

How Yoga Has Changed Veterans

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For many veterans, the battle does not end once they return home. The experiences during military service can have lasting effects on the mental health of veterans. Retired Army Green Beret John Mory, struggled with the after-effects of service, but found his peace in yoga.

Searching for a Solution

Mory served in the army for over 20 years. He was deployed all over Asia and completed tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Southern Philippines. During that time, Mory felt changes in his personality, but being a medic, he thought it was something he could treat himself. The Special Forces mentality is to push through, so that is what Mory did.



Army Green Beret John Mory during his tour in Afghanistan.

After retiring, the personality changes Mory felt during service became more prevalent being outside the military culture. Mory experienced a lot of added stress after the military and hit a tipping point. Everything that he tried to suppress broke through all at once and convinced him he needed to seek

assistance.

Mory was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and hypervigilance. His cortisol levels were through the roof and he suffered from sleep apnea. His initial experiences with doctors were not very pleasant as they gave very little advice and options. They left a bad taste in Mory's mouth.

Expanding Horizons

Mory began looking for solutions on his own and yoga kept popping up in his research. He was unsure and unfamiliar with yoga so he kept looking for other solutions. It was after participating in a research project for the National Institutes of Health that he began to see hope. After the project was completed, the head of the project spoke to Mory about therapy for PTSD.

"This simple act of kindness put me on the road to growth," Mory said. "I had never been approached like that before and it was very emotional for me."

Going to therapy made Mory more open-minded to trying new things. Yoga was still popping up in his research so he finally decided to take a class.

"Just one class totally shifted my mood," Mory said. "I walked out light on my feet, happy go lucky. I felt ready to take on the world. It was life-changing."

After practicing for six months, Mory fell in love with yoga and the progress he was seeing in his life. He was sleeping better, becoming more social and outgoing. The relationships in all areas of his life were improving.



John Mory in crow John Mory in crow pose or bakasana.

Reaching More Veterans

Experiencing the benefits of yoga compelled Mory to take yoga instructor training to teach fellow veterans and help those experiencing the same struggles he did.

Mory came across the Veterans Yoga Project, a non-profit organization that supports the recovery and resilience among veterans, families, and communities through mindfulness education, yoga classes, retreats, and advocacy events. VYP felt like the perfect place for Mory.

"What better organization to give me purpose and use as a vehicle to help other veterans," Mory said.

Mory has been with VYP for over two years and is a regional director for VYP in Virginia. He organizes and teaches yoga classes to veterans, police officers, and firefighters.



John Mory is the VYP regional director for Virginia.

Working with VYP, Mory has seen so much improvement in so many veterans just from yoga classes. One student told Mory that yoga has made him a better husband, others have been sleeping better, and some have even seen their blood sugar levels decrease.

“I believed in yoga because of how it affected me,” Mory said. “Seeing how these classes have had the same effect on other veterans, it sealed the deal for me that [yoga] is part of the solution.”

The biggest obstacle is **teaching mindfulness**, according to Mory. Yoga and mindfulness have a “hippie” stigma that many veterans are initially turned off to, but the science behind it is what resonates with them.

“Stress has physical effects on our body. It has a domino effect on veteran health,” Mory said. “What attracted me to it was the science behind it. Breathwork, gratitude, and mindfulness--they all have a positive effect on our nervous system.”

Being open-minded is vital when taking yoga classes. If a veteran is not open-minded, they won't be able to reap the benefits of yoga.

For those interested in trying yoga for the first time, go in open-minded and try to be as focused as possible, Mory advises. Practice for a month, try different teachers and different classes. Talk to your instructors about what you'd like to gain from classes and any modifications you would need.

Veterans Yoga Project offers online classes that are both live and pre-recorded. Classes are available on Facebook and Zoom. Check out [**their weekly schedule here.**](#)

“I hear vets say ‘it's not for me,’ but there are so many types of yoga,” Mory said. “As long as you have connective tissue and a nervous system, yoga is for you.”

John Mory is the regional director for the Veterans Yoga Project in the Virginia region. To learn more about resources available to veterans and the benefits of yoga, visit their website

Serena Lopez

Author

What do you think?
