

Mind/Body/Soul

Our bodies respond to our thoughts, feelings, and actions. This is a simplified way of explaining the mind-body connection, or more precisely—the biopsychosocial model, an approach positing that health is a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. This article addresses the spiritual facet of recovery.

Spirituality, in its broadest sense, can be defined as that which gives meaning to one's life and often draws one to connect to God or a Higher Power. Spirituality connotes a concern for the unseen and intangible, as opposed to physical or mundane. It also has to do with deep-- often religious--feelings and beliefs, including a person's sense of peace, purpose, connection to others. (adapted from *Holistic Nursing Practice* and the National Cancer Institute)

Therefore, this would include, but not be limited to, Christianity or any other organized religion. My purpose is to highlight how spirituality in any form can be a very important component of eating disorders treatment. As a Christian, I place a high value on how my own religious beliefs and spiritual practices have influenced my recovery.

One example of a spiritual discipline that makes some Christians nervous is yoga. However, yoga is not a religion, and participation in yoga is not at odds with Christianity. As a spiritual and physical practice, yoga addresses the integration of body, mind, and spirit; as such, it is a valuable instrument to promote one's spiritual well-being. Feuerstein, an internationally-known author on his interpretations of yoga, describes it as a "systematic program for peaceful living with sharpened self-awareness." Isn't that one aim of therapy?

At one stage in my healing journey, yoga became a critical piece in moving beyond a "stuck" point. I was having trouble with body image; also, I was not very skilled at identifying my emotions and knowing what to do with them once they *were* identified! I, like many eating-disordered individuals, lived entirely in my head, with very little awareness of what might be going on deep within my psyche. Surprisingly, yoga helped me learn to be at home in my own skin and tapped into such vast reservoirs of emotions that I would often cry in certain poses. Laura Meagher of the Inner Door Center says that in yoga, "we practice balancing effort with ease. In your healing process, you may find yourself in many uncomfortable moments. Your yoga practice is a metaphor for these uncomfortable situations. As you move into certain poses, they may feel awkward and challenging. As you begin to let go of your attachments, you can surrender into your healing work. "

There is such difficulty among ED clients with being still...being alone with their maddening thoughts and the overwhelming drive to FLEE. Yoga balances the nervous system and stills the mind, usually with a focus on breath—the bridge from our bodies to our brains. In traditional yoga, breathing exercises and postures culminate in the act of meditation. So, spiritually, yoga helps still a restless mind and a restless body. For the Christian, acquiring that skill would certainly enhance his or her prayer life. According to Thomas Ryan, CSP, that's part of its attraction for westerners: it gives fidgety activists something to *do* that is actually very peaceful and calming. Scripture tells us to "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)

Another treatment modality is acupuncture, and along with this—herbal remedies. Acupuncture is a set of procedures which usually involve inserting tiny needles along certain pathways in the body in order to restore the balance of "qi", the energy force present in all of us. Qi consists of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. When qi becomes blocked, illness develops. Acupuncture and

herbal remedies are major components of Traditional Chinese Medicine, which is thousands of years old but gaining respect with conventional medicine as evidence-based research shows its effectiveness. TCM can be used to treat anxiety, for example, a commonly co-occurring diagnosis with eating disorders.

Apprehension and fear may keep Christians from seeking less conventional, though potentially beneficial, avenues of healing. Why would we not question and scrutinize the training, credentials, and expertise of practitioners of Western medicine the same way we do those of the centuries-old Eastern approaches? These “alternative” therapies value the wisdom of the body and draw upon one’s own inner resources of healing. This should appeal to followers of any faith who believe in a Creator and/or are taught to value and care for their “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7).