

# Combat Yoga Fitness

**For military and law enforcement**

**By Clifford C. Smith, CYI, CPT, CAM**

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A Guide for Stress Management through the application of Combat Yoga Fitness™ and holistic lifestyle principles.

**“A simple to follow program that can be completed in 30 minutes”**

*Vis Medicatrix Naturae*

"If we can stay awake when our lives are changing,  
secrets will be revealed to us--secrets about ourselves, about the nature of  
life,  
and about the eternal source of happiness and peace that is  
always available, always renewable, already within us."

—Elizabeth Lesser

This book is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any disease. Always consult a medical doctor if you suspect you have a medical problem. Nor is it a substitute for any treatment that may have been prescribed by your doctor.

**About the Author:** Cliff is a former member of the Canadian Forces and served as an infantryman in the Canadian Grenadier Guards.

He is certified to teach yoga and has completed a variety of fitness programs through ACE, NASM, NESTA and GMP Fitness. Other study areas include naturopathy (college diploma), reflexology (certificate), posture analysis (certificate), stress management (certificate), psychology (college diploma) and complementary and alternative medicine (NIH).

Cliff also is certified in executive protection, holds an advanced credential in paralegal applications, and has completed management courses through Duke University, Continuing Studies.

He works primarily with clients who are injured or have underlying stress conditions.



Cliff is available for teaching and to conduct seminars. For additional information, you can email him at: [cbtyogafit@gmail.com](mailto:cbtyogafit@gmail.com)

Or you can visit his website at: [www.CombatYogaFitness.com](http://www.CombatYogaFitness.com)

**Introduction:** Yoga is a mind, body and spiritual discipline going back thousands of years to the ancient Vedas. Many of its core teachings can be found in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, also known as the eight limbs of yoga. While this program is non-denominational in its scope, there is nonetheless a wealth of information to be found in many of the older texts on yoga.

Combat Yoga Fitness™ is a combination of hatha yoga, fitness based yoga, ayurveda (the healing branch of yoga), naturopathy, marma therapy (Indian acupuncture), posture analysis, and reflexology. Its purpose is to provide simplified solutions to high states of stress.

Since people serving in the military and law enforcement absorb an enormous amount of stress while performing their day to day jobs and assignments, I can't think of a more important group of people that would benefit from this type of program.

I am confident that with the regular adoption of the principles found in this book that it will help you overcome the stress related problems that you're experiencing, whether manifested as job related stress, general anxiety disorder, panic disorder or PTSD. Yoga when used in combination with other holistic modalities can bring about healing and transformation on many levels.

There are many studies linking yoga with its many health benefits. Best of all, there's no investment in expensive equipment, like so many other health and fitness programs. All you need is enthusiasm, a relaxed area, a practice mat, some loose fitting clothing, water for hydration, and you're ready to begin. It can also be performed in regular military garb on or off the base.

This program is intended for Canadian Forces and American Armed Forces military personnel, since both nations work closely together. Combat Yoga Fitness can be utilized as a stress reduction component for military personnel returning from conflict areas exhibiting symptoms of severe stress. It also can be used by those serving in law enforcement.

**Contents:**

**CHAPTER**

[1] Stress a brief look.....	1-8
[2] Stress Management.....	9-26
[3] Combat Yoga Fitness Warm Ups.....	27-35
[4] Combat Yoga Fitness Poses.....	36-58
[5] Glossary and Resources.....	59-61

# Stress

## Chapter 1

Stress can be overwhelming when it exceeds a person's threshold for tension. Chronic stress not only weakens the immune system, but it also affects our sleep and our ability to interact and function normally in society. People facing enormous stress eventually fall apart and find themselves irritable, angry and unable to cope with even small problems. Stressful situations often become unmanageable and blown out of proportion.

Many people cope with acute and chronic states of stress by turning to alcohol, using drugs, overeating and taking OTC sleep aid products. This is known as *negative coping patterns*. In time, the problem only gets worse and may lead to full blown general anxiety disorder, panic attacks and uncontrollable horror, as in PTSD.

For those people who seek medical attention and are diagnosed with GAD, PD or PTSD, medications are often prescribed to control the anxiety and block the panic attacks. If you suffer from one of these disorders, you are probably aware of the numbing effects that many of these medications have over the long term, especially the benzodiazepine class of minor tranquilizers, which is often prescribed for controlling anxiety and panic attacks. With long term use, the mind becomes dull, along with a deterioration of motor skills and coordination.

While many of these drugs effectively control the symptoms of anxiety and panic, none of them address the root cause of the problem.

Unfortunately, there is no herbal medication that I'm aware of that is potent enough for the long term management of people suffering from GAD, PD or PTSD. However, herbs can be used effectively in combination with yoga, meditation and other holistic modalities to manage and, in some cases, reverse the negative effects of these debilitating conditions.

In ayurveda, which is the healing branch of yoga, psychological turmoil that manifests as anxiety or panic is viewed as undigested experience, which the mind has been unable to process and that ultimately affects the heart center. This is why so many people suffering from anxiety - or panic attacks - imagine that they are experiencing a heart attack, because their heart chakra is out of step, resulting in imbalance.

In essence, this undigested experience is trauma that often manifests as full blown anxiety and panic. By using the Combat Yoga Fitness techniques in this book, you'll be able to identify and target that trauma and create a relaxed state of mind, body and spirit. Moreover, by transforming undigested experience, the mind and heart can heal from the debilitating effects of unresolved trauma.

Hypothetically speaking, if you were to fall and fracture your arm, it would likely require physical therapy in order to work out the trauma and to regain the arm's full range of motion. Similarly, anxiety and panic is an emotional trauma that affects our mental and physical state of well being, despite there being no broken bones. Yet, it too requires a form of therapy to resolve itself, otherwise one cannot heal and the trauma will continue

It is through lifestyle changes, self-awareness and self-acceptance that we can bring about the deep healing of personal trauma, which goes to the root of the cause, rather than taking a pill to mask the symptom only to discover that when the medication wears off, you're right back where you started.

People working in stressful jobs like the military and law enforcement are usually familiar with the stress response:

- Heart rate increases
- Blood pressure increases
- Rate of breathing increases
- Sweat production increases
- Glucose levels increases
- Digestive secretions are reduced

What they're unfamiliar with, however, is the relaxation response, a term coined by Dr. Herbert Benson, a Harvard professor:

- Heart rate is reduced
- Blood pressure is reduced
- Rate of breathing decreases
- Sweat production decreases
- Glucose levels are stabilized
- Digestive secretions are increased

In the case of the stress response, the sympathetic nervous system is in full swing; whereas in the relaxation response, the parasympathetic nervous system takes over, creating a relaxed state of well being.

Through the application of Combat Yoga Fitness techniques, you will learn how to tap into the relaxation response, at will, so you can control situations giving rise to anxiety or panic.

Realistically, for most people serving in the military and law enforcement, the stress response has become an all too familiar way of life. Hence, negative coping patterns, such as turning to alcohol, drugs and overeating often take hold. However, they only serve to further exacerbate the underlying problem, which is the inability to relax and release trauma.

One of the principles of naturopathy is that we all have the power of self-healing. When we tap into it, we are able to transform our lives for the better. There is nothing to be ashamed of if you suffer from a stress related disorder. It is a part of each person's unique journey and karma. People that have overcome personal setbacks and illness tend to be much stronger and seem to develop a greater sense of purpose in life. A good example would be world cyclist champion, Lance Armstrong.

If you apply the techniques in this program and work at it daily, I promise that you'll discover that there is light at the end of the tunnel. When I was teaching a stress reduction class at a fitness club, one of the students that attended it regularly was a Marine that had served in a number of conflict areas. One day he came up to me and thanked me for teaching the class, since it had helped him enormously with relaxing and managing his stress.

His words are what inspired me to write this book, as I felt there was a definite need for a program like this.



# Stress Management

## Chapter 2

An essential component to stress management is proper breathing technique. In yoga this is known as pranayama (breath control), and is one of the eight limbs of the *Yoga Sutras*. When we are stressed out, angry, fearful or feel panicked, our breathing is immediately affected and usually entails shallow chest breathing (intercostal breathing). It's important that you become aware of your breathing patterns during states of tension and anxiety and identify what: "you are" feeling.

- Am I angry?
- Am I fearful?
- Am I panicked?

By observing your breathing patterns during times of increased tension and anxiety, you'll be able to properly identify if your breathing is shallow and irregular. If it is, you will then shift into the *relaxation response*, by using proper breathing technique.

While there are many different breathing techniques used in yoga, our primary focus will be on "abdominal" breathing, which is synonymous with diaphragmatic breathing. Abdominal breathing will help you focus your attention, as well as bring calmness to agitated states. In short, it stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system and triggers the *relaxation response*.

Look for a flat area that is carpeted or you can use an exercise mat. Start by lying on your back with your hands falling to both sides with the palms facing upwards towards the ceiling. The legs are bent and the knees also point upwards. See following illustration.

This posture is a modification of *savasana* (the resting pose) and it relieves tension in the lumbar region. Many clients I've worked with that have stress related problems usually have lower back issues, so it's an excellent pose to adopt into your practice.



Focus on relaxing each part of your body while inhaling through the nose, as your belly rises, then exhale fully through the nose. Try to match your in-breaths and out-breaths so they are equal in length. You can start with 2 to 5 minutes of “abdominal” breathing and gradually build up to 10-15 minutes for deeper relaxation.

It is important to be conscious of your breathing and focus on taking in positive energy (as you inhale through the nose), and release negative tension (as you exhale through the nose). Try to scan each part of your body and identify where you're holding tension and let it go on the out-breath.

Ideally, the modified resting pose can be done in the morning and evening, (before bedtime). It can also be performed whenever you feel tense, or during an anxiety or panic attack. If you focus on deep free flowing breathing, it will usually stop the anxiety in its tracks.

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