

Yoga and Mental Health

Beth Shaw, E-RYT, BS, CMT



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David Stouder: Welcome to the Humanized podcast – it's all about personalizing your health. I'm your host today, Dave Stouder. Now, our topic today will be 'Yoga and Mental Health' with health coach and author Beth Shaw. And I run into a lot of people who say they do yoga, but I think there's a lot of us that maybe could benefit who don't. And before I introduce Beth, I do want to remind you to subscribe and get all of our other podcasts, audio, and video at HumanizedHealth.com. And you can look– we have a whole library of free videos, transcriptions–so it's all there for you, and there's a lot of great information and we'd like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, for making that all possible.

Now, Beth Shaw is an author of four best-selling books on health and wellness. She's a pioneer in wellness, yoga, and fitness in North America. Beth is the CEO and founder of YogaFit Training and she does training systems worldwide, and she also has an education school by the same name, YogaFit. She is your go-to person for yoga and mindfulness.

In the media, she's been featured on numerous fitness, business, and consumer publications. She's a frequent speaker at universities, conferences, and Fortune 500 corporations. There's a lot of stress in those places, that's for sure. Beth educates others on health and mindfulness in the workplace and conscious business.

In her latest book, which we'll talk about, 'Healing Trauma with Yoga: Go from Surviving to Thriving with Mind-Body Techniques,' Beth provides tools and techniques drawn for 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 the sometimes debilitating conditions.

Beth, thanks for being with us today.

Beth Shaw: Oh, thank you so much. You know, I also have my own podcast called 'Make America Healthy.'

David Stouder: Okay. And we're going to give everybody your website and they can access it from there, yes?

Beth Shaw: Yes. Yeah.

David Stouder: I'll say it now, it's pretty simple–YogaFit.com.

Beth Shaw: Yeah, or they can find me at Bethshaw.com.

David Stouder: Bethshaw.com. Okay, great. Now, you know, I want to mention depression and mental health. Now, is it just me? It seems to me, I kind of make this joke that it used to take all

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of us 35, 40 years to get depressed. And now I see young teenagers, and it seems like just so many people talk about depression, anxiety. You know, so it seems to be kind of an epidemic. And everybody focuses on the brain, whether they're taking supplements, medications, but are we underestimating the impact of physical techniques like you do, like yoga, on our mental health?

Beth Shaw: Very much so, you know, there is no separation between the body and the mind. The Romans knew that, the Greeks knew it, somehow Western medicine has tried to separate the two. But, you know, we are one entity—body, mind, and spirit—and our bodies were made to move. There's a lot of positive effects, obviously, science upon science, of movement and exercise. Yoga happens to be one of the only things that really helps you work the body and the mind and the spirit simultaneously.

It's the only thing that allows GABA to be released in the brain naturally.

David Stouder: Real quick, explain to people what GABA is, for those who don't know.

Beth Shaw: You know, you may have heard of people taking a Gabapentin, a pharmaceutical drug or GABA, a supplement. GABA, it kind of is a calming, endorphin-boosting, relaxing chemical that is released, or you take it in pill form, you know, we can all hope to go the more natural route whenever possible.

And so when we're practicing yoga, we have lower cortisol levels, reduced insulin, we have lowered heart rate, we have improved breathing, circulation, digestion, respiration. And it doesn't take long, that's the thing. You don't need to do an hour and a half of yoga. You know, I can change people's state, literally, in 10 minutes with a few simple flowing poses combined with deep breathing.

David Stouder: Excellent. Well, what I like about this—now you must work with a lot of different people. There are some people that I talked to about exercise, and of course they have physical issues where, you know, they can't jog or they can't do this or they can't do that. But would I be right to say that we can taper—that you can taper a yoga program for almost anybody, whatever physical limitations they may have?

Beth Shaw: David, most certainly. I've taught at my grandmother's retirement home, you know, to people who were 75, 80 years old, plus. The beautiful thing about yoga is that it can be adaptable to any situation, any person, any physical limitation, any body size or type, any age, any level of flexibility, because the practice meets you where you are. And as long as you employ the philosophy like we do at YogaFit—no judgment, no expectation, no competition, breathe, feel, listen to your body, go at your own pace—you're going to have a really positive experience.

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And also for any of your listeners who are doing any type of regular working out or sporting activity, we need yoga to balance our bodies out so that we don't get repetitive use injuries. You know, most cardiovascular exercise is going to leave us with tight hips, tight low back, tight hamstrings, tight hip flexors. So, it's the ultimate balancing tool and it's the ultimate standalone exercise.

David Stouder: Interesting. I never really thought of that. So where some people might say, well, I don't do yoga because I jog or I do the treadmill or whatever, what you're saying is even those of us that do exercise, people that do, they could probably do a lot better for themselves that they would incorporate yoga into their fitness program.

Beth Shaw: Yeah, they're just going to feel better in their bodies. That's the—I think the biggest gift that I've gotten from yoga, and I've gotten so many, and I've made a career of it for over 25 years, but the biggest gift that I've gotten and that I give our clients, and we give our customers, and we've trained over 250,000 people worldwide, is the gift of being in their bodies. And the gift of being in your body in a way that you feel good about the body that you're in, no matter what you think that body looks like, what age you're—you exist better in the skin that you're in when you practice yoga.

David Stouder: You know, you mentioned body, mind, and spirit. I'm sure there's overlap, but is it fair to say—I mean, I think I know the answer, but that yoga has maybe a deeper impact on more aspects of our health than, say, just a regular fitness program of maybe some weights and cardio?

Beth Shaw: I would say, yeah, you know, I wrote a book called 'Yoga Lean.' And in that book, I have like seven different chapters on yoga for different goals. For example, there's one for anti-aging—poses you can do for anti-aging. I try to stand on my head at least four or five days a week, sometimes with a red light in my face because it's anti-aging. We have one for relaxation and restoration, if you need to relax and chill, like if you're a shift worker, if you're a healthcare worker, we do a lot with healthcare workers where, you know, they need—they've been on their feet for 12 hours. They need to take care of their backs and stretch out their hamstrings. And then there's one for energy. So if you get up in the morning, you need energy, you can do a sequence for energy. You can do a sequence for balance. So the nice thing about yoga is you really, you can tailor the different poses to what you need. If you're having digestive issues, you can do certain poses. If you're having back issues, certain poses. If you have a hangover there are poses for that. So it's really—I'm not going to say it's going to cure everything, but it's going to make you feel a lot better. And also I will tell you, I'm in my fifties, and I recently ran into a friend of mine who was YogaFit's first trainer. We had dinner when we were at Palm Springs for our *Mind Body Fitness Conference*. She is almost 60 years old and she is still getting her monthly cycle. And I made a joke with her, I was like, it must be all the headstands.

So yoga really keeps you young. And there's a saying, a Chinese saying, that you should “be like bamboo”—strong and flexible. And yoga gives us that opportunity.

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David Stouder: Well, that's good. Now, you mentioned your book, 'Yoga Lean,' one of your bestsellers, and I like that, so that you give people—and obviously there's instructions in the book. Tell us a little bit about healing trauma with yoga, because I think—and you're not talking about just physical trauma, right?

Beth Shaw: No, I'm not talking about physical trauma at all. In fact, you know, mostly the book goes into dealing with emotional trauma, mental trauma, PTSD, anxiety, depression. A lot of people who have had childhood sexual trauma have found the book very useful. So, you know—and trauma can occur at any age. It could be a car crash. It can be the death of a pet or a loved one. It can be a divorce. It can be—I mean, let's face it, this pandemic was traumatic. I think we're all still scarred from it, which speaks to your earlier comments about the state of mental health in at least the U S.

I have several friends—I did an executive education program at Harvard for three years—and I have several friends whose children committed suicide in the past three years. It's very sad. So, there is a rash of mental health issues, and unfortunately, there are not a lot of resources for people in this country. I mean, people who have resources, you know, can seek the help of a therapist. Perhaps people who don't have resources can go to a 12-step group or some, you know, local support group. I know a lot of people who are doing a lot of plant medicine and psychedelics now to heal their depression.

I myself have suffered from depression probably since childhood, so I've been studying supplementation for mental health since I was in my 20s. Different amino acids that you can take and, you know, exercise, yoga, definitely helpful for depression. But it's really a huge crisis, I don't think it's going to get any better anytime soon. We're more medicated than any other country in the world. And yet we're more sad. We have probably higher suicide rates. It's definitely higher teen suicide rates. And you know, it's—I only wish that they put the emphasis on dealing with this mental health crisis in the same way that, you know, they were so concerned for everyone to wear masks and get COVID shots. I wish that the focus would just be on mental health and teaching children how to identify their emotions, how to manage them, how to practice distress tolerance tools and techniques. But the nice thing is that yoga gives us so many of these things naturally. The breathing exercises, the meditation, the mind-body connection, the mindfulness, the awareness, the self-study. So, for anyone even engaged in a casual yoga practice, they'll find their mental health is much better.

David Stouder: Well, I'm with you. I understand. I've talked to people. Some of the medications have been, you know, very useful for people, especially in crisis. But they're not without downsides. And if we could do more with yoga, supplements and the way we live our life, it would certainly be, as you said, we're the most medicated country on earth and yet we're not the healthiest by any means.

Beth Shaw: And our health scores are low and our health span versus lifespan is getting further apart. You know, I have a chapter in my book, 'Healing Trauma with Yoga' called 'Food is

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Mood.' And it's all about what foods to eat to improve your mood. And there are different foods that you can eat that are going to help you feel better, and other things like processed foods and sugars that are going to just compound whatever negative emotional challenges you're having.

David Stouder: Well, that, you know, so you have your two books—now I was on your website today, which again—YogaFit. Just Y-O-G-A-F-I-T.com. And, so you do events all over the country and you also work with people individually?

Beth Shaw: I do. I work very selectively with people individually, with coaching, sometimes weight management. At YogaFit, we have a lot of ongoing continuity groups that we're just starting one tonight for eight weeks, it's called *Yoga Lean*. And we just help people get a handle on their microbiome, eat better, make healthier choices, work on their sleep. We also do *SOS*, which is a sort of sober—it's an alcohol cessation program. So we have a lot of different resources at YogaFit. We have over 250 different educational programs, many of which are very therapeutic and mental health-oriented, including our *Warriors Track* for people with PTSD, depression, trauma, and anxiety.

So we're kind of one-stop shopping when it comes to yoga, Ayurveda, meditation, or anything where, you know, we're going to empower you to take care of yourself.

David Stouder: Well, you know, thank you. That's a lot of good news for people and you're obviously doing a lot and we appreciate it.

And we want to again, remind you that you can find Beth at www.YogaFit.com. And let me remind you, go ahead and subscribe, and you know, all of these podcasts that we do on Humanized Health are free. And you know, again, I want to thank you, Beth, not just for being on the podcast today, but for all you do, you know, I'm sure you're bringing a lot of relief to people and we appreciate it.

Beth Shaw: Great. Well, thank you so much. And I appreciate everything that you are all doing in the world of health and wellness.