

Developing a Peaceful and Healthy Heart/Clinical Yoga and Heart Health SYTAR Austin 2014

Special Considerations for Heart Patients:

The most common form of heart disease results from the buildup of plaque in arteries. When plaque becomes unstable or inflamed it can cause a heart attack. The yoga practices just as the other practices in the Ornish Program are designed to reduce inflammation as well as develop a peaceful heart and healthy heart.

Qualities heart patients may exhibit:

- ❖ Anger and hostility (tempered by working with Ahimsa toward self and others)
- ❖ Perfectionism (from feelings of shame and unworthiness)
- ❖ Being disconnected from feelings
- ❖ Pushing
- ❖ Analytical and critical of self and others
- ❖ Being data driven or “wanting to know”, “wanting proof”
- ❖ Lack of body awareness and signals
- ❖ Lack of flow physically and energetically
- ❖ Language patterns using “I, me, and Mine” rather than “we, us, and ours”
- ❖ Emotional isolation

Contra indicated practices for heart disease:

- ❖ Any pose that involves holding the arms overhead or straining
- ❖ Retaining the breath
- ❖ Pushing or “trying to hard” in postures
- ❖ Most inversions with the exception of legs up the wall or on a chair
- ❖ Fish when there is carotid artery disease or retinopathy

Notes:

Best Practices for Working with Heart Patients

In this form of yoga therapy we are using yoga to return to a place of balance so healing can occur. We are also using specific techniques and postures that will improve blood flow, reduce stress, quiet the mind, and aid in a deeper connection to self, feelings, and others.

- ✓ Try to use the words “relax, soften, and breathe gently” often in teaching.
- ✓ Find a soothing voice for teaching.
- ✓ Maintain a sense of humor.
- ✓ Speak and move slowly.
- ✓ We seek to “down regulate” the sympathetic nervous system and “up regulate” the parasympathetic response.
- ✓ Encourage smooth breathing through the nose whenever possible.
- ✓ Encourage tuning in and listening to the body and not competing with self or others
- ✓ Often important health information doesn’t come out on health forms, but rather through a private conversation. Other telling issues may also be revealed in a private conversation.
- ✓ As teachers, we are the keepers of their stories. Create a space of non- judgment and compassion when listening. Showing them how to hold their own stories without judgment and with compassion.
- ✓ The energy in heart disease is characterized as moving up and pushing. Often the drugs that are prescribed for the condition can complicate the issue making patients feel depressed and tired. Our yoga practices are designed to balance these conditions.
- ✓ Don’t try to get all the postures “in”. Let there be plenty of time for internal practices.
- ✓ Bring attention to the heart often throughout practice by bringing hands to heart, and mentioning what the practice is doing for the heart.
- ✓ Language is so important...choose wisely. Saying “open heart” may cause trauma for some if they have had surgery. “Corpse pose” may also be frightening.
- ✓ Let the simple practices have deep significance.
- ✓ Leave time in between poses to rest and recover.
- ✓ Don’t try to answer medical questions. Form relationships with physicians and ask questions. Refer to the attending physician with medical questions.

Notes:
