

Beyond the Barracks: Structuring Wellness in Civilian Life



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Community: **Pillars**



COMMUNITY



ACTIVITY



MENTAL HEALTH



RECOVERY & SLEEP

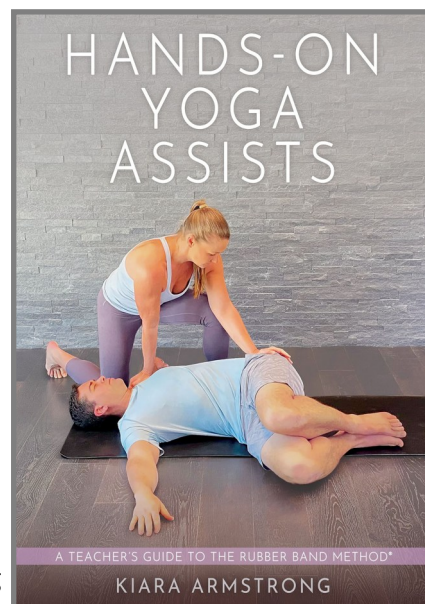


NUTRITION

Yoga: A Path to Recovery for Transitioning Veterans

**Holistic Health Through Flexibility,
Resilience, and Mindful Movement**

Kiara Armstrong, E-RYT 500, YACEP, CMT is the founder of the Rubber Band Method®, a consent-based, anatomy-informed approach to hands-on yoga assists. Living with and healing from C-PTSD has shaped her approach to teaching, reinforcing her belief that touch, when offered with skill and consent, can be a powerful tool for healing and wellness. She is the author of *Hands-On Yoga Assists: A Teacher's Guide to the Rubber Band Method®* (Human Kinetics, 2025), which offers a clear, adaptable system for bringing safe, purposeful touch into the yoga classroom.



We are obviously going to talk mostly about yoga today, but you have a very diverse athletic and fitness background. Can you talk a little about your health journey?

I've been an athlete pretty much most of my life in various different types of sports because for me, I've always found, even when I was a kid, that being active and moving was where I felt best. It's where I felt healthiest.

CONT. INSIDE ➡

MilitaryConnected.org is a nonprofit organization improving the military-connected community's transition experience through employer education, data driven research, and access to a network of job opportunities with military-ready employers.

The Vegetus Foundation is dedicated to helping Americans improve their quality of life through education on healthy living and has published the Nutrition Health Review since 1979. Learn more at nutritionhealthreview.com



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MENTAL HEALTH

For me, movement has always been medicine. I've coached CrossFit, weightlifting, and personal training, while also exploring outlets like boxing, surfing, rock climbing, and long-distance backpacking. I've always gravitated toward intense, dynamic training because it helped me burn off energy and find a sense of peace through exertion. I stumbled into yoga almost 25 years ago—back then I'd never even heard the word—but it left an indelible mark. Over time, it became the balance to all my high-intensity work, offering the restorative side my body and mind needed.

At what point on your journey did you say "This is different" or "there is something more here"

Being active and moving is how I've always been able to make myself feel better. When I started yoga, it would actually make me extremely tired and fatigued and I didn't like that.

It was hard, but I stuck with it because I had to – it was for credits. What I would later come to realize was that fatigue was actually my nervous system regulating itself. The first thing I noticed was a difference in how my body felt during other workouts - Like my body wasn't as stiff. I wasn't getting as many nagging soft tissue tears.

The big change really was when I felt this "internal flexibility" start to develop. I wasn't as irritable, I wasn't having such highs and lows in my reactions to life events. I was building stress resiliency and I didn't realize it at the time.

You've been a personal trainer, taught CrossFit, done epic adventure hikes - what would you say to someone with that background who has a preconceived notion of yoga?

I'd say that you've got options. There's everything from power yoga which can almost feel like HIIT classes, to yoga Nidra where you literally just lay there and breathe and listen to a guided meditation, and then everything in between.

If you are someone who is into exerting yourself, I think there's a tremendous amount of therapy in that. Go to a power yoga class, do lots of chaturangas. Just be open to the



balance other classes provide if they speak to you...and I suspect they may speak to you as you get older!

You mentioned balance and the nervous system previously. What should our audience understand about creating balance in their workout regimen?

The sympathetic nervous system is like the gas pedal of a car, providing energy, movement, and wakefulness. The parasympathetic nervous system is the brake, allowing for rest, sleep, and stress resilience. Most of us only focus on the gas and eventually, like driving to the grocery store with only the gas, a crash will occur.

Consistently "pressing the gas" (being stressed) without engaging the "brake" (rest and relaxation) leads to an imbalanced, dysregulated nervous system. Practices like yoga, with the addition of breath work, touch, and music, help strengthen the parasympathetic branch, allowing the body to "let off the gas" and achieve balance. This branch of the nervous system needs consistent training to build strength—just like a muscle. Practicing passive exercises, like yoga, builds the strength of this branch over time to help balance and regulate the nervous system.

How do you personally try to achieve balance when designing your workout plan?

For me, it starts with self-awareness. If I am feeling really wiped out, it's not the day to go do CrossFit. As fun as throwing around barbells seems, I am going to injure myself. If I need to be active I have other outlets, like going on a hike. With that said, if my body is feeling it I still go do challenging things. For the most part, I follow a plan that





mixes in weightlifting, cardio (weighted hikes), and yoga. What's interesting is my husband just does CrossFit and experiences wayyyy more injuries than me.

The concept of injury prevention and balance is a good way to transition into discussing your book. Can you talk a little about how it came together?

The Rubber Band Method® came about from my personal experience with PTSD and the realization that conventional medicine was not helping. I found healing through the full spectrum of yoga—movement, meditation, and breathwork—but skillful touch stood out to me as a particularly powerful tool for regulation.

With a highly sensitive nervous system, I noticed how skillful touch could regulate me almost instantly—I'd feel calmer, safer, more grounded. Once I had done the deep personal work of healing my own nervous system over time, I felt called to offer that same experience to my students.

Yoga is, at its core, a wellness toolbox filled with practices that bring balance—whether that's supporting the soft tissues to prevent injury or calming the nervous system to buffer against stress. My journey, along with emerging research, has convinced me that we can amplify these benefits when we combine yoga with skillful, consensual touch. The latter is essential, because touch is never neutral—without consent, it cannot be healing. That's where the Rubber Band Method® comes in: teaching yoga instructors how to bring safe, purposeful touch into their classrooms so they can truly amplify the benefits of the practice for their students.

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Healthy Tuna Salad



Serves 4

- 10oz canned tuna, drained
- 2 medium celery stalks, minced
- 2 Tbsp red onion, minced
- 2 Tbsp dill pickles, minced
- 1/3 cup plain full-fat Greek yogurt
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp fresh dill, chopped
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp pepper

Directions

1. Place the tuna, celery, red onion, and pickles in a bowl.
2. Combine the yogurt, lemon juice, mustard, and herbs.
3. Stir the yogurt mixture into the dry ingredients.

Notes: No fresh herbs? No problem—just substitute for 1/2 tsp of dried varieties.

Nutrition Information

Calories: 247; total fat: 8g; saturated fat: 2.6g; cholesterol: 35mg; sodium: 369mg; total carbohydrate: 7.6g; dietary fiber: 0.7g; total sugars: 5.3g; protein: 34.3g; calcium: 183mg; iron: 1mg; potassium: 453mg

