

The Role of Yoga in Healing Trauma among Elderly People: An Assessment

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Abstract

Yoga can improve the lives of people of all ages in a variety of means, including reducing trauma, stress, anxiety and depression, refining performance at work and in sport, decreasing risk of heart disorder, obesity, diabetes and cancer and fast-moving recovery from physical activity. Yoga makes us feel good exceptional, enlightening our sense of well-being and making us feel brighter, more linked to ourselves and thankful of the significant relationships in our lives. Many of these benefits are no different for elderly people. As we grow older, muscles incline to stiffen, our joints lose their variety of gesture and we become more vulnerable to chronic complications such as osteoporosis, arthritis and heart disease. Yoga aids to delay the effects of the ageing procedure by preserving muscle smoothness and elasticity, keeping the mind attentive and wakeful, cheering relaxation and firming up muscles and joints. Its multi-pronged approach can inspire the body, mind and spirit to remain healthy and strong while reducing the effects of many age-related issues. This paper will try to explore the benefits of yoga for elderly people and will also try to know how yoga has changed the lives of seniors.

Keywords: *Yoga, Mental health, Trauma, old age*

Introduction

Yoga can transform the lives of people of all ages in a variety of ways- including reducing stress, anxiety and depression, improving performance at work and in sport, reducing risk of heart condition, obesity, diabetes and cancer and speeding up recovery from training. Yoga makes us feel good all-around, improving our sense of well-being and making us feel lighter, more associated to ourselves and grateful to the important relationships in our lives.¹

Practice of Yoga benefits people of all ages, younger or older. Yoga is advantageous for older people, unfit people and unhealthy people too. Yoga aids all. Yoga aids and assists in healthy retirement. Yoga is not only for the young, but also for fit and healthy people.²

¹ Yoga for seniors. <https://www.doyogawithme.com/content/yoga-seniors>

² Benefits of Yoga for Older People. <http://www.marigoldyogaindia.com/benefits-of-yoga-for-older-people.html>

Yoga was envisioned for spiritual advancement, but increasingly nowadays it is used for its supplementary benefits such as stress reduction and managing lifestyle related disorders. Despite its Indian origin, the number of yoga practitioners in Western society is growing, for example, in the United States, a national study showed that 6.1% of the adults were practicing yoga in 2007. Apart from the benefits of Yoga practice in preventing and managing disease, yoga has numerous applications in rehabilitation (*rehabilitare* = to restore, in Latin). There are various types of rehabilitation such as -

- Physical,
- psychological, and
- Social.³

Yoga, as a way of life, has facilitated persons with physical disorders to homecoming to health, an example being coronary artery disease. Other conditions which have benefitted from yoga practice include stroke after cerebrovascular accidents and patients with heart failure, in whom exercise capacity, oxygen saturation, and parasympathetic activity were restored. Yoga breathing or *pranayama* was especially beneficial for elderly people. Practicing yoga has also been used with good results in degenerative disorders such as idiopathic Parkinson's syndrome and muscular dystrophy in old age.⁴

Yoga practice has helped restore the psychological function and mental equilibrium in persons with posttraumatic stress disorder and even certain psychotic conditions With regard to psychological rehabilitation. Lastly, yoga rehearsal can aid people who are at a disadvantage because of their societal surroundings. This comprises of persons in jail, those from the “*inner city*”, children in remand homes, and older people living in community centres. Dimensions of physical and psychological rehabilitation comes under Social rehabilitation.⁵

Yoga and Mental Health

Yoga contains the integration of physical movement with breath consciousness and focused attention. Yoga facilitates neural communication between the brain and body, and the integration of both top-down and bottom-up cognitive processing, unlike most other disciplines. Top-down processing refers to conceptually driven mental events that are inclined by thoughts, expectations, values, and beliefs. When engaging in top down processing you use

³³ Shirly Telles et al. (2013). “Yoga and Rehabilitation: Physical, Psychological and Social”. Published online sep.30 2013.

⁴ ibid

⁵ Shirly Telles et al. “Yoga and Rehabilitation: Physical, Psychological and Social”. Published online sep.30 2013.

existing knowledge and seek out information and experiences that “*fill in the blanks*”. Rather than figuring out each situation from scratch, this permits you to use amassed knowledge as a frame of reference, it also means that you are better able to regulate emotions such as fear and anxiety. In bottom-up processing, information from the external environment is cleaned through the brain’s emotional circuitry prior to being projected to higher order “*thinking*” centers for understanding. For instance, when a pedestrian steps in the path of your car, you slam on the brakes to avert an accident. It is not until after an accident has been prevented that you interpret the details of the event. Top-down processing allows you to maintain composure while handling complex problems.⁶

Bottom-up processing supports in your immediate survival. To maintain a healthy emotional balance, both systems are necessary. Yoga is planned to engage both the top-down and bottom-up systems. By coordinating breath with movement, one becomes increasingly more aware of the physical and mental events that shape your experience, and are better able to concentrate and endure attention. Try standing on one foot while solving a complex problem, and one will notice that it is very difficult to do both well. Yoga enables you to train and enhance one’s mental energy and harness it in appropriate ways.⁷

Ten Good reasons for practising Yoga in later life

- ✓ *Yoga postures (asanas) develop strength and flexibility in joints and muscles and increases the range of movement. This lessens the probability of developing deteriorating diseases such as arthritis and chronic pain as we age.*
- ✓ *Yoga advances our wisdom of balance, body consciousness and attentiveness, thus reducing the risk of falls and fractures in seniors.*
- ✓ *Yoga asanas upsurge bone density and strengthen bones, decreasing the risk of bone deteriorating diseases like osteoporosis, (the reduction in bone density and weakening of bones as we age) another common reason of fractures in elderly people.*
- ✓ *Yoga asanas correct bad posture. Good posture improves spinal health, reducing the risk of back pain, sciatica and herniated disc (slipped disc), it also allows the lungs space to function fully.*

⁶ Bullock,B Grace. “Yoga Improves Memory and Brain Function in Older Adults”.YogaUOnline. <https://www.yogauonline.com/yogau-wellness-blog/yoga-for-healthy-aging-yoga-improves-memory-and-brain-function-older-adults>

⁷ *ibid*

- ✓ *Yoga asanas (postures) and pranayamas (breathing exercises) work in tandem to increase lung capacity. By emerging better lung function regular Yoga practise directs more oxygen in the blood, which leads to enhanced functioning of all the systems of the body.*
- ✓ *Yoga trainings improve the circulation of blood and the lymphatic system, helping to remove toxins and fortify the immune system.*
- ✓ *Yoga asanas and pranayamas effort together to encourage the nervous system and the brain, thus improving the memory and powers of concentration, improving the temperament and relieving apprehension.*
- ✓ *Yoga asanas effort on the digestive organs and endocrine glands to advance the digestion and bowel function. Improving the quality of the food we eat, and increasing the competence of the digestive system can reduce the wish to overeat unhealthy foods.*
- ✓ *Yoga asanas, pranayamas and meditation have been shown to reduce levels of stress, lower blood pressure, regulate blood sugar and cholesterol, therefore reducing the risk of stroke, heart disease and diabetes.*
- ✓ *Yoga leads to a constructive and satisfied state of mind through the regular practise of asanas, pranayamas and relaxation. A relaxed mind and pain free body improves the quality of sleep and sleep behaviours.⁸*

Yoga benefits for Elderly People

Aging is unavoidably a natural process however its deterioration and related health hazards can at best be suspended to an extent through implementation of yoga. Yogic rehearsal can delay the age-related properties of aging motor systems as well as pathological conditions. Scientific surveys on Yoga have authenticated some of the claims that this system of natural therapy can control geriatric problems.⁹

Various benefits of yoga are no different for elderly people. As we get older, muscles incline to stiffen, our joints lose their range of motion and we become more prone to chronic problems such as osteoporosis, arthritis and heart disease. Yoga can help slow down the effects of the ageing process by maintaining muscle softness and flexibility, keeping the mind alert

⁸ Benefits of Yoga for Older People. <http://www.marigoldyogaindia.com/benefits-of-yoga-for-older-people.html>

⁹ Yoga Poses for seniors. <http://www.gyanunlimited.com/health/10-yoga-poses-and-exercises-for-senior-and-old-age/10966/>

and awake, encouraging relaxation and strengthening muscles and joints. Its multi-pronged methodology can encourage the body, mind and spirit to remain healthy and strong while reducing the effects of many age-related concerns.¹⁰

If you are a senior or elderly, regular yoga practice (2-3 times/week) can play an important part in keeping you healthy, because yoga helps:¹¹

- *Decrease swelling in joints*
- *Increase joint mobility and strength*
- *Improve balance and stability*
- *Reduce chances of having a fall Improve cardiovascular health*
- *Help digestion and elimination*
- *Improve sleep*
- *Lower blood pressure and cholesterol*
- *Increase blood flow*
- *Improve mood and well-being*
- *Recovery from surgery*
- *Aid in the grieving process*
- *With depression and anxiety.*¹²

How Elderly People should do Yoga?

The old age people should perform yoga carefully. There are some recommended procedures for practicing Yoga with active elderly people:

- They should perform Yoga under the supervision of a yoga expert or a yoga instructor.
- The instructor should be aware of their health anxieties and capacity level.
- Payable care should be taken for body alignment and posture.
- Reduce the length of time for which yoga pose is maintained.
- Elderly members may not have the strength required to hold the pose for a longer period of time but will gain strength from practicing the pose even for ten or fifteen seconds.
- Whenever there is a stretch in a particular asana, care should be taken to relax the tension.
- Motivate them and praise their efforts.

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

- Attention on poses, which stretch and strengthen areas, which are typically tight or weak in seniors. Ankles, hips, hamstrings, low back, and pectorals need special attention.
- Do not perform a lot of difficult poses.¹³

Why Yoga for Elderly People?

- Yoga helps to diminish positive pressure (*atmospheric*) and increase negative pressure (*anti-atmospheric*) thus good for prostate glands.
- Some researches disclose that yoga reduces urinary acidity and uropepsin.
- Practicing yoga has noteworthy contribution for reduction of high blood pressure, heart rate and coronary problems.
- Yoga lessens the activity of Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) i.e., oxygen free radicals thereby decreases neuro-generative disorders, oncogene activation and probabilities of diabetes and so many health disorders.
- Yoga literature suggests filling 50% of the stomach with solid food (rice, chapatti, vegetables etc.), 25% with water and remaining 25% should be kept empty for healthy living.¹⁴

Best Yoga Asanas for Elderly

- ❖ *Shavasana*
- ❖ *Uttanapadasana*
- ❖ *Naukasana*
- ❖ *Pawanmuktasana*
- ❖ *Ardha Shalabhasana*
- ❖ *Shalabhasana*
- ❖ *Bhujanasana*
- ❖ *Makrasana*
- ❖ *Anulom Vilom Pranayama*
- ❖ *Bhramri Pranayama*¹⁵

Retirement and Yoga

¹³Yoga Poses for seniors. <http://www.gyanunlimited.com/health/10-yoga-poses-and-exercises-for-senior-and-old-age/10966/>

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ Yoga Poses for seniors. <http://www.gyanunlimited.com/health/10-yoga-poses-and-exercises-for-senior-and-old-age/10966/>

By the time we reach middle age, our bodies and our minds have been shaped by the way we have lived - the type of work, the sport and exercise (*or lack of exercise*) we have done, the food and drink we have taken in, and. Young people take their bodies and the thought patterns we have developed minds for granted, paying them little attention. We are never taught to breathe, it is just something we do naturally, isn't it? Studies have revealed that many people breathe incorrectly, or in reverse, that is drawing in the abdomen as they inhale, instead of permitting the abdomen to expand and fill with air. We learn to walk at one or two years old, then just keep putting one foot in front of the other without thinking about it. During the busy period of working and raising a family there is little time to be troubled with such things.¹⁶

Elderly People Can Make Retirement the Best Time of Life.

Retirement from paid work offers a golden opportunity to re-assess the way in which our body and mind is functioning. Self-study and self-assessment forms a essential part of Yoga. Without developing a sense of self-awareness there can be no starting point from which to begin a programme of self-improvement. Once we become conscious of our strengths, and our weaknesses, we can begin to train our body and our mind to follow a new track.¹⁷

Retirement offers a chance to apply time with ourselves, and to take care of ourselves. Elderly people can practice yoga and also can embark on the positive and exiting road towards better health. The supplementary spare time which retirement gives, if used thoughtlessly can easily lead to deteriorating health. Longer make the excuse that we don't have time to look after our own health and wellbeing, because we are too busy doing things for others. Retirement is a crossroads in our lives, when we have the chance to take a new path - or to continue along the old one. It is a time when we can choose whether to head downhill towards deteriorating health and for problems, if we take an example, someone who is habitually anxious, given more time alone, without work to do may become obsessed by small habit is not checked. An office worker already suffering from back ache and rounded shoulders after years working on a computer, who continues to sit for most of the day and does not take the chance to stretch the spine in diverse ways, will soon develop serious back problems. Even the person who, with the intention of keeping fit, continues the same repetitive sporting actions, with age, can do

¹⁶Benefits of Yoga for Older People.<http://www.marigoldyogaindia.com/benefits-of-yoga-for-older-people.html>

¹⁷ ibid

permanent damage to joints and muscles unless the actions are countered by different movements and stretches.¹⁸

Yoga offers the best form of exercise for ignored, overworked or damaged bodies, and relieves the stress of disorderly minds. Yoga is about “optimizing the function of every system in your body from the muscles to digestion, circulation and immunity”. It is about emotional wellbeing, spiritual flexibility and resilience, even enjoyment. Yoga imparts that only when these elements are associated, you can maximize your chance for health and healing.¹⁹

Conclusion

One of the most unbelievable benefits of yoga is its low-impact, lifelong practice properties. Yoga can be practiced from age three to ninety-three. Recently yoga has really caught on with the baby boomer generation and those now entering their golden years.²⁰

Yoga is incredible for an elderly population to help them preserve their balance, keep their joints flexible, maintain bone health and muscle mass, as well as learn how to handle with their mental state as they witness their bodies ageing. Yoga is great for focus, concentration, and emotional wellbeing. Seniors can benefit tremendously from the practice and it gives them a place to tranquil their mind and start to slow down in life. Group classes are also wonderful for an elderly population because it gives them a wisdom of determination and community.²¹

¹⁸ Benefits of Yoga for Older People. <http://www.marigoldyogaindia.com/benefits-of-yoga-for-older-people.html>

¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ Yoga Poses for seniors. <https://www.doyouyoga.com/7-yoga-poses-for-seniors-49052/>

²¹ ibid