

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy (C-IAYT)



Developed by the International
Association of Yoga Therapists



Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy (C-IAYT)

Background

This Scope of Practice (Scope) is an important pillar of the comprehensive self-regulatory initiative that the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) began in 2007. This initiative has included developing educational standards for the training of yoga therapists, an accreditation process for recognizing training programs that meet these standards, a certification process for credentialing individual yoga therapists who meet IAYT's standards, and a [Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities](#) with detailed enforcement provisions to promote responsible practice. All of this work has been accomplished by committees of leaders in the yoga therapy field representing diverse lineages and methodologies, and IAYT has provided extensive opportunities for review and comment on each aspect of this work by our membership and other stakeholders in the yoga therapy community.

Introduction

IAYT accredits yoga therapist training programs and certifies yoga therapists internationally. This Scope document was developed by IAYT primarily to inform IAYT-certified yoga therapists (i.e., yoga therapists who have been granted the C-IAYT credential) about the activities, practices, skills, and knowledge that IAYT believes every yoga therapist with the C-IAYT credential should be able to utilize and responsibly apply in professional practice. Because IAYT is not a licensing body for yoga therapists, the Scope is not a legally binding document. Rather, it serves as a set of guidelines and parameters for IAYT-certified yoga therapists and the yoga therapy community. Additionally, the Scope is intended to be an information resource for healthcare practitioners, clients, healthcare insurers, and other individuals and entities that may be interested in learning what yoga therapy is and how it is practiced.

IAYT acknowledges that there are varying approaches to and styles of yoga therapy, so the Scope is not meant to prescribe or standardize the practice. Yoga therapy may adapt to diverse cultural and social environments and takes into account modern medical research and practice innovations. As such, each IAYT-certified yoga therapist may apply skills and knowledge according to their training in an appropriate and adaptive way, consistent with the therapeutic principles and accepted conventions of yoga therapy.

IAYT's role is to ensure competence at the level of the professional's entry to yoga therapy practice. Beyond this standard, individual C-IAYTs take responsibility for ensuring their competence and ongoing

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy

professional development.

It is important to note that this Scope is not meant to imply in any way that yoga therapists are physicians or practitioners of other licensed/regulated healthcare fields who are capable of diagnosing and treating conditions from the perspectives of these professions. Yoga therapists may, however, hold additional qualifications in other healthcare fields that enable them to utilize practices that fall outside of the Scope set forth in this document. In such instances, this Scope is not intended to limit in any way practices that may fall under the scope of practice of the concurrent healthcare qualification, or to otherwise impede or prevent a licensed/regulated healthcare practitioner from practicing according to their scope of practice.

It is recommended that all yoga therapists provide a client information document to ensure that clients understand the nature and extent of the services being provided; the practitioner's education, training, experience, and other qualifications; and the fact that yoga therapy is not a licensed/regulated healthcare profession in the state, province, or other jurisdiction in which they practice (unless this does not apply). As with any other healthcare provider, it is the responsibility of a yoga therapist to ensure the safety of a client at all times and to refer to a more appropriate therapist or medical practitioner when a client seeks care for conditions that cannot be appropriately addressed within the Scope.

Framework

Yoga is a scientific system of self-investigation, self-transformation, and self-realization that originated in India. [**Yoga therapy**](#) is the professional application of the principles and practices of yoga to promote health and well-being within a therapeutic relationship that includes personalized assessment, goal setting, lifestyle management, and yoga practices for individuals or small groups. The yoga tradition views each human being as a multidimensional system that includes numerous aspects—including body, breath, mind (intellect and emotions), and spirit—and their mutual interaction. Yoga therapy is founded on the basic principle that intelligent practice can positively influence the direction of change within these human dimensions, which are distinct from an individual's unchanging nature or spirit. The goals of yoga therapy include eliminating, reducing, and/or managing symptoms that cause suffering; improving function; helping to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of underlying causes of illness; and moving toward improved health and well-being.¹

Yoga therapists draw from the principles and practices of yoga, assessment skills, and familiarity with biomedical, psychological, and spiritual knowledge. Yoga therapists work with the client to develop and implement a self-empowering therapeutic plan² appropriate to the client's needs and oriented around prevention and health promotion.

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy

To ensure competence, an IAYT-certified yoga therapist (C-IAYT) has undertaken specialized training beyond that of a yoga teacher, in accordance with IAYT's [educational competencies for the training of yoga therapists](#) or has met IAYT's requirements for certification under alternate pathways. IAYT-certified yoga therapists adhere to the [professional ethics, guidelines, and codes](#) relating to the practice of yoga therapy as defined by IAYT and commit to not making false or inaccurate claims about yoga's therapeutic and healing capacities.

Competence to practice and *scope of practice* are separate yet inter-related concepts.³ IAYT's role is to specify, through this Scope of Practice, the range of activities in which a C-IAYT might reasonably engage in the course of their professional practice, and to ensure competence at the level of entry to yoga therapy practice. Beyond this standard, individual C-IAYTs take responsibility for ensuring their own competence and ongoing professional development to maintain and build on this competence.

Yoga therapy may occur in the following settings (in-person or online/virtual):

- Individualized one-to-one yoga therapy sessions. (If the client is a child/minor, the state or other local jurisdiction laws governing the safety of children/minors are to be adhered to.)
- Group yoga therapy is a session(s) in which a yoga therapist works with a small group of clients who have a similar condition or symptom(s), or with clients who have a variety of health or health-related conditions. A hallmark that differentiates group yoga therapy from group yoga teaching is the presence of an individual intake and assessment⁴ for each client in the group prior to commencing the class, personalization of the practice(s) based on the individual assessment, and reassessment at regular intervals throughout a series of classes.

QUALIFICATIONS, REQUIREMENTS, & ENCOURAGEMENTS OF THIS SCOPE OF PRACTICE

1 A yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is qualified to:

- Practice in a way that responsibly reflects their yoga therapy education, training, and experience.
- Work with clients on issues only within the therapist's area of competence/professional expertise.
- Assess each individual client using qualitative and/or quantitative yoga therapy assessment tools and maintain records according to any applicable statutory requirements.⁴
- Use the assessment process to identify any risk factors or contraindications to ensure the safety and appropriateness of the yoga therapy intervention from a biopsychosocial and spiritual perspective and to develop an appropriate therapeutic plan.^{2,4}
- Develop a therapeutic plan² and/or provide advice within the yoga therapy biopsychosocial and spiritual framework in accordance with the individual client's needs, goals, learning style, life circumstances, and access to resources such as time and equipment.
- Guide clients in implementing the therapeutic plan.²

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy

- Teach an integrated set of practices aligned with the needs and goals of the individual and consistent with the yoga therapy framework.
- Include yoga practices such as *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breathwork), relaxation, meditation, spiritual connection, *mudra* (energetic gestures and seals), *bandha* (energy locks), *mantra* (sacred sounds), mindfulness, *bhavana* (imagery), *sankalpa* (affirmation/intention), yogic (and ayurvedic) lifestyle, and dietary advice⁵ according to the yoga therapy framework, education in yoga philosophy, and other practices in the yoga tradition and for which the therapist has received appropriate education and training.
- Provide appropriate follow-up and review at regular intervals.
- Use and modify practices of yoga therapy to support the client and help the client manage their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health.
- Make modification to a practice by verbal instruction and/or consented touch⁶ as commensurate with the therapist's training and local laws. (Read IAYT's guidance on Consented Touch in Yoga Therapy Training, Teaching, and Practice [here](#).)
- Provide clear goals for each yoga therapy session.
- Provide clear instructions for any home practice that is recommended, with appropriate feedback mechanisms.
- Foster the client's own support networks, independent practice, and self-responsibility for their own well-being.
- Provide clear processes for client feedback.
- Provide guidance for lifestyle changes to create improved health and well-being according to the yoga therapy framework provided in yoga therapy training.

2 A yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is qualified by virtue of their knowledge of health and health systems to:

- Have a foundational knowledge of health and yoga therapy from a biopsychosocial and spiritual perspective. The therapist will use this understanding to inform their recommendations for suitable practices for each individual.
- Have a basic understanding of typical disease states and associated symptoms, the effects of medications, and associated contraindications. The therapist will use this understanding to inform their recommendations for suitable practices for each individual.
- Understand and integrate information provided by diagnoses from other qualified healthcare professionals.
- Have a basic understanding of different treatments and procedures from a variety of sources, or be able to identify and source credible and relevant information on other healthcare modalities, as needed.
- Have a basic understanding of health reports obtained from a variety of sources.
- Have a basic understanding of how to manage interpersonal issues that may arise in therapeutic relationships and seek support as appropriate.

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy

3 A yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is qualified to communicate with other health professionals to:

- Receive and provide referrals from and to other appropriate healthcare providers.
- Be part of a multi-disciplinary team when necessary or useful to optimize the care of the client.
- Use best-practice referral/feedback processes, with secure release of private information, to engage with medical or other healthcare professionals (when appropriate) to optimize client health and well-being outcomes.

4 As part of their professional practice, a yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is required to:

- Meet the requirements for certification as an IAYT-certified yoga therapist, by way of either graduation from an IAYT-accredited program or by having met IAYT's requirements for certification under alternate pathways.
- Maintain all qualifications and ongoing continuing education requirements.
- Maintain certification with IAYT.
- Maintain confidentiality of client information, including health records.
- Comply with the IAYT **Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities**.
- Observe all applicable local, state, province, regional, or country jurisdiction laws relating to the practice of healthcare and/or complementary care.

5 As part of their professional practice, a yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is encouraged to:

- Acquire a basic understanding of current yoga evidence-informed practices.
- Maintain a network of healthcare practitioner peers for the purpose of referrals.

ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THIS SCOPE OF PRACTICE

1 A yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is NOT qualified to:

- Work with clients presenting with issues outside the therapist's area of competence/professional expertise.
- Advertise themselves as a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner, unless they are also a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner.
- Perform physical adjustments,⁶ manipulations, or massage, unless appropriately qualified to do so. (Read IAYT's guidance on Consented Touch in Yoga Therapy Training, Teaching, and Practice [here](#).)
- Provide individual or group psychological counseling, unless appropriately qualified to do so.

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy

- Recommend specific lifestyle or nutrition changes outside of a yoga therapy framework, unless appropriately qualified to do so.

2 A yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is NOT qualified to:

- Diagnose a medical or psychological condition, unless qualified to do so as a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner.

3 A yoga therapist (C-IAYT) is NOT qualified to:

- Advise about other health treatment modalities, other than referring clients to appropriate personnel or services, unless appropriately qualified to do so.
- Order diagnostic tests or procedures outside their professional areas of expertise or qualifications.
- Interpret raw medical or psychological diagnostic test results, unless qualified to do so as a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner.
- Prescribe medication, unless qualified to do so as a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner.
- Prescribe nutritional supplements or herbs from Western or traditional medical methods such as Chinese medicine or ayurveda, unless appropriately qualified to do so.
- Advise clients about ceasing medication prescribed by another healthcare practitioner, unless qualified to do so as a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner.
- Perform any invasive procedures, unless qualified to do so as a licensed/government-regulated healthcare practitioner.
- Make recommendations regarding the advice or treatment provided by another healthcare professional, unless appropriately qualified to do so.

1. The full IAYT definition of yoga therapy can be found [here](#).
2. The term *therapeutic plan* refers to the implementation of yoga therapy and does not imply providing any medical treatment.
3. A *scope of practice*, such as the present document, is a framework referring to the range of activities in which members of a profession are authorized to engage by virtue of holding a credential, in this case *C-IAYT*. The responsibility for determining one's *competency areas*, however, falls to the individual C-IAYT, as individuals themselves necessarily hold the most accurate information about the extent of their own training and expertise.

Scope of Practice for Yoga Therapy

For example, a teacher's scope of practice could include delivering educational content, assessing student progress, creating lesson plans, and providing guidance on academic development; an individual teacher's competence is their ability to effectively teach and manage students. Although all teachers are qualified to teach at a basic level, one teacher might be especially competent in teaching advanced calculus, whereas another may specialize in teaching younger children basic arithmetic.

4. *Assessment* refers to assessing a client's presenting condition(s) and underlying cause(s) according to the yoga therapy framework and determining the appropriate yoga therapy goals, priorities, and tools useful for improving the client's condition. It does not include any medical assessment, but may be informed by a medical assessment report provided by a referring healthcare practitioner.

5. *Dietary advice* refers to advice relating to foods that may support or hinder a client's progress toward well-being, according to the tradition in which the yoga therapist is trained. It does not include the prescribing of herbs or other nutritional supplements, nor imply that a yoga therapist is a nutritionist or ayurvedic practitioner, unless they have other appropriate qualifications.

6. A yoga therapist may need to support and assist a client's proprioceptive and/or interoceptive awareness and/or alignment through appropriate use of touch. If clear consent has been provided by a client/student/patient, yoga therapy sessions may be supported by the use of appropriate touch, the documentation for which is noted in client records. IAYT's full definition of consented touch can be found [here](#).