



YOGA AND SURGERY

CAN YOGA HELP *before and after surgeries?*

Yoga and its role for people going through surgery is rarely a subject of exploration. Yet, I often have students who are facing surgery come to me with questions. The number one question I am asked is: if they should stop their practice before and for a period after the procedure.

To me, this question reflects some doubt and a lack of understanding of practice. It also works to sabotage the student's path to health, as their attention and energy is on possible future negative setbacks rather than on how to be constructive in the present. So, let's be constructive and think about how yoga might serve a student facing surgery.

Firstly, let's remember that Yoga is our ally, our tool to build holistic health and unleash potential. Our body always responds well to systemic stimuli delivered in a way that aligns with our nature.

That said when we have an injured area we tend to apply simple logic, fearing that adding more pressure and stimulating an area that is in ill-health will be harmful. *But how can a healthy stimulus delivered skillfully to an area that is in ill-health be negative?*

Furthermore, if you are going to operate on your shoulder, why consider only that region of the body? Wouldn't it be better to have the rest of the body in a state of good health and fully functioning to aid support the body through the procedure and during recovery? Working on the whole will always be in service of good health, regardless of the conditions one faces. Yoga, when practiced correctly, will only promote current and future health.



Yoga has great value after surgery too. In the Kaiut Yoga Method, we work with a concept from the Austro-Hungarian physician and psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich. He asserted that before physical illness there is energetic illness, which is through the whole body. Surgeries are efficient to treat physical ailments, but they do not act on the energetic matrix in the body that is often part of the need for surgery in the first place. On top of that, the surgery itself can lead to the emergence of new issues across our whole physical and energetic system.

There will always be post-surgery issues that require recovery time. The fact is, surgery is traumatic to our system—most apparently there are cuts and significant physical changes from the intervention, but on top of that people will experience other physical, emotional, and mental reactions. These traumas accumulate in overlapping layers and are stored in the body, and can hinder a full recovery. Yoga is a perfect tool for recovery as it addresses and cleans up the whole system—both the preexisting matrix of issues and the consequences of surgery.

Of course, as a teacher delivering yoga to someone pre and post-surgery requires a great deal of comprehension and technique and taking responsibility for the situation. But it is worth it, as I have observed the life-giving benefits that yoga has brought to students who have maintained continuous practice before and, when released, after surgeries.

I hope in sharing more of my experiences, some research, and the inspiring story of one of the teachers of the Method you gain a deeper understanding of the potential role of yoga when someone is facing challenging processes in life, such as surgery. We may need surgery at some point, but we don't need to unnecessarily suffer! Yoga offers us a way.

Enjoy your reading!

Francisco Kaiut



THE ADVERSE *IMPACTS OF SURGERY*

Surgery is proposed as the main cure for many diseases we face in modern life. However, surgery can become a stressor and lead to adverse effects—mentally, emotionally, and physically—that were not related to the treatment.

In countless cases, the mental health of patients is shaken as a result of surgical procedures and their aftermath, a factor that negatively compromises their recovery. An article published in Medical News Today, by Johnson and Legg, entitled *Depression After Surgery: What You Need to Know*, sheds light on the emotional fallout from surgery. They explain that depression can arise from the health problem itself and the postoperative discomfort and change of routine. During this time after surgery, a patient may have an increased perception of pain. Besides this, he may feel tiredness, apathy, irritability, anxiety, lack of confidence, reduced mobility, and stress, among other symptoms.

Depression can also happen in the pre-surgery period. This is because many people worry so much about the procedure and the

outcome that they increase their anxiety and stress levels. People with depression also postpone seeking medical treatment, delaying the chances of healing. Pre-operative depression reduces the effectiveness of the surgery, according to the authors of the study *Depression and Postoperative Complications: An Overview*. One example offered was patients with morbid obesity and showed signs of depression, experienced lower rates of weight loss after bariatric surgery.

When depression is severe and significant it can warrant a diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). The World Health Organization (WHO) ranks MDD as the fourth leading cause of disability worldwide. It predicts that these rates will continue to increase and by 2030 the disease will rise to second on that list. The effect on post-operative patients, besides the reduction in general functioning and quality of life, can lead to an increase in morbidity and mortality.



Research out of the University of Iowa reported that people with coronary artery disease, even after a successful intervention, had psychological impairments caused by depression, with increased cases of postoperative delirium, unplanned hospital admissions, arrhythmias, and other symptoms. This impairs the general health status of the individual, recovery takes longer, both physically and emotionally, and the quality of life is affected.

It is true that for most of us, our lives are filled with endless commitments and demands. Given this, the need to face medical treatment overloads us physically and emotionally even before the surgery. When you receive a diagnosis and treatment plan, it is likely you enter the stressful process of reorganizing your work, social, and personal life to find the necessary rest and recovery time. On top of these practical issues, questions and concerns may arise in relation to the possible

complications of surgery related to anesthesia, medication, pain, or discomfort and the impact this will have on your quality of life.

All these worries are normal, but if you don't take care of yourself, depression can easily arise, compromising the whole process of healing and restoring health. Allow yourself not to be overwhelmed. Surgical procedures save lives, but they can cause pain and psychological suffering for the patient. But I know many stories of students who have been able to cope better with the downsides of surgery through yoga. One of the stories I'll share is of a teacher of mine who had bowel cancer. She kept up the practice before and after her medical procedures, which helped her get through that time and recover well.



YOGA IS THE *BEST MEDICINE*

To understand how yoga contributes to the recovery process and its potential to reduce negative outcomes from surgeries or interventions, the researchers at Vanderbilt University Medical Center selected a group of adult women with suspected gynecological cancer to investigate the Feasibility of a Brief Yoga Intervention to Improve Acute Pain and Discomfort Post-Gynecological Surgery.

Usually, when diagnosed with gynecological cancer, women undergo major abdominal surgery. The options for pain management for this population are inadequate. Psychological distress is often an additional factor that increases the perception of pain in this population.

The researchers chose yoga as an intervention as they understood the practice brings together key elements to help patients: movement, breathing exercises, and meditation. The participants were asked to do 15-minute yoga sessions, one before and two after

surgery. The intervention involved gentle movements that could be done in bed to avoid any kind of discomfort.

The study pointed out that yoga was feasible because it impacted the surgical, psychological, and physical outcomes, helping the patient cope better with the process, as well as, in the short term, showing a reduction in pain and distress.

Just as in the study, I know many students who have come through this whole process better because yoga has been a steady part of their self-care routine long before they faced surgery. The longer the practice, the better the outcome, but new students can also benefit from the power of yoga. The practice helps build physical and mental health.





KEEPING YOUR LIFE ENERGY FLOWING



Surgeries, even the simplest ones, are perceived by the body and mind as traumatic processes. Throughout our lives, we accumulate small traumas that can lead to the formation of a dense layer that affects our emotional state, impairing health.

For me, Wilhelm Reich's psychosomatics makes a lot of sense because in his studies he discovered that our body holds all the physical and emotional experiences we go through in our lives, from birth to death.

Reich concluded that there is a continuous energy pulsation through our body that regulates the functioning of all our vital functions.

If it is kept in rhythm, there will be a spontaneous movement of this energy, so we will have no physical disturbances or dysfunctions. However, if external conditions or factors disturb the flow of energy to the point of blocking or accelerating it, our organism will try to get rid of it, and if it can't, it will react with anger or aggressiveness to destroy the threats.

This ability to self-regulate is what generates a state of health for all human beings. The change in the flow of energy can affect parts of the body and the human state of health can be altered.

When our emotions are blocked, it is because the energy is stopped, and from a somatic point of view, our physiological functions, such as respiratory rate, blood circulation, and body fluids, and cellular processes are also disturbed. This is how we go from a healthy to a sick state of health when our emotional state becomes unbalanced. It is therefore essential that our body can resume the normal flow of energy as soon as possible.

"[...] HE WHO FORGES HIS BODY IN THE FIRE OF PRACTICE WILL KNOW NO AGING OR DEATH."



Some people react by wanting to forget what happened and return as soon as possible to normality. I am sorry, but this will not happen—your body is no longer the same. What is normal today, is not the same as yesterday, or what it might be tomorrow. A sense of normal comes from accepting reality and life as it is. Trauma does not have to be a negative entity in life. It is possible to view trauma as a resource for building health in the long-term. The practice of yoga aids in this process.

Your body can be forged in practice. I make an analogy to the art of forging iron developed by our ancestors approximately 4,000 years ago. They heated and cooled metals to change their mechanical and metallurgical properties, being able to shape and produce utensils for everyday needs. This technique would transform raw materials into an object that was often

so strong and durable that it was passed down from generation to generation.

Wisely, the Vedas recognized the value of consistent yoga practice to make the body increasingly strong, resistant, and malleable to change. So much so that in their writings it is recorded that "he who forges his body in the fire of practice will know no aging or death".

You can build health and eliminate suffering with yoga practice. What you need to do is commit to rescuing your health, and your body's full potential, and embrace a new possibility for life and personal growth. Dealing constructively every day is the only option, perhaps a bit painful at first, it requires maturity, but it is the only path to total health. If you don't embrace reality widely, with the difficulties that arise, you do not evolve, and your health will be harmed.



YOGA WHEN FACING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

A good example of everything I talked about above is the story of a teacher of the Kaiut Yoga method who had cancer of the intestine, and, thanks to the practice, she moved through the recovery process well and is working to dissolve the traumas caused by the surgery in her body.

Her first contact with yoga was in January 2016, during a wellness event in Campos do Jordão. The practice was one of the activities on the program and she was invited to attend one of the classes with a teacher with over 17 years of experience. According to her, at the end, despite the degree of difficulty, the pain and the fatigue, she felt a sensation different from anything she had ever experienced.

Upon returning to São Paulo, she decided to continue the practice with the same teacher. Her main interest was to experience the mental well-being he had felt that first class. This was particularly relevant, as her main issue was the stress and anxiety she experienced from working 10-12 hours a day in a high-pressure job in one of the largest banks in the country, in the area of prevention and money laundering.



In addition to the anxiety, her body resented the heavy backpacks she had carried since college which left her with strong back pain. With the practice, twice a week, this pain disappeared, and her anxiety diminished. As a result of the positive benefits of practice, she became curious to understand how the practice worked. So she started reading about meditation and other related topics until she decided to specialize in a training course. I was one of the teachers invited to train the students, and we got to know each other.

At the end of the first class, she felt new sensations and had a new experience of herself—she could actually feel her own body. After that, we started talking longer and I explained how the Kaiut Yoga method works. She was delighted to learn that anyone, regardless of physical condition, could take a class in this method.

This new awareness made her want to share what she was experiencing with others. Since then, she continued investing in training until she came to me and said she would like to become a teacher. I explained that the trainings took place in Curitiba, and further south in Gramado. The distance made it impossible for her to go but in 2018, I ran training in São Paulo and finally she could attend.

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She started teaching yoga in 2017, still mixing concepts from other methods, but in 2018 aligned all her teaching with the Kaiut Method. At the same time, she continued practicing and improving perception of her own body, getting to know, through the postures, places she didn't even know existed.

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic came, and she started to dedicate herself more to classes and practicing every day, something she did not do before. It was then that she noticed a drastic change in her body, from a drop in fat indexes to structural ones, besides feeling more available and more willing.

Months later, in October, she noticed something wrong with her body and went to her gynecologist, who recommended a colonoscopy. ***The exam identified two polyps in her intestine, one of them being cancerous. From then on, she went through a routine of many exams until***

she realized that she needed to have surgery to remove the polyp.

The surgery was cancelled three times due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, until it was scheduled for July 24, 2021. The solid contact she had developed with her own body made her aware that she needed to be well both physically and emotionally to go through this process. After all, the doctor was clear and said that the cure would depend on how the body reacted and the recovery process. If everything went well, she would be cured.






Even though she was aware that it was a delicate process, with risk of hospital infections and because it was a bowel procedure, she knew she could not despair. Prior to the surgery she tried to remain optimistic. Of course, she had highs and lows, but overall she remained confident of healing. She took time for self-care of her body and mind, looked at the future in a positive light, doing what she could to not slide into depression.

Committed, she continued to take online classes and often says that this is what sustained her in the moments of anguish and despair when doubts fill our mind. These moments are absolutely normal when facing and recovering for surgery, even with full understanding and openness to the highs and lows of the process and yoga as a stabilizing resource, there were still times she was apprehensive about the future.

At these times, she would devote herself even more to the practice to take care of her body to give herself the best chance of going through and recovering well from surgery. Her commitment to nurturing herself and tapping into her internal universe of self-care was even there in the hours before the surgery—she would enter yoga postures on her hospital bed to get through the long-waiting time.

The surgery was a success, despite the cut in her abdomen, the 13 centimeters of bowel removed, and the pain that immobilized her. During the medical team's visit, she learned that it took a lot of force to pass the equipment through the pelvic region and this was the reason for the pain. Soon, she understood that her body was traumatized and heavily disrupted and that she would need to restore the harmony she had created with the practice.



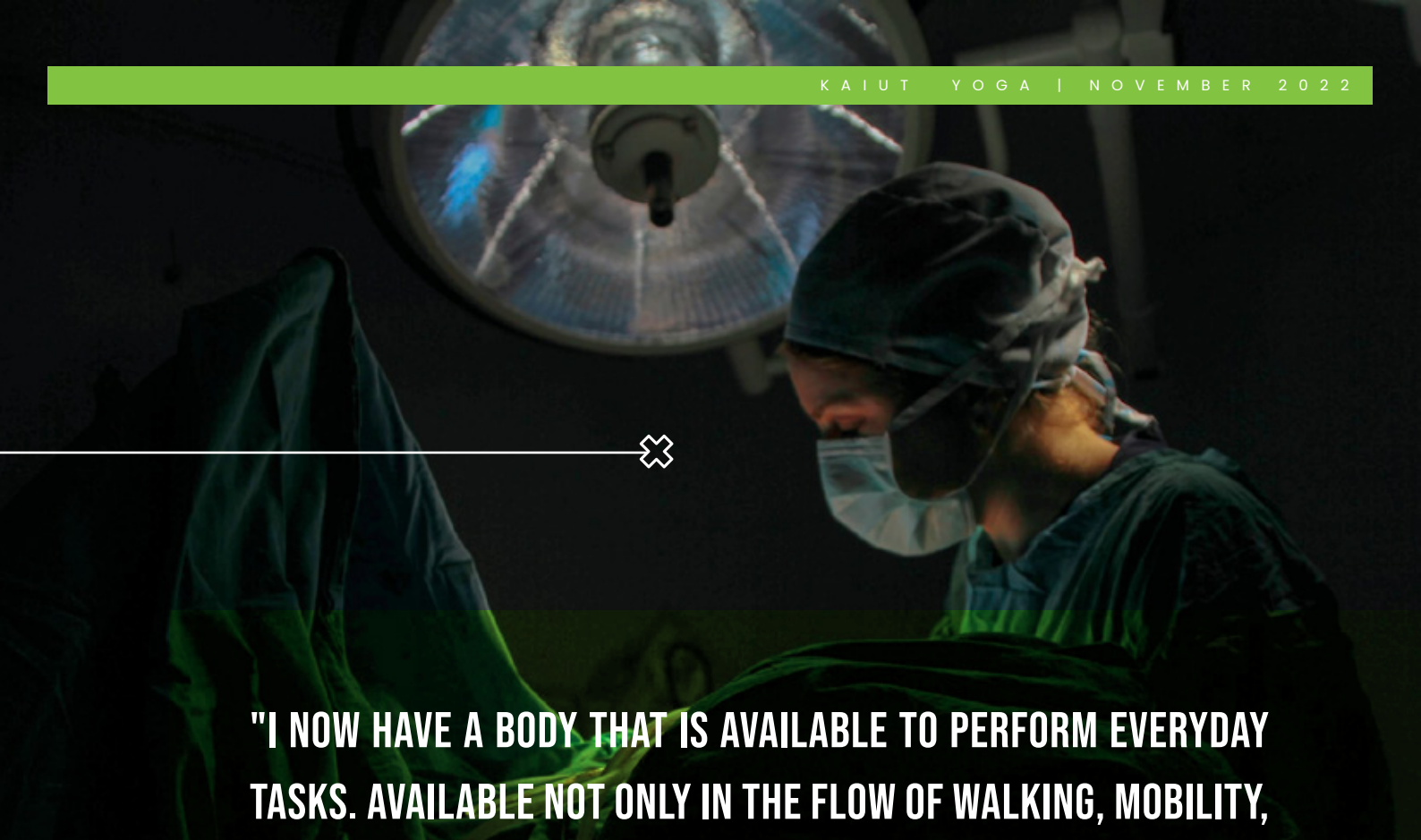


She had to stay at home about 20 days without making any effort because of the cuts, stitches, and pain caused by the trauma of the many bowel movements during the surgery. Already in the first days she felt powerless and asked me if she could do some postures.

After the medical release, which took about 26 days after the procedure, I recommended putting her legs up in a gentle position. Resuming yoga, even in small doses, made her feel better with a sense of internal comfort.

For her, the post-surgery period was more challenging than the pre-surgery period, as at this stage there she was limited in what she could do with her body which there was not before. Her body was stiff and she still had fear of the disease coming back.





"I NOW HAVE A BODY THAT IS AVAILABLE TO PERFORM EVERYDAY TASKS. AVAILABLE NOT ONLY IN THE FLOW OF WALKING, MOBILITY, BUT ALSO IN POWER. AFTER SURGERY, I WAS IN A LOT OF PAIN, AND WITH CONSTANT PRACTICE, I FEEL LIKE I'M MAKING EFFECTIVE GAINS."

In January 2022 she returned to the full one-hour practice, and in July 2022 she resumed face-to-face classes. Already in the first month she noticed the difference in her body that extended from mobility to the area in her belly that was stiff and swollen.

I have no doubt that the constant practice, the experience of the method, and the understanding she had about how everything worked helped her not to experience extensive losses. I notice that today her body is more prepared and she feels more secure than she did six months ago.

CONCLUSION

Yoga practice can be considered a systemic health stimulus. Consider it as a tool that prepares your body and mind for the challenges that life throws at us. It is such a powerful resource that some researchers have already identified the potential in treating disease and recovering from surgical processes.

Often the diagnosis of surgery is not well-received by individuals, but the yogi is better prepared to face the whole process. First, because he is aware of the potential of his own body, its ability to recover, and the healing power of the practice. He also maintains a positive outlook on life, and we know that a person with a weakened mental state puts the metabolic functions of the body at risk.

The pre-operative phase is crucial for building this more available and resilient body. I have observed great results working with students pre-surgery. If there are no medical restrictions, and I have a solid bond with the student and they have adequate comprehension of the Method, I try to intensify the practice before surgery. This includes working intensely in the region that will be affected by the surgery. Of course, this is done in a gentle, technical, and responsible way.

Post-operatively, we need to consider the many layers of trauma created by the surgery, and the yoga teacher needs to work with the student through all of them--gentleness, use of appropriate techniques, and taking responsibility remain vital. I usually start the work after medical release, this will help the student to feel more comfortable and

secure, so the brain will help us to resume the movements.

The evolution will depend on the student's dedication and level of experience. Those who have practiced yoga for longer have more body awareness because their prefrontal cortex is more developed and can easily identify what has changed. In any case, the results will be effective for everyone.

We know that every trauma generates fear, and we prefer to try to forget what happened and return to normal life. However, this will no longer be possible. After a surgery, your body will not be the same, it will not have the same functionality as before. Denying reality will not help you.

Make yoga a resource to dissolve all the layers of trauma of this process—from the gross physical ones to the more subtle energetic ones. Know that in the Method, the positions are designed to stimulate numerous body regions and rescue your body's health potential. We can view surgery as the beginning of a path of growth and evolution if we choose. Surgery wounds us by necessity, but with yoga as a complement, it can be an experience that leads us to unleash more of our potential.



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