

Yoga Therapy: The Profession

PERSPECTIVE

The Differences Between Yoga Teacher Training Programs and Yoga Therapist Training Programs

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A yoga teacher training program differs from a yoga therapist training program. We present an overview of the essential contents of each type of program in order to illustrate the differences. We also describe how a yoga teacher training program provides the foundation for a yoga therapist training program.

In a yoga teacher training program, students learn the art and science of yoga, as well as the art and science of teaching. Although programs vary, the general curriculum for a yoga teacher training program should include

- the history and philosophy of yoga
- basic anatomy and physiology
- an in-depth study of the methods of practice
- how to develop and maintain a consistent personal practice that utilizes these methods
- the ability to ascertain the needs of the students
- the principles of adapting, sequencing, and applying these various methods to meet those needs in different teaching contexts.

These teaching contexts should include group drop-in classes, class series, private classes, workshops, and retreats.

Although programs vary, the methods of practice taught in advanced programs should include

1. asana,
2. pranayama,
3. chanting,
4. mantra,
5. meditation,
6. relaxation, and
7. aspects of *tantra* (to include an understanding of ritual and the methods of *bandha*, *kriya*, *mudra*, *nyasa*, and *sankalpa*).

Prospective trainees in a yoga therapist training program should have completed an advanced yoga teacher training program, as described above, and should have integrated those teachings into their personal practices, as well as having applied them in different teaching contexts. These are the essential steps required prior to being trained as a yoga therapist, for two main reasons:

1. In yoga teacher training, teachers gain proficiency in the tools of yoga, which are then adapted and applied to individuals or groups with clinical conditions when working as a yoga therapist.
2. In yoga teacher training, teachers gain the skill of teaching the tools of yoga to their students, which is an essential skill when transmitting the intervention to yoga therapy clients.

Thus, IAYT has established the minimum entry requirement into a yoga therapist training program to be the completion of a 200-hour yoga teacher training program.

As described in the following paragraphs, yoga therapists require further education and different skill sets than yoga teachers.

In a yoga therapist training program, trainees learn about the art and science of yoga therapy, as well as the art and science of being a therapist. The overall curriculum should include

1. models of health and a healthy lifestyle;
2. a broad spectrum of symptoms, conditions, and pathologies that we collectively understand as illness or disease;
3. core principles of Ayurveda;
4. basic anatomy and physiology;
5. basic psychology and pathology;

6. the principles and practices of yoga therapy and how they relate to both symptoms and conditions;
7. how to develop and apply a personal therapeutic practice that addresses the trainee's needs;
8. therapist/client relationship skills, including the methods of assessing a client's condition, setting appropriate goals, developing provisional therapeutic strategies, implementing those strategies, training clients to apply them for themselves, and doing client follow-up and revisions of the therapy.

Yoga therapy trainees learn how to determine appropriate goals, adapt suitable practices, and apply them to each particular clinical context.

Although programs vary, the general curriculum with regard to illness and disease should include

1. a range of structural conditions, from common aches and pains to more serious and debilitating conditions;
2. a spectrum of common physiological symptoms that manifests in many different types of illnesses;
3. a broad range of physiological conditions that affect the human system; and
4. psycho-emotional and psychosocial conditions that affect clients at the level of emotion, cognition, social interaction, and behavior.

Again, although programs vary, students should learn the yoga therapy principles for helping their clients reduce

or manage their symptoms, improve their function, and shift their perspectives about themselves in relation to their health conditions. In addition, trainees learn how to understand the diagnoses that come from their clients' health care practitioners and the prescribed treatments; how to develop condition- or symptom-specific complementary strategies; and how to navigate in the realm of professional health care systems.

Trainees learn how to work with individuals in different settings: in private practice, in an integrative clinic, and in a hospital. In addition, trainees learn how to develop and offer group therapies that are either symptom- or condition-specific.

This review of a comprehensive yoga teacher training program and a comprehensive yoga therapist training program shows that the contents and curriculum for each program and the intended skill sets of prospective graduates of each program are different. A yoga teacher training program trains its prospective graduates in the principles and practices of yoga and the art and science of teaching them in different teaching contexts. A yoga therapist training program trains its prospective graduates in a broad spectrum of health conditions and symptoms of imbalance, dysfunction, illness, and disease; the principles and practices of therapeutic yoga application; and the art and science of the clinical application of therapeutic yoga. Though a comprehensive yoga teacher training program may include competencies that extend beyond the needs of a yoga therapist, the basic skills of a yoga teacher are essential prerequisites to be a competent yoga therapist.