messages that form food beliefs and rituals. What food beliefs, rituals and patterns did the individual inherit from family or learn from friends, significant others or the media that still have influence in your life?

The second chakra, svadisthana:

Your relationship with food and how it parallels every other relationship in your life. This is also the pleasure center. How does your relationship with food parallel all other relationships in your life? Your relationship with people, things, money, sexuality, drugs, alcohol and other addictive substances? Do you allow yourself balanced pleasure?

The third chakra, manipura:

Issues related to responsibility, self-esteem, finding one's soul purpose and nourishing the soul. What are you hungry for? What is the void in your life that you need to nourish?

The fourth chakra, anahata:

How you use food to deal with emotions and learn to let go of old behaviors along with practice forgiveness? Do you turn to or away from food to numb painful emotions, and what is this numbing process like? Who do you need to forgive in order to heal your relationship with food?

The fifth chakra, vishuddha:

The power of choice in healing your relationship with food and letting go of your story. Are you addicted to your drama? Can you verbalize your attachments and the benefits that you receive by holding onto these attachments?

The sixth chakra, ajna:

Using intuition and insight in making food and related-behavior choices that are in your highest good. Do you use your intuition in making food and behavior choices that are in your highest good?

The seventh chakra, sahasrara:

Exploring the spirituality of food and your own spirituality in the healing process. Are you using your eating disorder to escape? How can you learn to let go, engage into life and verbalize gratitude?

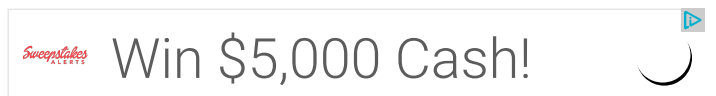
In our yoga and eating disorder recovery programs at Reconnect with Food®, we work toward balancing the energy related to the chakras to heal physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually and therefore heal your relationship with food.

How does meditation work in eating disorder recovery? Meditation is the highest form of yoga. Interestingly, the neurologist, Antonio Damasio, headed the team that created the Iowa gambling experiment. Dr. Damasio studied patients with damage to a small but critical part of the brain called the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which lies behind the nose. The ventromedial area plays a critical role in decision-making.

People with damage to their ventromedial area are perfectly rational. They can be highly functional, but they lack judgment. Addicts can articulate very well the consequences of their behavior, but they fail to act accordingly? Is it this brain issue causes the disconnect between what one knows and what one does?

Studies have shown that meditation can act on the cerebral cortex improving awareness, focus and memory. Further studies are warranted to understand the exact mechanics of yoga and how yoga can help food addiction and related eating behaviors involving these intricate brain centers.

Beverly Price, RD, MA, RYT is a registered dietitian, exercise physiologist and registered yoga teacher who specializes in the treatment of eating disorders. She is the owner of Reconnect with Food® at Inner Door Center, a yoga-based eating disorder treatment program in Royal Oak, Michigan serving those near and far. Beverly also runs a yoga-based professional development program for practitioners interested in learning how to integrate yoga with eating disorder recovery.



Comments for Integrating Yoga Therapy into Eating Disorder Recovery

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Jul 21, 2012

**loved it
 by: debi s.**

I am a psychotherapist (social worker type), and struggled in college with an eating disorder. I am also a yoga practitioner and currently going through YTT 200 hour program. I have to do a report to meet the requirements for graduation and am doing mine on Yoga and Eating Disorders. I found this article and loved it. The way it ties the 8 limb path and the chakras into the recovery model along with the 12 steps is fascinating. Thanks for posting.

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