

# Viniyoga for Chronic High Stress

## Viniyoga for Stress Reduction: The Aetna Mind-Body Pilot

- The *Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program* is a specialized Viniyoga Therapy intervention developed for a mind-body pilot for Aetna Inc., one of the nation's largest health insurance companies.

J Occup Health Psychol. 2012 Apr;17(2):246-58. **Effective and viable mind-body stress reduction in the workplace: a randomized controlled trial.**

Wolever RQ, Bobinet KJ, McCabe K, Mackenzie ER, Fekete E, Kusnick CA, Baime M.

Int J Yoga Therap. 2012;(22):91-2. **Building bridges for yoga therapy research: the Aetna, inc., mind-body pilot study on chronic and high stress.**

Kusnick C, Kraftsow G, Hilliker M.

- The *Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program* provides tools for managing stress including physical yoga postures, breathing techniques, guided relaxation and mental techniques. The original pilot study was a 12-week program, 1 hour each week. The current program taught in Aetna facilities is 50 minutes/week for 10 weeks to accommodate corporate schedules and cycles.
- Objectives of the *Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program* include yoga methods to help participants:
  - Relieve musculoskeletal tension in back, neck and shoulders
  - Relieve headaches caused by musculoskeletal tension
  - Improve sleep
  - Increase feelings of well-being
  - Improve coping strategies for dealing with stressful events and the subsequent negative symptoms of stress
  - Adopt home and office strategies for reducing stress through yoga.
- The intervention includes a weekly on-site class, home and office practice tools and weekly educational/motivational e-mails.
- See the back the Aetna Mind-Body pilot study results.



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The *Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program* was developed by Gary Kraftsow and the American Viniyoga Institute for the Aetna Mind-Body Pilot Study. Mary Hilliker, RDN, E-RYT 500, CYT, 5 Koshas Yoga & Wellness, Wausau, WI coordinated the program in the original pilot and for several years as the program was institutionalized in Aetna facilities.

The *Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program* is taught by Certified Viniyoga Teachers who are trained by Gary Kraftsow and the American Viniyoga Institute. *5 Koshas Yoga & Wellness and the River Flow Yoga Teacher Training School* train 200 hour Viniyoga Wellness Instructors in central Wisconsin.

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## Aetna Inc. Mind-Body Pilot Results

### Statistically significant results on primary and secondary objectives:

- Perceived stress scale
- Sleep quality
- Heart rhythm coherence ratio of heart rate variability (measure of autonomic balance)
- Current level of pain (*Viniyoga intervention*)

### Directionally favorable results:

- Breathing rate
- Worst pain ever and average pain
- Symptoms of depression

Virtually all participants in the initial yoga study group reported that they had incorporated some of the *Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program* tools into their daily lives. Participants reported that they:

- Used yoga breathing techniques to reduce stress, prepare for sleep or increase energy levels
- Started a home practice or desk break practice to relieve muscle tension and improve postures
- Increased awareness about how they respond to perceived stressors and use of coping strategies.

Half of the participants in the yoga study group reported **barriers to participation** in the VSRP with work-related issues being the most frequently cited barrier (meetings, phone calls, last-minute assignments, customer problems, heavy workloads).

## Quotes from Participants in the Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program

*"I can consciously alter my physical state by practicing these techniques on a consistent basis."*

*"I'm more aware of the moment stress begins and use breath to reduce it. I also use mini-postures, poses, and breath to reduce keyboard, back and neck stress."*

*"I can now identify when I'm starting to feel stressed (tension in my neck and faster breathing and heart rate) and can counteract the stress by doing a breathing exercise. I immediately feel calmer and have less tension in my body."*

*"I never thought yoga would be for me... the breathing and relaxation has kept me from losing my temper."*

*"For me it has been a life-changing event and may have saved my life. I feel my future is brighter. I have a greater sense of well-being. "*

## For More Information

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Mary Hilliker, RDN, E-RYT 500, CYT, is available to discuss Viniyoga stress management program options for health care, corporate and worksite settings. Contact Mary at [mary@5koshasyoga.com](mailto:mary@5koshasyoga.com) or 715.218.7120.