

Good-bye Back Pain

By Leonard Faye, D.C.

Reviewed by Donna Martin

Good-bye Back Pain, subtitled “a step-by-step guide to full back recovery,” provides a clear and readable explanation of the major causes of back pain and the various treatment approaches currently available.

Written by a chiropractor with 30 years experience as a back specialist, this book naturally emphasizes chiropractic, but Dr. Faye gives a fair resume of many other methodologies, including Yoga.

Dr. Faye points out that “most back exercises prescribed by specialists are derived from Yoga” and that Yoga offers the benefits of “improving strength, endurance, flexibility and balance. Yoga does it all.” However, he does suggest that a “skilled motion manipulator” (i.e., a chiropractor) should find and correct “joint blockages” before Yoga is started in order to avoid spontaneous adjustments at inflamed joints. He adds that “Yoga also offers a serenity and philosophy that controls stress and promotes a natural, healthful lifestyle.

Good-bye Back Pain is “reader friendly,” with large print, six clearly structured chapters, photographs of the exercises recommended, and simple accompanying instructions.

Chapter one of the book, “The Causes of Back Pain,” discusses the major causes for back pain, including conditions such as arthritis and pregnancy, as well as mechanical dysfunction, injury, and degenerative back pain. Written “for the lay person who wants complete answers in language easy to understand,” the book is a useful tool for Yoga therapists as well. One of the points Dr. Faye makes is that “sitting improperly is the worst thing you can do to your back, and one of the easiest postures to correct.” This is certainly one aspect of Yoga training that can help prevent or correct back problems.

In this first chapter “stress-induced back pain” is also discussed. Dr. Faye clearly respects the role of stress in the case of certain back problems, both as an underlying source of the problem, and as an outcome of having back pain. He mentions that: “Worry, fear, hate, anger, frustration, and pent-up emotions cause chemical reactions in the brain, triggering a chain of events that can result in muscle spasm and pain.” With this in mind, Dr. Faye tells the story of a man who incurs his first “back attack” the day before he is

to fly to meet a daughter he has not seen for 19 years. The trip is postponed while his back improves. Three weeks later, the day before he again intends to fly to see her, the man re-experiences the same symptoms of acute back pain. Dr. Faye goes on to note that: "if a condition is allowed to persist, the brain may begin to interpret the accompanying restrictions as normal. You could become stuck in your predicament indefinitely."

It has been suggested by Yoga therapists that the various individual holding patterns which contribute to postural problems also contribute to the likelihood of back pain. It is this habitual unnecessary tension in the body which creates the very foundation for back pain. Because these patterns are habitual, they are generally unconscious. According to Dr. Faye, "reversing these conditioned patterns requires specific balancing exercises." Since "posture is an involuntary action which must be challenged by our balance, Yoga balancing exercises are extremely beneficial."

The second chapter, "Self-Diagnosis", presents a useful self-assessment quiz to help the reader determine the reason for back pain. It also presents diagnostic tests to pinpoint the problem as either disc, back joint, sacroiliac joint, or muscularly related. These tests and explanations make the whole issue of back pain simple and easy to understand. The chapter ends with a description of the symptoms related to the various kinds of back problems, and useful suggestions for which professional to see, depending on the nature of the problem.

The third chapter describes the various professionals who might be able to help someone with a back problem, including medical doctors, orthopedic surgeons, neurologists, physiotherapists, rheumatologists, chiropractors, massage therapists, osteopaths, Yoga therapists, and acupuncturists. Yoga is included as a viable therapy for "helping the patient to achieve strong, flexible muscles and ligaments, as well as to activate the balancing responses." Dr. Faye makes it clear that any one approach is unlikely to be effective. For lasting results, a combined approach is usually necessary. There is a description of the kind of pain that may indicate a need for immediate surgery (although according to research done at the San Francisco Spine Institute only 10 percent of the back surgeries done in the U.S. may be necessary), as well as a list of options for other kinds of pain.

The author even mentions that "psychiatrists and clinical psychologists...can be a big help."

The fourth chapter describes the various treatments ranging from drug therapy, ultrasound, TENS, and cold packs, to massage, manipulation, exercise, and Yoga.

In chapter five: "Home Treatment," goals are outlined for reducing pain, inflammation and swelling, discouraging scar tissue formation, promoting healing of primary tissue, increasing range of motion during and after recovery, increasing strength, improving posture and lifting methods, stretching, and reducing stress. The exercises suggested and illustrated in this chapter are derived from Yoga postures, such as cobra, forward bend (from a chair), cat pose, leg stretch, lunge, knee press, twist, bridge, bow, and arm and leg stretch. They are explained simply and clearly. My only criticism is that they are mixed in with the text and not adequately organized. The reader is required to read through the entire book and then go back and choose the exercises appropriate for his/her condition. I would have preferred to see the photographs for the various groups of exercises separated and labeled. However, the instructions are excellent with good reminders about breathing.

The final chapter is on relaxation. Dr. Faye suggests that we "turn off the stress, anger, and fear [and] discover the inner peace." According to the author, "the combination of stress management as well as removing mechanical dysfunctions is essential for long-lasting control of pain." The need for relaxation, of course, is well known to therapists and Yoga teachers who work with people experiencing pain. To help cope with stress, and as an aid to learn how to relax, Dr. Faye outlines the approach of Autogenics. Dr. Faye's sequence of chapters is very appropriate, and it seems fitting to end on the note of relaxation.

Good-bye Back Pain is a useful resource book and I recommend it to Yoga teachers, therapists, and anyone with back problems.

Healthy Back: Exercises for High-Stress Professionals

By Larry Payne

Reviewed by Donna Martin

An excellent companion to *Good-bye Back Pain*, and a useful booklet on its own, is Larry Payne's *Healthy Back: Exercises for High-Stress Professionals*.

An experienced Yoga teacher who has trained with T. K. V. Desikachar and Professor A. G. Mohan, Dr. Payne has become an expert in treating back problems using Yoga therapy.

In his booklet, simple clear instructions with accompanying photos are given for appropriate Yoga exercises related to specific back conditions. The exercises are easy to follow and organized according to upper back and lower back, levels one, two, and three. All the exercises are suitable for beginners. Good biomechanics are emphasized in sitting, standing, lifting, and sleeping positions. Dr. Payne also provides brief comments and suggestions on the principles behind the exercises as well as on related topics such as diet and relaxation.

Other books for the back may describe similar exercises, but Larry Payne's *Healthy Back Booklet* goes a step farther by emphasizing the importance of working with the breath. Dr. Payne incorporates breath-

ing instructions with each exercise and into each sequence. This recognition of the significance of the breath, along with the clear photos and instructions, makes the booklet a unique and invaluable tool for Yoga teachers, therapists, students, and anyone with a back problem.

Audio cassette tapes are available to accompany the booklets, which can be purchased separately or in sets. A video and wall charts are also available.

For information, call (213) 306-8845, or write to:

Samata International,
4150 Tivoli Avenue,
Los Angeles, CA 90066.

Energize with Yoga

A video featuring Liliás Folan, a Nityananda Institute presentation
Reviewed by Donna Martin

Anyone who has worked with Liliás in person knows that her classes can range from the vigorously challenging to being totally relaxing. Either way, she is an empowering teacher, and the “energizing” effects of doing yoga with Liliás come as much from her joyful enthusiasm as from her impeccable yoga.

This video presents an appropriate combination of movements and postures for students of all levels. Geared particularly for advanced beginners and intermediate students, the poses are clearly explained and demonstrated with careful attention to easing into and out of the holding positions and, of course, to the breath.

Liliás has a special way of inviting you to experience the spirit of the practice, using suggestions such as: “Rest your concentration lightly, like a silk scarf upon your skin.” Her words and demonstrations convincingly remind us not to strive but rather to work at our own level.

Divided into two 30-minute “workouts,” the first half hour features warm-up stretches for the back, as well as a lunge series, cobra/locust variations, bow pose, and a sitting relaxation. The second half hour involves balance poses, a warrior/half moon sequence, dog pose, sitting forward bend, bridge, twist, and savasana (deep relaxation).

Liliás’ experience as a television instructor is evident in the ease and smoothness of her presentation. At times, voice-over techniques and background music could have been used more effectively. As a viewer, I was also aware of wanting to mirror the instructor, and would have preferred her to reverse her use of the terms “right” and “left” to allow for mirroring.

On the whole, the video is excellent and I highly recommend it for students of all levels. Teachers, too, should find Liliás’ radiant presence inspiring and energizing. She is a beautiful reminder that “the joy is in the journey.”

Energize with Yoga, the video,
is distributed by Rudra Press,
P.O. Box 1973,
Cambridge, MA 02238.