

## Yoga Medicine Innovation Conference 2026

### Purpose in Life and All-Cause Mortality: Implications for Meaningful Yoga Instruction

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#### ***Purpose in Life: Key Concepts***

- *Purpose in life* is not synonymous with happiness, optimism, or spiritual certainty.
- It reflects an *ongoing orientation toward meaning*, which can coexist with stress, grief, or adversity.
- In psychological research, purpose is typically assessed via self-report measures and has demonstrated robust associations with overall wellbeing.

#### ***Research Highlights***

- Large-scale studies (e.g., UK Biobank) show that individuals reporting higher meaning in life is associated with decreased risk of death from any, even after accounting for socioeconomic status, clinical and behavioral risk factors.
- The further study of cognitive and affective mechanisms that moderate the relationship between purpose in life and wellbeing, may serve to inform meaningful and effectual purpose in life measures and public health interventions.
- Neuroscience research (e.g., Dr. Lisa Miller's work) suggests that *personalized spiritual or meaningful experiences engage neural networks* associated with emotion regulation, stress resilience, and adaptive coping.

#### ***Why Yoga Is Uniquely Positioned***

Yoga offers an integrated framework for supporting purpose through *embodied, relational, and reflective practices*, including:

- Intention-Setting
- Embodied Awareness
- Mindfulness and Self-Compassion
- Attention and emotion regulation create space for inquiry into meaning without self-judgment.
- Community, Dharma, and Seva

#### ***Considerations/ Limitations***

- Purpose inquiry may be *contraindicated* for individuals experiencing acute trauma or distress.
- Instructors should avoid imposing meanings, spiritual frameworks, or life narratives. *Yoga teachers serve as facilitators of inquiry, though not clinical authorities on meaning or purpose.*
- Cultural humility, choice/ autonomy, and care are essential. Yoga may foster conditions for purpose to emerge- without defining it
- *Purpose in life* is a well-established contributor to positive wellbeing though contributes to a broad range of human flourishing. Future research is needed on embodied measures of purpose and yoga-specific interventions.

### ***Presentation References***

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