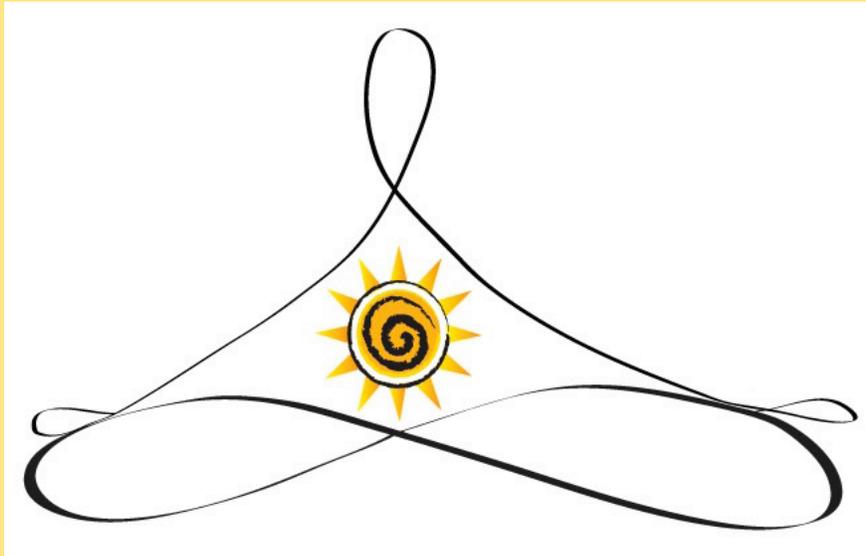


Yogic Tools for Chronic & Critical Illness



Six Stages and Twenty-Two Steps

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Guruatma K. Khalsa

When a chronic or critical illness strikes, the effects on a person's life are not just physical, but emotional, mental, spiritual and energetic, as well. **Chronic and critical illnesses bring profound challenges into a person's world. However, they also offer the opportunity for deep, personal transformation.**

Guruatma Khalsa has spent much of her life personally dealing with chronic and critical illness. This program distills her experience into **22 simple Steps** that address the challenges and changes people with chronic and critical illness have to face. The steps are divided into **6 distinct Stages** that a person may need to navigate.

Each Step embodies a guiding wisdom and positive affirmation to help face a particular aspect of the journey through chronic and critical illness. Not everyone will experience all of these Steps, nor walk them in a particular order, but each one offers hard-won pearls of wisdom from Guruatma's own personal story.

With each Step, **Guruatma offers realistic advice, practical resources and yogic tools to help you develop the skills to manage and cope with the issues at hand.** These resources and tools will help guide and support the journey of your body, mind and soul through chronic and critical illness.

Stage One: Am I Really Sick?

Step 1. All I know is what I feel.

Step 2. All the people in my life evaluate and understand the circumstance I am challenged by, from their own point of view.

Step 3. Is there a medical diagnosis that matches what I feel?

Stage Two: Diagnosis

Step 4. My life is drastically changing.

Step 5. I am not my diagnosis and my choices are the only thing I can control.

5-A. I learn to research, get in the door, and move through the networks of my country's medical systems.

5-B. I learn to incorporate complementary health systems and pain management techniques.

Step 6. My illness offers me an opportunity to evaluate the journey of my soul.

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Stage Three: Living With Chronic and Critical Illness

Step 7. I pay attention to my Self and give myself credit for facing this heavy challenge.

Step 8. I manage the discipline of taking prescription drugs.

Step 9. I receive the support of caregivers and tap into support groups and organizations that can help me.

Step 10. I acknowledge that the relationships in my life are shifting.

Step 11. My awareness of my soul and Spirit keeps growing.

Stage Four: Episodes of Intense Sickness

Step 12: The suffering is true.

Step 13: 'Quality of Life' issues are my top priority.

Step 14. I can find one thing to be grateful for today.

Stage Five: Facing Death

Step 15. My fear of death is normal and it is what I need to face now.

Step 16. I work to release my attachments.

Step 17. I get my personal and legal affairs in order, asking for help if I need it.

Step 18. I create an altar for my death and refer to it for inspiration.

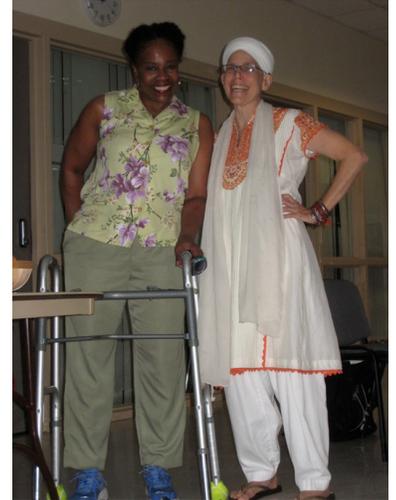
Stage Six: Re-Entry

Step 19: I accept that my life is permanently changed by the course of this illness.

Step 20. I create and commit to a daily health routine that works for me.

Step 21. I allow myself to continue to heal and transform at the soul level.

Step 22. I feel better. I am better. And that is my base.



Guruatma with one of her chair yoga students, Desiree Batiste.

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A Brief Explanation of the Stages and the Steps

Stage One: Am I Really Sick?

Prior to being diagnosed with a chronic or critical illness, something may not feel right in your body, and your whole life becomes affected by this. Even though you feel it, it may not be visible to those around you.

Step 1. All I know is what I feel.

In this step, you learn to listen to yourself and trust yourself. Your body is sending you messages that you need to listen to and respect.

Step 2. All the people in my life evaluate and understand the circumstances I am challenged by from their own point of view.

It can become very challenging for the people around you to adjust and adapt to what is happening to you and what is happening to them because of your condition. In this step, the issue is how to handle the doubts, questions and reactions of your family, friends, and even the medical establishment. There is a way to separate your experience from their experience, to respect what is inside you, while realizing that there is a limit to what those you come in contact with can understand.

Step 3. Is there a medical diagnosis that matches what I feel?

In this step, you are engaging the medical establishment to determine if you do, in fact, have a medically recognized illness. You may investigate this through mainstream medicine. You may also find yourself investigating complimentary health systems like acupuncture and kiniseology.

There is also the possibility for being repeatedly misdiagnosed before finding a diagnosis that matches what your symptoms are telling you. In some cases, you may not find a name to identify your dis-ease.

Note: Many people who suffer traumatic injuries, such as car accidents, may find themselves navigating through the steps described in Stages 2 through 6.

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Stage Two: Diagnosis

Step 4. My life is drastically changing.

When you find a diagnosis that matches what your symptoms are saying, it's a wake-up call. The diagnosis may be sudden and unexpected, or it may be an answer to a long-standing problem. Either way, your whole life is about to shift. There can be tremendous shock and vulnerability at this point. There may be a sense that everything around you is falling apart. In this step, it is important to realize that you cannot avoid that shock. The goal is to treat the shock, regroup and move forward.

Sometimes, doctors can't find an existing diagnosis to match your symptoms and also, it's not unusual for a diagnosis to be incorrect.

Step 5. I am not my diagnosis and my choices are the only thing I can control.

When diagnosed with a chronic or critical illness, the only thing you can control are your own choices. It is important in this step to empower yourself with as much information as possible, so that you can make the best choices you can. It is also important to learn how to develop relationships with your doctors where they listen to and respect your input into your care.

5-A. I learn to research, get in the door, and move through the networks of my country's medical systems.

5-B. I learn to incorporate complementary health systems and pain management techniques.

Step 6. My illness offers me an opportunity to evaluate the journey of my soul.

When faced with a chronic or critical illness, it is normal for the subconscious mind to evaluate your entire life. This is automatic. The subconscious will comb through all of your memories, looking for the answer to the questions: What happened? How did I end up here like this? What did I do wrong?

This is part of the journey. In this step, you can develop the skills to handle this process. You may discover new things about yourself, your past, your habits, your relationships and your beliefs.



Guruatma and Becca Tores at the 2012 Abilities Expo at the Reliant Center in Houston, TX. Guruatma taught at Becca's MS Support group.

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Stage Three: Living With Chronic and Critical Illness

Step 7. I pay attention to my Self and give myself credit for facing this heavy challenge.

Self-acceptance, self-care, self-nurturing, putting yourself first: all of this becomes necessary for your survival. You may change the way you eat. You may have to develop new routines. You may integrate certain supplements, herbs or complimentary medical practices into your life. It is also important to stop and feel every little victory you have, and to honor your “story.” In this step, taking care of yourself and giving yourself credit for what you are going through becomes the best thing you can do for your illness.

Step 8. I manage the discipline of taking prescription drugs.

In many cases of chronic and critical illness, there are drugs given to the patient with intense side effects. The drugs are necessary tools with powerful benefits and potential dangers. In this step, you can learn to appreciate your drugs for the positive benefits, while separating out the negative side effects from your sense of self. “It’s not me. It’s the drugs.”

Step 9. I receive the support of caregivers and tap into support groups and organizations that can help me.

When a person is healthy, it is easy to live in the illusion that “I can do everything on my own.” But when facing a chronic or critical illness, survival depends on accepting the help of others. In this step, you learn how to accept help while also maintaining good boundaries and healthy relationship dynamics with those who support you.

Step 10. I acknowledge that the relationships in my life are shifting.

Chronic and critical illness not only brings about deep changes within, but also changes in relationships. Friendships may shift. Family members may not be able to handle what you are going through. New people come into your life who can be part of your journey. Others may leave. In this step, you can develop the skills to handle the shifts in relationships that chronic and critical illness may bring about.

Step 11. My awareness of my soul and Spirit keeps growing.

In these first three stages, your entire life has gone through a dramatic and possibly rapid change. Your body is not doing what you expect. Your mind is evaluating everything, trying to understand “Why me?” “What happened?” The structure of your life transforms. After adjusting to these changes and developing new resources, skills and knowledge to ride the change, it is important to take a deep breath. In this step, relax and integrate whatever insights and wisdom the journey has brought.

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Stage Four: Episodes of Intense Sickness

Like a storm, chronic and critical illness can have its beginning stages followed by intense, potentially dangerous phases. Sometimes, intense sickness does not come for a while; sometimes, it happens right away. Stages Four and Five deal with the depth of the storm.

Step 12: The suffering is true.

You may experience loss with your physical body. For instance, you may lose one or more of your five senses. A gland, a major body organ or even an entire system of the body may stop functioning. There will be a loss of freedom. You may have to deal with new and unbearable symptoms or side effects from the drugs. It seems like the pace will never let up. The pressure can feel unbearable. The key to this step is to acknowledge that you ARE suffering. Then, you have choices about what to do with the suffering.

Step 13: 'Quality of Life' issues are my top priority.

The skill of listening to your body and intuition become important. Whatever input you receive from others, remember that your choices are ultimately up to you. In this step, you create what you know you can handle and what you can do. Quality of Life issues become important in this step.

Step 14. I can find one thing to be grateful for today.

Even in the depth of the storm, there is the possibility to choose not to suffer. To laugh. To find something to be grateful for. When a person can truly enjoy something positive in the darkest moments of life, that is the greatest victory of human consciousness. In this step, you create that victory for yourself.



Guruatma, in 2001, after many years of low-dosage chemotherapy and high-dosage prednisone.

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Stage Five: Facing Death

When faced with chronic and critical illness, you may start thinking about death and dying. The truth is, we are all going to leave this body behind, and that can happen at any moment. No one knows when they will take their last breath, but when grappling with a serious illness, you have the opportunity to look death in the face and prepare for it.

Step 15. My fear of death is normal and it is what I need to face now.

The thought of death can be very frightening for some people. When you think about death, it makes you look at your life and ask, "Did I do what I came here to do?" Facing the fear of death often gives you a chance to make peace with the choices of your life. In this step, you evaluate your life. You take the opportunity to study the death process and understand it.

Step 16. I work to release my attachments and my hopes for the future.

Hope is not what is needed now. Letting go of hope, letting go of the thought of the future, letting go of relationships - all of this will naturally happen when facing death. Death is the process of the body disintegrating and the mind detaching from the reality it currently perceives. In this way, the soul can continue its journey. In this step, there is support and understanding to help the mind to let go.

Step 17. I get my personal and legal affairs in order, asking for help if I need it.

When dealing with death, there are many important legal issues to address - deciding whether and how to create a DNR, making sure your legal will and your living will are in order. In this step, you make clear the instructions that need to be followed if you become incapacitated or for when you die.

Step 18. I create an altar for my death and refer to it for inspiration.

For many people, thoughts about death are intimately linked with their spiritual beliefs. It can be very healing to create a visual representation of what you believe the spiritual journey through death and beyond means to you. Forgiveness is a significant part of creating the altar. In this step, consider building an altar to your death.

No matter how much pain or suffering is involved in your illness, every day that you live is still a day of your life. We naturally live as much as we can with every breath until the breath is gone. The altar for your death helps inspire you to live every day, consciously.

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Stage 6: Re-Entry

For some people, the process of facing death does, in fact, lead to the end of their journey in this life. For others, the intense storm passes. The medications, therapies, and self-care have brought them to the other side. There is the possibility of rebuilding a new life from this point forward.

Step 19: I accept that my life is permanently changed by the course of this illness.

Coming through the storm, there is an evaluation process. How has my body been permanently altered by the illness? Are there drugs I will need to take for the rest of my life? There may be grief and post-traumatic stress issues to deal with. There is an exhaustion factor. There may be feelings of loneliness and a struggle to reconnect with everyday life. There are identity crisis issues.

In this step, you assess the total damage that has been done. You identify what you need to live with and what you can rebuild.

Step 20. I create and commit to a daily health routine that works for me.

Now you can move out of emergency mode into a realistic maintenance routine. There is a sense of empowerment because you HAVE survived. You have faced death and a new world is opening up for you. You can rebuild and regain your vitality. In this step, you take your self-care to a new level. Self-healing is not a miracle. It is a set of agreements that you make with yourself. You experiment with and find healing strategies that allow you to re-engage the world. In this step, there are many tools available to help you regenerate yourself.

Step 21. I allow myself to continue to heal and transform at the soul level.

To have come this far, you have most likely experienced the deep guidance and support of your inner-most being - the soul. Part of reintegration is redefining your life from the soul level. In this step, you engage the emotional and spiritual issues that have come to the surface during your illness. You develop new skills to integrate the mind, body and spirit into one healthy, co-creative identity. You refine your relationship with Spirit as you understand it. You celebrate your victory!

Step 22. I feel better. I am better. And that is my base.

“Health” is not based on what doctors tell you. There is a sense of balance within yourself that becomes the new definition of health. Your experience has brought about a new understanding and sense of responsibility to take care of yourself deeply. Even in the midst of challenges, a sense of well-being and joy is possible. In this step, you have done the work on yourself physically, mentally and spiritually to redefine what an authentically healthy life is for you. You are committed to a personal program that keeps your life in balance. You feel better about your Self, therefore you ARE better.

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Guruatma K. Khalsa: Bio

Guruatma Khalsa was born in 1952 and grew up in a large, middle-class family in Chicago, Illinois. Being the oldest girl of nine children, she was always taking care of others, working both in and outside the home, and struggling, just like her father, with severe allergies. In her freshman year in college, after months of battling with what doctors diagnosed as a sinus infection, she had the first flare-up of a rare, degenerative autoimmune disease characterized by acute inflammation and deterioration of the cartilaginous tissue throughout the body. One morning, she woke to a shocking sight in the mirror - the cartilage in her nose was gone! For the next 24 years, myriads of doctor were not able to recognize and identify the disease as it went in and out of remission and attacked different parts of her body at different times.



Guruatma left college but continued working and eventually she had two plastic surgeries to rebuild her nose.

During one particularly bad relapse, she desperately sought help at a 3HO-Kundalini Yoga Center. Here at last she found relief! Discovering something that gave such immediate and positive results, she threw herself, body, mind and soul, into that lifestyle while also using alternative medical therapies. Her efforts paid off. Most symptoms of the disease went into remission for about 17 years. But, life is full of twists and turns and, in 1986, she was hit by lightning and had the first of several encounters with death.

All this time, the disease was lingering in the background. During a period when she physically over-exerted herself doing deep-tissue massage, the disease returned with a vengeance, inflaming the cartilage in her rib cage. Doctors at M.D. Anderson suspected she might have cancer; they put her on morphine while they investigated for three months but found nothing. Using her own system, Guruatma weaned herself off the morphine and pushed the disease into remission again.

Years later, during a time of great personal stress, the disease surfaced again, exploding like a bomb and attacking in several places within her body, including serious eye complications. In February of 1995, Guruatma fell into the county hospital system. It was there that the disease was finally identified as Relapsing Polychondritis; she was given a 5-year prognosis and told to get her affairs in order.

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Doctors started her on chemotherapy, high-dosage prednisone, pain medications, and a host of other prescription drugs with devastating side effects - Guruatma lost her hearing in both ears during the course of chemotherapy. As if being deaf weren't challenging enough, for three whole years the Audiology Department determined she was not eligible for hearing aids!

Ever so slowly, using both Eastern and Western medicine, and with many set-backs along the way, she was able to incrementally wean off all Px medication, including the 5 drugs she was told she would be on for the rest of her life. She fought a long, hard battle and the disease began to loosen its death-grip on her. By 2006, she was back on track doing yoga in a chair, as a starter. Using the yogic tools that she now shares with others, she gradually gained her health back, lost 100 lbs. and learned how to take care of her Self and get what she needed in order to live a healthy and happy life.

Guruatma has walked through the long, dark night of the soul. Although she had support coming in from many directions, she knows how it feels to suffer though the intense loneliness that can accompany a chronic or critical illness. She has lived through years of inexplicable pain and suffering, dozens of misdiagnoses, prescription drug nightmares, fighting tooth-and-nail to keep from falling through loopholes in the medical system and, dealing with feelings of abandonment, hopelessness and wanting to die.

Guruatma currently lives and teaches in Houston, Texas, but her clients are spread all over the globe, thanks to the world-wide web. She works with people suffering from many different chronic and critical illnesses and traumas, offering her time-tested yogic tools from her website as well as private consultations. For all those who are suffering from illness, Guruatma stands out as a victor and a light in the darkness, showing the way to make it through, giving step-by-step instructions, support and encouragement.



Guruatma with her colleague, Kelly Indra Inselmann at the 2011, 7th Annual Oncology Training Conference for Yoga Teachers at MD Anderson Cancer Center.