

A Day in the Life of...

## The Yoga Therapist

Article By: Leslie Fink, MS, RD



She has a history of substance abuse, alcohol addiction and eating disorders. Now Lisa Matkin is high on life, healthier than ever thanks to a daily dose of yoga and meditation.

Lisa and husband Charles are co-owners of Matkin Yoga in Garrison, NY. Lisa is also a yoga therapist at Yoga Works in New York City. She has been teaching yoga for almost 20 years and is mom to two kids, ages 8 and 5.

WeightWatchers.com found out how she achieved inner peace.

### Questions for Lisa:

**WeightWatchers.com: Have you ever struggled with weight?**

**Lisa Matkin:** Oh my goodness, yeah. My grandmother was a model. Both my parents were models. I was a model. I struggled with anorexia, bulimia and compulsive overeating. Food is definitely one of my drugs.

**WW.com: How is your body image?**

**LM:** Body image is a big issue for me. It's environmental, cultural and familial, so it's hitting me on every level.

My body image is a work in progress. I used to control my weight with drugs and alcohol. That was extremely destructive. I stopped that and I became spiritual. I started yoga and meditation. Incorporating the principles of Ayurveda has been really helpful: I got the chance to discover who I really am and how I can accept what I really am...I guess you could say I came into the right relationship with my body.

**WW.com: You mentioned you had a wild past. What does that mean?**

**LM:** Drugs. Alcohol. Food addictions.

**WW.com: How did you overcome your food addictions?**

**LM:** I had to learn how to feel. I was uncomfortable in my own skin. I ate food to numb my feelings (or I would run 20 miles). Now I'll write in a journal, pound a pillow or do an art project to help express my feelings in a non-destructive way.

**WW.com: What was your wakeup call?**

**LM:** There are a number of things but having to go to rehab was a big one.

**WW.com: You're very open and honest about your past. Why?**

**LM:** If my story can be helpful, it wasn't all in vain. I want others to know that you don't have to suffer to be at peace with your body.

**WW.com: Where do you find your emotional strength?**

**LM:** Through yoga and meditation which are very spiritual. I also have a "wise-women" team: A group of people (both men and women) I call who remind me of what I want in life. They're this huge tool box I have when I need it. There's great power in group support.

**WW.com: Do you ever fall back to your old ways?**

**LM:** After I had my daughter, I started to crash and burn again. It was really frustrating. After I stopped nursing her, I was suicidal. I had postpartum depression. I have an abusive past and it all crept up and wanted to come out after I became a parent. I had to deal with it and face my past. A doorway opened that helped me to deal with my history.

**WW.com: How do you stay so positive?**

**LM:** Bad stuff is going to happen but that doesn't mean your whole life has to be bad. Instead of feeding my feelings with food, I ask myself "what's the gift in this situation?" so I don't feel like a victim anymore. You have to ask yourself, what did I really come here to do in this situation, in this life?

**WW.com: What do you think you're here to do?**

**LM:** I'm still figuring that out. But I do know that I'm living in recovery from addiction, being an example to others and sharing my tools how to work through it all.

**WW.com: Sounds like you might have found your purpose.**

**LM:** You have to have a plan. There's a great saying: *If you don't have a plan, you plan to fail.*

**WW.com: How does yoga fit into your plan?**

**LM:** It's about living in a beautiful relationship with your life. About linking body, breath and mind. When I connect with my breath, it gives me power. It shifts me. It's my life force.

It gets me to move past the superficial and away from obsession with my body weight. That's an obsessive, addictive loop. It will not bring me peace or everlasting happiness. Looks fade – and there's only so much a plastic surgeon can do!

**WW.com: You teach "therapeutic yoga." What does that mean?**

**LM:** Therapeutic yoga is a form of yoga that takes an injury, illness, condition or addiction that a person is struggling with and applies specific yogic techniques to help that person heal and find balance.

I teach some people yoga in chairs. I teach yoga to people with obesity issues which is one of my favorite things to do.

**WW.com: Why?**

**LM:** Teaching obese people (or anyone struggling with food and their relationship to their body) is a group I hold close to my heart. I feel like I identify with them so much. I get how they feel. Not only have I seen it for myself but I have also watched so many others heal. It is not easy and it doesn't change overnight but little by little, if you are committed to change, it is absolutely possible.

**WW.com: What do you say to the person who complains that yoga is too**

**difficult for them?**

**LM:** Yoga is about learning to sit into discomfort in a loving, gentle and respectful way. It's about sitting with your feelings in your body and breathing through them, with the final discovery that you are so much more than your body.

**WW.com: For the person uncomfortable walking into a yoga studio, how can they get started?**

**LM:** If you're too intimidated for a class, get a yoga buddy and get a video. Or work privately with a certified yoga instructor.

**WW.com: What are the key benefits of yoga/meditation?**

**LM:** First, the postures and breathing techniques release tension, soothing and calming the nervous system. Second, certain philosophies in yoga help people take responsibility for what is going on in their mind and emotions, rather than just being a victim to their circumstances. And third, meditation is the most profound thing I have ever done. It connects me deeply to another realm and helps me experience myself beyond my body.

**WW.com: Do you have a personal mantra?**

**LM:** Yes but it evolves and is always changing. Currently it's my interpretation of the word *Namaste*: The light, the magnificence that I see within me, I will see within you. It's about oneness.

To learn more about Lisa or receive her free email newsletter, please visit [www.matkinयोगa.com](http://www.matkinयोगa.com).

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