

Taking Control of Your Own Mental Health

Beth Shaw



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Rebekah Kelley: Welcome to the Humanized podcast, all about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley and today our topic will be Taking Control of Your Own Mental Health, with health coach and author Beth Shaw. Before I introduce Beth, I want to remind everyone to subscribe and get all the other variety of casts in audio, video and transcription at HumanizedHealth.com. I'd also like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, at MyVillageGreen.com.

A little bit about our guest. Beth Shaw is the author of four best-selling books on health and wellness, a pioneer in the wellness, yoga, and fitness space. Beth is the CEO and founder of YogaFit Training Systems. Beth is also a go-to yoga mindfulness expert in the media and is frequently a speaker at universities, conferences and Fortune 500 corporations. In her latest book, *Healing Trauma With Yoga and Mind-Body Techniques*, Beth provides tools and techniques drawn from her work as a recovery and health coach. She offers a deep understanding of the physiological, psychological, and emotional changes brought on by trauma and depression, with techniques to survive and thrive through these seeming debilitating conditions.

Beth, thanks so much for being with us.

Beth Shaw: Thank you so much for having me.

Rebekah Kelley: So, I'm really excited to get into this topic, because I know that it's certainly been a topical issue, right? Mental health, wellness. I know a lot of us coming out of the quarantine, there was a lot of disconnection and sadness and depression that kind of came out of that. But then there's also been situations where certainly people have experienced traumas, right? And the need for mental support is really out there. And so this is a very interesting thing, that you're coming at mental health issues with a lot of physical and emotional support via yoga, it sounds like. And I know a lot of times we think of anything that has to do with mental health and mental wellness being related to stress, but also medications, right? But maybe you could provide us with an understanding of some options that we also might have that you're able to provide from where you're coming from, from your book, maybe. Can you show us your book?

Beth Shaw: Sure. This is my most recent book. It's called *Healing Trauma With Yoga*, and it is available anywhere books can be purchased.

Rebekah Kelley: Awesome.

Beth Shaw: So, I like to have a DIY approach to mental health. And I say that kind of jokingly, because since the pandemic, I have really been my own mental health practitioner. And I have a history of depression, childhood trauma, horrible PMS, and so I've really learned how to care for my mental health, obviously through yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, and other mind-

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body tools, but also since I decided that I wanted to be medication free, because I went on a plant medicine journey earlier this year. And I've been on and off of antidepressant medication pretty much since my late twenties. and I just made the executive decision that I wanted to stay off of them and really stick with the natural route.

So I have employed a lot of different techniques. Again, I'm fortunate because I'm in the yoga mind-body health field and I'm physically healthy. And I will just share with your listeners that it's a lot easier to have a mental health crisis in a physical body that is in good health than have a mental health crisis in a body that is sick, fatigued, diseased.

So, very important for everyone to be taking care of their physical health. And that involves the food we're eating, our hydration, proper rest, exercise, yoga, flexibility exercises, and all of that. And then on top of that, there are so many natural supplements that one can take that can help alleviate depression.

But you need to run your body like a business and also be very diligent in your multifaceted approach. And everyone's got a different body, different life experiences, different constitution. So we really need to try out for us what works and what doesn't. I wrote a book called *Yoga Lean* that came out in 2016, and in this book there are recipes and food for relaxation, for energy and all of that. And in *Yoga Lean*, too, I describe the Wheel of Health, and everyone's Wheel of Health is different, but some of the spokes should run across the board for everyone. So there are ways to do it. There are ways to do it naturally. It may require a little bit more self-study, more discipline. But I believe that I'm living proof of someone who has given up antidepressant medication and really is thriving.

Rebekah Kelley: Wow. What a wonderful story. And you're so right, though, about really needing a solid body to be in to contain everything that we are, and a healthy, strong body.

Can you give us an example that would help us understand maybe some of the success that you've been experiencing? You gave your example of yourself, but I know you're also offering your program to a lot of other individuals, right? And teaching training. So I would love to hear something that maybe helps me understand what you're able to accomplish.

Beth Shaw: At my school, YogaFit, that has now been in existence for over 25 years, we offer about 250 different types of educational programs for consumers, for professionals, for healthcare workers. We've got something for everyone. But we have a program called YogaFit Warriors. It's a trauma-informed yoga program. It's a 200-hour program, but we have weekend trainings and all of that. So I just got back from our conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. We're celebrating 10 years of the YogaFit Warriors program that was designed by a YogaFit master trainer, who's also a lieutenant army colonel. And she designed this program over 10 years ago, really to help veterans and first responders. And so that's where the program started out. But now let's face it, we're living in a world where everyone is traumatized. And we're helping a lot

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of people deal with their own physical and mental trauma. And we actually have techniques that help get the trauma out of the body without people even having to discuss what that trauma is. We're really proud of that work and the ripple effect we put into the world by training so many people in trauma-informed yoga through the YogaFit Warriors program that are now taking it out and working at the VA and military bases, in corporations, all different places in the world.

Rebekah Kelley: Wow, I love the concept of working through trauma without actually having to talk because I've done a lot of therapy myself and after a while, you're kind of tired of talking, like you kind of want action and some sort of movement and fluidity. Like, what are some techniques? Is there anything you can teach us that maybe would help us understand how we might be able to have some better mental or emotional balance?

Beth Shaw: Well, if we weren't on the Zoom, I would throw down my yoga mat and get into a reclining butterfly pose and start to show you how we do the psoas release, which really helps the vagus nerve. But short of that, I can just start..

Rebekah Kelley: Darn it! Because I would love to see that.

Beth Shaw: Well, you're going to have to come to a training.

Rebekah Kelley: For sure.

Beth Shaw: Yeah. So, there's a lot of breathing exercises too. And people who are watching this podcast, they can just do something as simple as making their exhalations twice as long as their inhalation. So if you inhale on a count of 8, and then exhale on a count of 16, if you do that repeatedly, it's going to put you into your parasympathetic nervous system, which is rest and digest and gets you out of fight or flight. That's actually a good thing to do before you eat a meal so that your body is relaxed, before you may go to a medical appointment, when you're just feeling stressed out, you can even do it when you're driving, there's no danger. And I do that a lot.

Rebekah Kelley: It's probably actually a great tool while driving, especially if someone cuts you off, you're like, okay, let's breathe in, breathe out.

Beth Shaw: So, simple techniques like that can really be game changers for people in the moment, because it is my belief that we all need tools that we can enact in the moment. And even if people are... I also spent years in talk therapy and I prefer these days a much more direct hit, which is why I like plant medicine and other modalities. I've done six infusions of ketamine earlier this year at a clinic. It's legal in every state. I knew that I needed to shift my brain, I wanted to stay off of the antidepressant medication. And so I went and did ketamine and that was very beneficial.

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So I think if we're approaching our mental health much like our physical health, and that is, we're willing to do whatever it takes to make a shift, or willing to be open-minded and keep trying new things... you know, when a doctor prescribes an antidepressant medication, many times it's not the right one. So, maybe they're going to give you Prozac and that doesn't work, or you have side effects, and then you're going to get Paxil or a Lamictal or Wellbutrin, and the list goes on and on and on and on. And there's only a 30% efficiency rate or effectiveness rate on pharmaceuticals, antidepressant medication, whereas studies have shown now – and I also just got back from the MAPS [Psychedelic Science] conference in Denver, Colorado – studies have shown that psilocybin mushrooms have a 60% rate of curing people's depression. And there's a lot of clinical trials going on right now around this. And they're becoming legal in more states.

So again, depending upon what people are comfortable with – and I always like to tell my yoga students get comfortable being uncomfortable – I think the same can be said for our approach to our mental health. Because if you are willing to do whatever it takes to make a shift and to feel good, don't leave any doors closed. Keep walking through them and you're going to find the right room for you, or the right combination of rooms for you, at some point.

Rebekah Kelley: I love that. Well, when you said DIY, right? DIY, a lot of times, especially for our bodies. We are in them. We're living in them. We know how we feel, what we think, what experiences are, when you do this, this happens. But do you have any place where someone can maybe start, any simple first steps that you make suggestions for people to actually start exploring those doors, so to speak?

Beth Shaw: Well, one, I would have them listen to every episode that I've done of Make America Healthy, which is available anywhere podcasts live, because we've had a variety of mental health professionals and physical health professionals, all different types of individuals, and so they could get a very well-rounded education there. We did a show earlier this year, actually, it was called New Breakthroughs in Mental Health, and we talked about magnet therapy, we talked about ketamine, plant medicine, the woman who was named the Psychedelic CEO of the Year was on the show. I've had Zen monks on the show.

So, again, there are many different approaches. I'm an advocate of trying everything to see what works. But you know, this is what I do for my passion. It's also what I do for work. And the learning opportunities are also endless.

And then I would advise to the listeners to do simple things like keep a mood journal. And it's not just like, you know, your mood, but it's also what did you eat that day? How much rest did you get? Did you exercise? Did you practice yoga? Did you have some quiet time with some kind of a device like a BrainTap? Or did you meditate? And then you can kind of see what the trends are and what's working for you, what's not. If you're a female of still childbearing age, you're also going to need to deal with this horrible PMS thing, which throws everything off, including your intermittent fasting. I run online groups, YogaLean groups off of YogaFit.com for

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weight loss and weight management. And I've had my people do like digestion protocols that I've come up with because also our digestive system is very linked to our mood and serotonin being released in the gut. So I have the great opportunity as a health – I like to consider myself an unlicensed healthcare provider [chuckles] – as a healthcare provider to really give people options and opportunities. And I think when it comes to a yoga practice, I always say the one with the most options wins. And that is because at YogaFit, we modify every pose so that you can be in a deconditioned body, conditioned body, a flexible body, a not-so-flexible body, an older body, a younger body, and the practice will still give you the most benefits because you modify around things.

And I also believe that's very true when it comes to handling our mental health, is that the one with the most options wins. Listen, pharmaceuticals are always an option. I have a bottle of Wellbutrin in my cabinet and there have been some days where I was like, maybe I should just take that pill again, because, you know, to a certain degree, yes, they do work. Am I willing to kind of set my personal belief systems aside, just to take an easy, I don't even want to say "fix," but an easy mask and bandage, or am I going to dig in, do the work, find the root cause, and then try to work with that best as possible. Sometimes with mental health practitioners, plant medicine shamans, whatever, to do the digging and the transformational work that at some point this lifetime or next, you know, you're going to be called to do, so why wait? Jump in, jump into the deep end of the pool. You may be feeling like you're in it already and some days it does feel like you're drowning, but just know that there is hope and the healthier you keep your body, the better chance you're going to have of swimming to the surface with ease and with grace.

Rebekah Kelley: I love that. Thanks, Beth. Those are really valuable insights. Beth Shaw can be found at www.YogaFit.com. Let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts, and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders like Beth on personalized health at HumanizedHealth.com. Thanks so much for being with us.

Beth Shaw: Thank you for having me.