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Christine D. Walck

*Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University*, daileyc1@erau.edu

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# Yoga's Journey from East to West: A Tale of Adaptation, Wellness, and Healing

## The balancing Act



**Christine D Walck\***

*Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Aerospace Blvd, Daytona beach, FL 32114, USA*

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**\*Corresponding author:** Christine D Walck, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Aerospace Blvd, Daytona beach, FL 32114, USA

### Abstract

Prepare for a unique journey through the world of yoga with an opinionated, funny twist. Join a devout Catholic, a PhD-toting engineering professor, and an extreme athlete as they navigate the intriguing yet mysterious realm of yoga. Their initial skepticism, rooted in Eastern philosophy, quickly dissolves as yoga seamlessly melds with their Catholic faith, offering a universal path to physical and mental well-being. Buckle up for a humorous takedown of common misconceptions about yoga's compatibility with Western religious beliefs. It's all about respecting the body, which conveniently aligns with their active (with a dash of clumsy adventures thrown in).

Yoga emerges as their steadfast companion amidst the chaos of academia, motherhood, and athletic pursuits. Dive into the physical and mental benefits of yoga, coupled with its intriguing biomechanics that are bound to tickle your geeky side. But hold on to your yoga mats; things take a serious turn with a discussion on yoga's profound impact on foster children carrying the weight of trauma. Explore common traumas like abuse, neglect, and separation from biological families, all while embracing the paradoxical longing for even abusive homes, reminding us of the universal need for connection. In this narrative, humor dances with seriousness, creating a storytelling experience like no other. So, fasten your seatbelts and prepare for a rollercoaster ride through the world of yoga, where laughter and contemplation blend seamlessly on the mat.

**Keywords:** Yoga; Exercise Physiology; Catholic Perspective; Mindfulness; Biomechanics; Foster Children

### Opinion Piece

As a devout Catholic, PhD-toting engineering professor, and extreme athlete (phew, that's a mouthful!), my foray into the world of yoga has been anything but ordinary. You see, yoga and I had a bit of an 'It's complicated' relationship initially. It's like that distant cousin from the East you've heard about but never met – intriguing yet a tad mysterious. Yoga's got this rich backstory, over 5,000 years old, deeply entrenched in Eastern philosophy. But here's the kicker – it's not just for the Buddhists and Hindus! No, sir. No, ma'am. It's like the universal charger of physical and mental well-being, fitting perfectly into my Catholic lifestyle without any adaptors.

Now, let's talk misconceptions. In the West, where yoga often gets the side-eye for possibly conflicting with religious beliefs, I'm living proof that it's more adaptable than a chameleon at a disco. It's all about respecting the body (which, let's face it, needs some serious TLC after my spastic attempts at bodybuilding, Cross-Fit, wakeboarding and, oh the rock-climbing adventures). Yoga,

amidst my chaotic juggling act of being a professor, foster mom, wife, and occasional astronaut training programs, is the constant. It's like the Swiss Army knife in my wellness toolkit. It's not just about twisting myself into a pretzel – it's a full-on system upgrade for the body, boosting everything from flexibility to cardiovascular health.

But wait, there's more! Yoga's biomechanics are a geek's dream. Each pose is a masterclass in balance, strength, and injury prevention – vital for someone who's as athletically adventurous (read: clumsy) as me. Then came my 'Eat, Pray, Love' moment at a silent retreat in Germantown, Maryland, USA. Imagine, a talkative professor like me, embracing silence! This retreat wasn't just a pause button on my life; it was a reset. It taught me the power of mindfulness, the art of inner peace, and that silence is indeed golden (especially when you're normally surrounded by the delightful chaos of two energetic 2-year-olds, two hugely affectionate bulldogs who think they are lap dogs, and one large fussy laboratory-hound mix who acts like an old crotchety lady).

Speaking of the little ones - no not the bulldogs - let's talk about yoga's impact on foster children. It's like a secret superpower for these kids. Sure, they need their time to go full-throttle wild, but yoga brings this beautiful calmness. It's a way for them to express themselves, manage stress, and process their emotions. It's not just 'sit down and be quiet' time; it's 'let's learn how to ride the waves of our feelings' time. And it's a great way to get them to try new things (poses) with laughter and without being embarrassed. It's super cute! In my home, yoga has become this amazing bonding and healing activity. And in the grander scheme, I advocate for its inclusion in foster care - not just as an exercise, but as a lifeline for emotional stability and growth.

Foster care is a challenging and often heart-wrenching journey for many children. These young souls frequently carry the heavy baggage of trauma, the weight of which can be difficult to comprehend. Common types of abuse and trauma that children in foster care may experience include physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and the upheaval of being separated from their biological families. Physical abuse can leave physical and emotional scars, making it challenging for these children to trust and connect with others. Emotional abuse, on the other hand, can be just as damaging, leaving invisible wounds that erode their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Neglect can manifest in physical and emotional ways, depriving them of the care and attention they desperately need. Sexual abuse, a deeply traumatic experience, can shatter their trust in adults and leave them feeling vulnerable and violated.

The separation from their biological families is another profound trauma. It disrupts the only sense of stability they may have known, plunging them into an unfamiliar world of uncertainty and upheaval. These traumas can have a lasting impact, affecting their emotional well-being and making it difficult for them to form healthy relationships and cope with the challenges of life. Even if the home they were taken from was abusive, the children still often miss it. This paradoxical longing for a place that caused them

pain is a complex and heartbreaking aspect of their experience. It's a testament to the deep-seated need for connection and belonging that all humans share, regardless of the circumstances.

This is where yoga steps in as a beacon of hope and healing. Yoga can provide these children with a safe and nurturing space to explore their bodies and emotions. It can allow them to regain a sense of control over their physical selves, something that may have been stripped away by abuse or neglect. Yoga can teach them to breathe, to be present in the moment, and to let go of the burdens they carry. Through yoga, these children can begin to release the tension and trauma stored in their bodies. It holds the potential to offer them a way to express their feelings without words, allowing them to process their emotions in a non-threatening environment. Yoga can foster a sense of self-compassion, teaching them to be gentle with themselves as they embark on their healing journey.

The practice of yoga is not a magical cure, but it can be a powerful tool in the healing process. It may help these children build resilience, develop coping mechanisms, and learn to regulate their emotions. It can offer them a sense of empowerment, reminding them that they have the strength to overcome their past and create a brighter future. In my role as a foster mom, I've witnessed the transformative effects of yoga on these children firsthand. It's like watching them emerge from their cocoons, slowly unfurling their wings and discovering their own strength and beauty. Yoga provides them with a sense of stability and consistency in a world that has often been anything but stable.

So, in the midst of my chaotic life as an academic, athlete, wife, and foster mom, yoga has become not just a practice but a lifeline. It's a lifeline for me, allowing me to navigate the challenges of my roles with grace and resilience. And it's a lifeline for these children, offering them a path to healing and a brighter future. Yoga is about finding balance in the cup of life, one breath, one pose, one laugh at a time, and for foster children, it's a lifeline of hope and healing.



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