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## Yoga benefits in the ageing population

Older people with a range of age-related conditions including arthritis and dementia showed physical and health related improvements after doing Yoga classes, research shows.

Doing Yoga is an effective way for physically-inactive people aged over 60 years to become more mobile, while also improving their mental and social well-being, according to research from Northumbria University, Newcastle.

*'Adapted Yoga to improve physical function and health-related quality of life in physically-inactive older adults: A randomised controlled pilot trial'* shows that a weekly group-based Yoga programme, adapted for older adults with a broad

range of age-related diseases or disorders, can lead to improvements in physical function and mental health.

The three-month research study was conducted at Yorkshire Yoga and Therapy Centre, two community centres and a care home in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, with 52 participants ranging from 63 to 92 years of age.

The British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) '*Gentle Years Yoga*' programme was first developed by charity Yorkshire Yoga in 2009 to cater specifically for the needs of older people with age-related conditions such as osteoarthritis, hypertension, dementia, and sensory impairment.

Adaptations to more challenging Yoga poses were developed so that older adults with physical limitations could safely participate while still reaping the health benefits of Yoga. The aim of this recent study with Northumbria University was to confirm these benefits among a physically-inactive ageing population.

The study found the most commonly-cited physical benefits included improved mobility, for example improved chair rising, walking ability, improved flexibility and reduced pain.

Cited mental health benefits included stress-relieving effects, improved mood and a reduced frequency of panic attacks. More than 70% of participants said they liked the social interaction that the group exercise class provided and many said they had developed new friendships.

Dr Garry Tew, who led the research from Northumbria University's Department of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation, said: "There can be several barriers to exercise among people aged 60 or more, including personal issues such as pain and discomfort, fear of injury, and misconceptions about what's appropriate. This Yoga programme may be appealing because its content is suitable for people with hip or knee replacements and long-term health conditions such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.

Yoga is a holistic therapy, which has the potential to produce a range of physical and mental benefits. The apparent social benefits of this programme were also very interesting, with many participants saying they felt the classes gave them a new lease of life and made them feel less isolated."

Barbara Scaife was one of the participants in the research. She recently spent 18 weeks in hospital where she said the yoga helped her. She said: “Yoga deep breathing exercises I had learned in the Yoga class helped me to cope with the pain - more than anything else! I love the Yoga and I will definitely be coming back to class as soon as I’m able to walk with my sticks again - hopefully soon.” The BWY is the National Governing Body for Yoga recognised by Sport England and the Sport and Recreation Alliance. The BWY has been existence for 52 years and it is the oldest and largest Yoga membership organisation in the UK.

BWY Chair, Paul Fox, said: “The British Wheel of Yoga is committed to building on this excellent research. We are in the process of training as many yoga teachers as possible to deliver the Gentle Years Yoga programme. Yoga can play an important role in promoting health, wellness and quality of life among older members of communities across the UK. At a time when an ageing population is putting pressure on health and social care services, yoga can be a cost effective way of meeting this nationwide challenge. Our thanks to Northumbria University and the Yorkshire Yoga and Therapy Centre for their work”.

The full research has been published in BMC Geriatrics <https://bmgeriatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12877-017-0520-6>

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