

A woman with dark hair tied back is shown in profile, looking out a window. Her face is partially in shadow, and her arm is extended towards the window. The background is bright and out of focus, showing hints of a cityscape.

# I AM MARIS

SCREENING KIT FOR EDUCATORS

*I am meant to live.*

# I AM MARIS

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A woman with long, wavy brown hair is shown in profile, performing a yoga pose on a rocky shore. She is wearing a black sports bra and black leggings with a white circular pattern. Her arms are raised, with her hands clasped together above her head. She is looking down with a focused expression. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky.

# ABOUT THE FILM

Chances are you know someone with an eating disorder. Seventy million people worldwide — more than the population of Canada and Australia combined — experience eating disorders. They are life-changing, sometimes life-threatening illnesses. Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness; the disorder kills one person every 62 minutes.

But here's the thing. It doesn't always end like that.

In *I Am Maris*, Director Laura Van Zee Taylor follows Maris, a sixteen-year-old writer and artist in the early stages of treatment for an eating disorder. When the film begins, Maris is at war — with herself, her emotions, and her body. While she is motivated to get better, recovery is still an uphill battle. One day, she walks into a yoga class at a local lululemon store. Little did she know, that class would change her life.

Over the course of the film, we follow Maris as she uses the practice of yoga to come to terms with her illness, make meaning of her experiences, and befriend her body. The film is a testament to the resilience of the human mind and the healing power of yoga.

# HOW THIS GUIDE CAME TO BE

**Maris:** Hi, I'm Maris. I'm the subject of the film you will be screening.

**Chelsea:** And I'm Chelsea. I run a nonprofit organization called Eat Breathe Thrive that offers yoga-based programs to people with eating disorders. We're one of lululemon's Here to Be partners.

Together we created this guide to give you, educators, a framework to screen *I Am Maris* in your stores and communities. More than that though, we want to encourage you to use this film as a springboard for a larger conversation about yoga and eating disorders.

But first, we wanted to tell you a little bit about how we met and how the guide came to fruition.

**Maris:** In August of 2018, I was offered an opportunity to head from my home in California up to Canada to attend an Eat Breathe Thrive training with Chelsea. I had no clue what I was getting myself into, but I trusted that lululemon's Here to Be team knew what they were doing when they said I just had to meet Chelsea and get to know her work.

**Chelsea:** That's funny! I remember getting an email, followed by a call, from the Here to Be team. They told me there was a very special young woman who would be attending my training in Vancouver who they wanted me to meet. When they told me your story, I was pretty floored. I felt like it could have been ripped from a page in my own book. After I saw the film trailer, I was like 'I have to meet this girl!'

**Maris:** I had high expectations, but they were definitely exceeded over the course of that weekend.

**Chelsea:** Well, that's nice to hear!

**Maris:** Chelsea's program gave a clear, compassionate

voice to eating disorder challenges and offered valuable insight into how yoga could be used in recovery.

But what touched me most was the connection I felt to your story, Chelsea. All eating disorder experiences are different, but I found so many similarities between our stories. Both of us found yoga and service to others to be healing, and our paths had finally crossed.

When you agreed to come on board to the film's educational team to help us build resources to accompany the film, I couldn't have been more excited.

**Chelsea:** I felt the same way. Yoga, and this company in particular, has played such an important role in both of our lives and work. In my case, the Here to Be program helped our organization bring yoga programs to thousands of folks dealing with eating disorders and mental health challenges.

But for you, lululemon was actually your gateway to the practice right? Do you want to say a little bit about how you came to yoga?

**Maris:** I was diagnosed with an eating disorder at age 14, when I was hospitalized for intensive treatment. This hospitalization sparked my recovery journey, but it certainly wasn't the end of it.

A year into my recovery, I wanted desperately to move my body and tap into resources outside of "traditional" eating disorder treatment. My doctor recommended yoga, because as she put it, "it's just stretching!" I'll admit I rolled my eyes a little at that: it didn't sound "intense" enough to offer the calorie burn my eating disorder wanted, but I figured I'd take what I could get.

**Chelsea:** I had a very similar experience! It was a therapist who suggested I try yoga, and I think my response was: "Where did you go to school?"

**Maris:** Just a few days later, I happened to spot a sign in the window of my local lululemon, advertising free community yoga classes. I'd never stepped foot in the store before, but it sounded low-pressure enough: no payment and no commitment. I decided to take the risk. If I didn't like it or (worse) "wasn't good at it" I'd be no worse for the wear.

**Chelsea:** I can relate. When I got out of treatment, I was pretty desperate to exercise. I think this is one reason so many people with eating disorders end up on the yoga mat. Often it's the only form of exercise treatment teams will allow, and increasingly it's the only form of exercise offered in eating disorder treatment centers.

What was your first class like?

**Maris:** Everything about that class felt a bit chaotic, to be honest! Words I didn't understand, playful music, new movements my body was unfamiliar with. At one point, the teacher had us get up and dance wildly around the room.

**Chelsea:** Oh my god, I would have been out of there in a heartbeat. 😊

**Maris:** The temptation to run right out the door was real! I had no clue what was happening, but all of a sudden, I realized I was smiling for the first time in over a year.

At the end of class, the teacher thanked us for joining and said she had a yoga mat to give away to one student. She said there was someone in the class that she'd known was special from the moment she walked in, someone she hoped she'd get to see again. Her eyes landed on me, hidden away in the back of the room. I realized that she was talking about me.

She handed me the mat. But the mat wasn't the true gift. The gift was being seen.

**Chelsea:** Wow. I can definitely relate. I remember after my first class, the teacher walked up and said, "I hope I see

you on Thursday, Chelsea." The fact that she remembered my name at all was a big deal, but even more so was the fact that someone wanted me to be there.

**Maris:** Having a teacher really see you and care about your presence can make such a difference. My teacher, Jenni, was the one who encouraged me to join a teacher training program when I turned 16. And now, six years later, I'm the one teaching those Sunday morning lululemon classes.

The lululemon educators who organized that class didn't know it, but that first class was the fork in the road of my story.

**Chelsea:** That brings us to this guide. When lululemon asked us to create an educational toolkit to help stores screen *I Am Maris* in their local communities, we realized we had a huge opportunity.

There are so many people out there — including guests and educators at lululemon stores — who have stories like our own... people who have dealt with eating disorders, or some other form of mental illness, and end up on a yoga mat... either with an intention to heal, or sometimes (like in our case) with no idea what they are getting into!

**Maris:** Chelsea and I both see the film as a powerful opportunity to start a conversation about eating disorders, and in particular how yoga can be impactful in the lives of those going through mental health challenges. We created this guide to help you build a dialogue in your community. We couldn't be more excited to support you in this process: as leaders, you have the ability to make a huge impact in your stores and your communities.

**Chelsea:** In this guide, we'll offer some suggestions to help you set up the event, facilitate an impactful dialogue, and continue offering support after the screening is over. We're really excited to be in this work with you — don't hesitate to reach out to us directly if we can be of support.



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# SCREEN THE FILM

Okay, first thing's first! Logistics. There are a few steps you need to take to obtain the film, secure a space for your screening, and get the word out. Here is what you need to know to get started.

## HOW DO I GET THE FILM?

The film is available for download online. To screen the film for a group, you will need to purchase public performance rights. [CLICK HERE](#) to secure the rights for your screening, and if you have any questions email our friend Allie Silvestri at [allie@rocofilms.com](mailto:allie@rocofilms.com).

## WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO HOLD A SCREENING?

We suggest you shoot for a time that is going to be accessible to both your team and the wider community. We think it's really important that educators at your store are able to attend the screening themselves. Consider scheduling the event after store hours, so that everyone on your team can attend.

## WHERE SHOULD I HOLD THE SCREENING?

You can host the screening just about anywhere — in your store, in a local yoga studio, or in a friend's living room! Many people choose to screen the film in yoga studios, largely because these studios have plenty of space and organically tap into the local yoga community. You can also hold the screening in your store, just make sure you have a blank wall on which you can project the film — no yoga pants in the way!

## I WANT TO SCREEN THE FILM OUTSIDE MY STORE. HOW SHOULD I APPROACH A POTENTIAL HOST?

Just ask. Try sending an email request to the person in charge of the space. Keep your request clear, kind, and direct. Briefly describe what the film is about and the parameters for the event. How much time will you need? How many people do you hope will attend? Will you be serving food? Will you be collecting money? Emphasize what you're hoping to achieve with the event and why you're reaching out to this person in particular as a partner (in other words, make it personal).





# SPREAD THE WORD

Once you have set your dates and location, it's time to start spreading the word. We strongly encourage you to make this a community event; build alliances with as many organizations and leaders in your community as possible. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

## 1. ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF MULTIPLE STORES.

Your store is not an island; if there are other lululemon stores in your area, get the word out. Reach out to your regional manager and ask him or her to send an email about the event to other store managers. If you decide to make print materials, make sure there are plenty of copies at the other stores in your area.

## 2. ENGAGE LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

Community is key. Reach out to local schools, treatment centers, and yoga studios to let them know about the screening. You might invite them to speak on a panel or share materials about what they do at the event. Ask them to share an announcement about the screening, and then follow up with reminder emails as the event approaches.

## 3. MAKE VERBAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AT YOGA CLASSES IN YOUR AREA.

Eating disorders thrive on shame and secrecy. We believe face-to-face conversations are the most effective way to encourage folks to come to the screening. In the weeks before the event, we suggest you attend local yoga classes and ask teachers if you can make a quick announcement about the screening after class. Invite leaders in your community to make announcements about the screening after their classes as well.

## 4. OFFER COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCT TO ATTENDEES.

There's nothing like free product to get people in the door. If your store has budget and product to give away, consider offering the first ten (or twenty, or fifty) people who walk in the door a complementary product. You can also partner with a local restaurant to provide food and snacks before or after the screening.





# SET UP THE DISCUSSION

*I Am Maris* can bring up a range of emotions in viewers, from sadness and concern to hope and inspiration. With this in mind, there are some things you can do at the start of the screening to set the stage for an healthy and impactful discussion. Use the following guidelines to create an environment that fosters freedom of expression and growth:

## 1. SET SOME GROUND RULES.

Conversations about eating disorders and mental illness can easily get sidetracked. Sometimes those who have experienced eating disorders can be triggered by discussions about body weight, nutritional content, and specific eating disorder behaviors. Ensure your discussion is safe and supportive by setting ground rules and vocalizing an intention for the conversation at the beginning of the screening. For example, you might ask participants to make a commitment to confidentiality, keep their phones on silent, or avoid discussing body weight during the discussion.

## 2. BE VULNERABLE YOURSELF.

If you were inspired to host this screening because you yourself have (or someone you know has) experienced an eating disorder, we encourage you to share a brief personal story with the group before the film begins. This can help build rapport, reduce stigma, and foster an atmosphere in which those in attendance feel safe to share openly with one another in the discussion.

## 3. CREATE CONNECTIONS WITHIN THE GROUP.

Create a sense of community by allowing ample opportunities for folks to get to know one another during the screening. Depending on the size of your group, you might consider incorporating introductions or an ice-breaker exercise at the beginning of the discussion. You can also offer refreshments before or after the screening to encourage folks to continue the conversation.

## 4. ENGAGE COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

Ensure there are opportunities for participants to get support after your screening by inviting local treatment centers, nonprofits, and helping professionals to the event. You might make time in the agenda for a panel discussion to feature these experts, or you can offer community partners a space to set up booths or leave out materials. At the very least, make some time to recognize their presence and invite folks to connect with them at the event.



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# FACILITATE THE DISCUSSION

Once you've watched the film together, it's time to host a discussion. We've broken down the questions into five segments or themes to help with the flow of conversation. Each theme comes with some background information to help frame the dialogue and provide context for the ideas that will be discussed.

You'll also notice there are many questions offered for each topic — you don't have to tackle them all! Choose the topics, questions, and reflections that will best serve your community. You can also add your own.

You may find that certain topics will inspire more shares from the group than others. Go with the flow: if certain topics don't inspire conversation, offer a personal share to stoke the discussion if it feels relevant, or simply move on to a new question.





## BACKGROUND

Eating disorders are biopsychosocial illnesses, which means that they emerge from a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural forces.

Eating disorders have their roots in biology. Research suggests that anorexia and bulimia in particular are highly heritable; having a parent with an eating disorder can increase your risk of developing one yourself. That doesn't mean that there is a single gene that causes eating disorders, but your genes might predispose you to coping with anxiety and depression with food.

There are also psychological factors that cause eating disorders. One of the biggest psychological risk factors is trauma. Trauma is any experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. When individuals experience trauma, they may be more likely to use unhealthy behaviors — such as overeating or drinking alcohol — to make themselves feel better. Scientists often say that when it comes to eating disorders, “genes load the gun and trauma pulls the trigger.”

Finally, there are many social factors that can lead to eating disorders. Young people in particular may try dieting or purging to lose weight and/or fit in with others. In wealthy and western countries especially, people may internalize the idea that the way their body looks determines their worth or value as a human being. Finally, emerging evidence suggests that intergenerational trauma and systems of oppression can contribute to eating disorders.

Each person who develops an eating disorder is affected to different degrees by each of these factors. Keep this in mind during your discussion, and use the questions below to engage the group in a conversation.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What do you think causes eating disorders?

What did Maris's therapist say about “why” she developed an eating disorder? What are some other reasons someone might develop an eating disorder?

Maris's therapist said she had a biological predisposition to an “anxious temperament.” What do you think that means? In what other ways might a person's biology predispose them to an eating disorder?

Maris spoke about the need for control contributing to her eating disorder. Have you ever felt out of control? What role do you think control plays in the development of an eating disorder?

Maris was a competitive athlete at a young age. Can you think of some ways athletic competition might contribute to eating disorders? Alternatively, are there ways you think athletics might support mental health?

Maris's family underwent a big transition when she was young — her mom went back to work after being a stay-at-home-mom for ten years. But Maris's therapist was quick to point out that had this not occurred, it may have been going away to college that triggered her eating disorder instead. What does this tell you about the role life transitions play in mental illness?



## BACKGROUND

Eating disorders affect people from all walks of life, no matter how old or young, no matter what gender identity or ethnicity. For most people, the term “eating disorder” conjures up images of stick-thin women with emaciated bodies and sunken cheekbones. But disordered eating can manifest in many forms — including overeating, over-exercising, emotional eating, under-eating, purging, and obsession with health (commonly called ‘orthorexia’).

Disordered eating exists on a spectrum, and not everyone who struggles with disordered eating behaviors has a diagnosable eating disorder. When disordered eating progresses to a level that endangers a person’s physical health and/or disrupts everyday functioning, he or she may be diagnosed with an eating disorder. This includes the more commonly known eating disorders, anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, as well as lesser known ones such as binge eating disorder and pica - the persistent eating of substances such as dirt or paint that have no nutritional value.

While eating disorders only affect a small percentage of the population, disordered eating is ubiquitous. Just about everyone will struggle with some form of disordered eating at some point in their lives. Keep this in mind during your discussion, and encourage your group to consider how disordered eating manifests in their own lives.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Maris was in recovery from anorexia, which is perhaps the most commonly recognized eating disorder in our society. But eating disorders exist on a spectrum. What are some other eating disorders you know about?

Do you think people with anorexia are more likely to get help than those with bulimia or binge eating disorder? Why or why not?

What do you think is the difference between disordered eating and eating disorders? What are some examples of disordered eating?

Why might people reach toward disordered eating behaviors to cope with stress and trauma? How might these behaviors help in the short term? Do you think they work in the long term?

Do you see similarities between eating disorders and other forms of mental illness? What are the commonalities, and what are the differences?

## BACKGROUND

We believe that yoga can be a game-changer for people with eating disorders. Part of that belief is rooted in our personal experience — as we’ve already shared, yoga (and the community that surrounds it) has been life-changing, and even life-saving for both of us. But there’s also some good scientific research that suggests it really works!

Research shows yoga can help people with eating disorders regulate their nervous system, allowing them to cope more effectively with anxiety and depression. Two yoga practices in particular — alternate nostril breathing and yoga nidra — have been shown to increase the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, which can help reduce anxiety after meals and promote healthy digestion.

Yoga’s emphasis on community and connection is also important for those with eating disorders. Mental illness doesn’t develop in a vacuum, and we don’t heal from it alone. The yoga community can help people with eating disorders build healthy relationships with others and build a sense of identity beyond their disorder.

But at the same time, the practice can be a double edged sword. Yoga can be a convenient mask for disordered eating behaviors; it’s easy to disguise restricting as a detox, or overexercising as a disciplined practice. To learn more about how this shows up, read Chelsea’s article [THE TRUTH ABOUT YOGA AND EATING DISORDERS](#).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you think eating disorders are more common in the yoga and fitness community than in the general population? Why or why not?

In what ways did yoga seem to support Maris in her recovery? What role did the community at her yoga studio play in supporting her?

In what ways do you see disordered eating and/or eating disorders show up in the yoga community? Do you think there are ways the yoga community either masks or exacerbates eating disorders?

What do you think local yoga studios can do to make their studios a more supportive space for people dealing with mental health challenges?

Do you think there are gaps in the way eating disorders are traditionally treated? How might the yoga and the community that surrounds it help to bridge these gaps?

You heard from some of Maris’s yoga teachers in the film. In what ways did those yoga teachers support Maris, and how were their roles different than a therapist or doctor?

Do you think the yoga practice would have impacted Maris’s healing differently if she had started her practice alone, as opposed to in a studio with other practitioners?

## BACKGROUND

*I Am Maris* tells the story of one person, from one walk of life, who dealt with one kind of eating disorder. But eating disorders affect people of many different cultures, circumstances, and identities. And those variables — age, ethnicity, gender identity, and economic circumstance — affect how a person develops, experiences, and recovers from an eating disorder.

There is a widespread misconception that eating disorders are a wealthy, white girl illness. But research suggests that notion could not be further from the truth. There is some evidence to suggest that some eating disorders are more common in minority populations than others. For instance, one study found people of color were somewhat more likely to develop binge eating disorder and Latino/a youth were much more likely to develop bulimia than their Caucasian counterparts. Another study found that transgender folks are four times more likely than cis-gender people to experience eating disorders.

While all populations experience eating disorders, some populations have greater access to treatment than others. Financial barriers, cultural norms, and biases within the mental health system itself can impact access to treatment. There is some evidence to suggest that people from minority groups are less likely to be diagnosed with and treated for an eating disorder. One study found that eating disorder professionals are less likely to refer Latinas and Native Americans for treatment than Caucasians, no matter how severe their symptoms.

If *I Am Maris* tackled all these issues in-depth, the film would be ten hours long! But just because they aren't included in the film itself doesn't mean you can't bring them into your conversation. We hope you will use Maris's story as a starting point to have a broader conversation about positionality and access to treatment.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In what ways do you think race and ethnicity might affect one's experience of an eating disorder? In what ways do you think it might affect one's ability to get treatment?

In what ways do you think one's economic circumstance affects a person's ability to recover from an eating disorder? Do you think treatment looks different for someone on private insurance, versus government healthcare?

Maris was hospitalized as a part of her recovery. Struggling to afford treatment wasn't a part of her journey. How might that element affect someone else's recovery?

Maris is in some ways a "stereotypical" eating disorder patient: young, female, and perfectionistic. How might Maris's story be different if she had a different identity (e.g. she identified as male or transgender)? Do you think it would have impacted her diagnosis, treatment plan, or the response from her community?

Maris was as an able-bodied individual who could attend group yoga classes relatively soon into her recovery journey. What unique obstacles might individuals with different forms of disabilities face in the recovery process?



## BACKGROUND

As your event comes to a close, invite attendees to reflect on opportunities for action and next steps. Are there major insights or take-aways that have emerged in the conversation that could be turned into action? Are there folks in the room who could collaborate and work together in the future? What can each individual in the room do to continue the conversation post-film?

This is also an opportunity to think about who was missing in the room. Perhaps this film could serve as a conversation-starter with someone you are concerned about, or maybe Maris's story reminded you of someone you love. Invite participants to think about who they would like to share the film or have a conversation with afterwards.

Finally, if you haven't already, take a few minutes to acknowledge the different leaders and community partners in the room. If there are treatment centers, nonprofit organizations, or mental health professionals in the room, give them a few minutes to speak about what they do. If there are materials or websites where attendees can seek out additional resources, call them out before you close.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Are there any topics you wish were covered in the film that were not touched on? What are they, and why do you think they are important?

What do you think our local community can do to continue this conversation after the film?

Are there people you feel would benefit from seeing this film who were not in the room today? Who are they?

# RESOURCES

## ORGANIZATIONS WE RECOMMEND

**EAT BREATHE THRIVE** offers yoga-based programs to people with eating disorder challenges in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom. To host a program in your store, visit [EATBREATHETHRIVE.ORG/LULULEMON](http://EATBREATHETHRIVE.ORG/LULULEMON)

**THE NATIONAL EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION** provides a searchable treatment directory for those in the United States.

**BEAT** offers a searchable database for individuals looking for eating disorder services in the United Kingdom.

**PROJECT HEAL** awards grants and other forms of support to motivated, low-income people ready to take on the challenge of entering treatment.

## BOOKS WE RECOMMEND

TO SUPPORT EATING DISORDER RECOVERY:

**EATING IN THE LIGHT OF THE MOON**, by Anita A. Johnston

**8 KEYS TO RECOVERY FROM AN EATING DISORDER**, by Carolyn Costin

TO HEAL, INTEGRATE, AND MAKE MEANING OF TRAUMA:

**WAKING THE TIGER**, by Peter Levine

**THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE**, by Bessel van der Kolk

**THE DEVELOPING MIND: HOW RELATIONSHIPS SHAPE WHO WE ARE**, by Dan Siegel

**IN THE REALM OF HUNGRY GHOSTS**, by Gabor Mate

TO UNDERSTAND MENTAL ILLNESS:

**CRAZY LIKE US: THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHE**, by Ethan Watters

**A PRESCRIPTION FOR PSYCHIATRY: WHY WE NEED A WHOLE NEW APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING**, by Peter Kinderman

**THE BIOLOGY OF DESIRE: WHY ADDICTION IS NOT A DISEASE**, by Marc Lewis

TO CHALLENGE BELIEFS ABOUT BODY IMAGE:

**THE GOOD BODY**, by Eve Ensler

**UNBEARABLE WEIGHT**, by Susan Bordo

**HEALTH AT EVERY SIZE**, by Linda Bacon

