

Yoga Therapy in Practice

The Psychological Benefits of Yoga Practice for Older Adults: Evidence and Guidelines

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Abstract: Yoga is an effective complementary approach to health maintenance and promotion for older adults and has been demonstrated to support many dimensions of psychological wellbeing, from everyday stress to anxiety, depression, and coping with health challenges. Yoga has the potential to be even more effective when consciously and systematically integrated into an individual's overall self-care and medical care program, through deliberate and open dialogue among patients, healthcare professionals, and yoga professionals. The purpose of this article is to (1) briefly review the psychological benefits of yoga practice for older adults; (2) outline practice guidelines for older adult yoga, including key postures; and (3) provide some basic practical guidelines for both healthcare professionals referring patients to yoga and yoga teachers interested in working with older adults.

Key words: Yoga, meditation, older adult, senior, fitness, complementary and alternative medicine, psychological health, anxiety, depression, stress

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Introduction

A cross-sectional survey of 1200 community dwelling older adults (older than age 65) found that 62.9% used at least one complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modality, with an average of three modalities per respondent.¹ Many CAM users implement these approaches, at least in part, for the management of disorders that are either psychological or stress-related.² For instance, 34% of respondents with anxiety spectrum disorders reported using mind-body therapies in the management of their condition. Similarly, mind-body therapies were used in the management of symptoms for 26.5% of respondents with depression; 18.5% with chronic pain, including headaches and neck and back pain; 18.0% with heart problems or chest pain; 13.3% with insomnia; and 12.1% with fatigue.

Yoga—a broad approach that includes physical exercise, relaxation, breathing, and meditation practices—is one of the most commonly used CAM or mind-body approaches for psychological and stress-related conditions. Among yoga practitioners, 63.7% reported implementing yoga techniques for wellness and preventative benefits and 47.9% reported implementing yoga techniques for the management of specific health conditions.³ Yoga is free from the stigma of medical care,⁴ thus yoga is particularly appealing to older adults with cultural and personal beliefs that create resistance to medical treatment, especially for psychological issues. Many individuals may use yoga and meditation techniques rather than seek medical treatment for psychological distress.⁴ Older adults may also prefer mind-body strategies—like yoga—that are self-administered because they wish to remain independent and involved in their own care for as long as possible.⁵

While CAM and mind-body approaches like yoga are becoming more popular, only 53% of older adults report their use to their primary care practitioner.¹ There can be contraindications and risks for CAM practices, including certain forms of yoga. Therefore, it is important for medical and mental health professionals to be familiar with the benefits and risks of these approaches, including yoga, in order to feel comfortable discussing them with their patients. When medical and mental health professionals engage in open and informed dialogue with their patients, they support patients' disclosure of approaches that may carry risks along with benefits. If medical and mental health professionals understand how yoga practice may influence physical and psychological health, they can provide supportive guidance to their patients. Medical professionals may be able to recommend yoga to support self-care as part of a wider treatment plan, particularly in older adults who would be resistant to other psychological interventions. Yoga practice provides an alternate option for general practitioners to offer their older adult patients who experience mild psychological distress.

This purpose of this article is to (1) briefly review the psychological benefits of yoga practice for older adults, (2) outline yoga practice guidelines for older adults, and (3) provide practical guidelines for yoga teachers and healthcare professionals, including a sample practice for older adults.

A Brief Review of the Psychological Benefits of Yoga Practice

Stress and Anxiety

Yoga training is particularly effective in reducing stress and anxiety. In fact, yoga's potential for reducing stress-related symptoms is so strong, and so well-established, that the National Institutes of Health recommended meditation over prescription drugs as the preferred treatment for mild hypertension in 1984.⁶ Yoga practice may reduce participants' perceptions of stress⁷ and reactivity to stress,⁸ including the stress of chronic conditions, such as cancer,⁹⁻¹³ posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD),¹⁴ Parkinson's disease,¹⁵ and the stress of caring for an individual with a chronic condition.¹⁶ For example, regular yoga practitioners were found to have lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in saliva samples.¹⁷

Yoga theory and research also support yoga's potential for reducing anxiety.¹⁸ Long-term yoga practitioners were diagnosed as having lower levels of both state and trait anxiety than non-yoga practitioners.¹⁹ Yoga is effective for reducing anxiety symptoms in older adults,²⁰ including older adults with documented clinical anxiety diagnosis.²¹ Yoga's effec-

tiveness in reducing stress and anxiety symptoms may be due to its capacity for lowering stress reactivity and increasing concentration and self-control.²² Yoga breathing may be useful for restoring a sense of control when an individual is confronted by an anxiety-inducing trigger.¹⁴

Depression and Mood

Yoga has a positive impact on overall wellbeing in older adults.²³ Yoga has been shown to reduce hostility,²⁴ modulate the fear of death,²⁵ and improve overall mood.^{17, 26-29} Yoga meditation practice has also been demonstrated to reduce perceived stress and improve mood in both older adults with cognitive impairment³⁰ and their caregivers.³¹

Yoga has the potential to reduce the depression levels of older adults,³² both in nonclinical³³⁻³⁴ and clinical^{27, 35} populations, including individuals for whom depression is a comorbid condition.^{36, 37} In one study,³⁵ depressed outpatients noted reduction in symptoms after just 3 consecutive days of yoga therapy that included 20–25 minutes of simple yoga exercises with specific deep-breathing techniques.

Pain

Yoga reduces pain levels in individuals with osteoarthritis of the knee,³⁸ other osteoarthritis conditions and carpal tunnel syndrome,³⁹ arthritis,⁴⁰ and chronic low-back pain.⁴¹ In one study with AIDS patients, yoga also reduced the usage of pain medication.⁴² A 6-year longitudinal study of individuals with chronic pain found that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a technique that combines gentle yoga practice with mindfulness meditation, reduced pain.⁴³ Individuals with arthritis, back/neck pain, or two or more comorbid pain conditions were most likely to experience improvements in pain intensity and functional limitations in response to MBSR. In particular, yoga may reduce the muscular tension that precipitates pain⁴⁴ and thus serves as an effective preventative technique.

Sleep and Insomnia

Yoga and meditation may also improve sleep quality and reduce sleep disturbance^{45, 46} and reduce chronic insomnia.^{47, 48} In fact, Brown and Gerbarg report that insomnia may be one of the first symptoms to respond to daily yoga practice, through the ability of breathing techniques to "quiet the mind, reduce obsessive worry, and induce a state of physical and mental calmness conducive to sleep."^{14, p. 712} Yoga has been shown to improve sleep quality in an older adult population, but compliance to the protocol is key to improved sleep quality outcomes.⁴⁹

Table 1. Yoga Practice Recommendations for Older Adults

<p><i>Benefits of Yoga Practice (Based on Scientific and Clinical Evidence)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to maintain activities of daily living. • Increased self-efficacy for maintaining activities of daily living. • Reduced levels of stress, anxiety, anger, and depression. • Increased self-control over thoughts and emotions. • Improved sleep quality. • Reduced levels of pain. • Opportunity for self-reflection and spiritual inquiry.
<p><i>General Guidelines for Beginning a Yoga Practice</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor should be certified to teach yoga (200 hours of training is considered an industry minimum), preferably with training in teaching older adults. Individuals can find trained, certified instructors via the Yoga Alliance (www.yogaalliance.org) and/or the International Association of Yoga Therapists (www.iayt.org). • Most clinical trials of yoga include guided group classes, supported by at-home practice. This parallels traditional yoga theory, which recommends yoga practice under a teacher’s guidance, supported by daily at-home practice. Home practice in particular may be key; a longitudinal study by Rosenzweig et al. found that improved compliance with home-practice routines was associated with several positive outcomes, including improved overall psychological health.⁶² • The American College of Sports Medicine recommends that older adults engage in physical activity based on the following guidelines: Aerobic activity—a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 days per week or a minimum of 20 minutes of vigorous activity 3 days per week. Muscle-strengthening activity—at least 2 days per week. Flexibility and balance—at least 2 days per week.⁶³ An appropriately sequenced yoga practice can meet the exercise needs of older adults for muscle strengthening activity and flexibility/balance.
<p><i>Common Yoga Styles</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hatha yoga: a general term usually describing a traditional yoga practice with slow, relaxed movement and a focus on breathing. Appropriate for most older adults. • Chair or seated yoga: an adapted yoga practice, based on Hatha yoga, in which participants sit on chairs rather than the floor and have the chair available for support during standing practice. Appropriate for most older adults, and beneficial for older adults with limited mobility or health conditions that prevent getting up and down from the floor. Also appropriate for older individuals in walkers or wheelchairs. • Iyengar yoga: a precise form of yoga that focuses on specific body alignment, slow movement, and endurance. Appropriate for most older adults. • Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: The MBSR approach combines gentle hatha yoga and mindfulness meditation. MBSR is very appropriate for new yoga practitioners and provides a comprehensive approach to mind-body wellness and stress management. Appropriate for most older adults. • Restorative yoga: a yoga practice focused on soothing and supportive yoga postures. This practice usually involves the use of yoga props (bolsters, straps, pillows, blankets, and small foam blocks) to support the individual in holding a yoga posture for a longer period of time (as much as 15 minutes) while relaxing and consciously breathing. Appropriate for most older adults. • Viniyoga: a gentle yoga practice in which the breath and the physical poses are synchronized. Viniyoga is personalized to the individual practitioner. Appropriate for older adults, particularly since the Viniyoga teacher will work to adapt and develop the practice based on the needs of the individual.

Table 1. *Yoga Practice Recommendations for Older Adults*

<p><i>Common Yoga Styles (continued)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kundalini yoga: a yoga practice that focuses on energy work, including breathing practices and flowing, repetitive movement. Some group Kundalini classes include jumping, vigorous activity, and breath-holding poses. This may or may not be appropriate for older adults, depending on the instructor's teaching style and focus, so older adults should always inquire with the instructor about specific health concerns. • Vinyasa, Power, and Ashtanga yoga: vigorous yoga practices based on fast movement, high-intensity exercise, and building of strength and flexibility. Generally not appropriate for older adults, unless the individual is in excellent physical condition with no joint or mobility issues. • Hot yoga: vigorous yoga practices following specific protocols with little room for modification or variation, practiced in a room heated to above 100° F. Generally not appropriate for older adults, unless the individual is in excellent physical condition with no joint or mobility issues and no issues that would be contraindicated for heat (such as heart or skin conditions).
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Components of Yoga

As outlined by Pantanjali, yoga includes eight limbs, or disciplines, including *yamas* (ethical disciplines), *niyamas* (individual observances), *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (self-realization or enlightenment). Though many in the West are only familiar with *asana* (the physical postures of yoga), many of the yoga interventions used in research studies also include breathing exercises, concentration and awareness meditation, and discussions about everyday living. In fact, it is the more comprehensive yoga interventions that seem to have the greatest potential for impact on psychological health. For instance, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) specifically includes mindfulness meditation as a core component of the intervention, and the impact of MBSR on psychological health has been documented in numerous research studies, including three meta-analyses. Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach's meta-analysis of 20 studies concluded that MBSR helps a broad range of both clinical and non-clinical problems.⁵⁰ Chiesa and Serretti's review of 10 studies found that MBSR likewise had a positive impact on stress levels in healthy people.⁵¹ Ledesma and Kumano further verified the positive impact of MBSR on mental health outcomes in cancer patients, in a review of 10 studies.⁵² While the physical practices of yoga can be very helpful, it is specifically the non-physical components of yoga that yield the unique benefits of yoga above and beyond other forms of physical exercise.⁵³

How Does Yoga Influence Psychological Health?

Traditional yoga philosophy points to key mechanisms for yoga's mental health benefits. First is mindfulness, the

practice of complete present-moment awareness.⁵⁴ During yoga practice, one is encouraged to focus on breath, sensation, and mindful movement, rather than allowing the mind to wander. Inherent in present-moment awareness is nonjudgmental acceptance of things as they are, rather than craving for change in the future. For older adults facing physical health impairments, loss of independence, the death of loved ones, and their own impending death, mindfulness and acceptance provide profound support for psychological wellbeing.⁵⁵ If the older adult can accept his or her current situation and enjoy the present moment, he or she can experience less stress, anxiety, and depression.

Second, through the practice of yoga breathing and focusing techniques, older adults learn to cultivate self-control.⁵³ In my doctoral dissertation research,⁵³ a yoga intervention with older adults led to significant improvements in perceived self-control (as compared to an exercise group and a control group). Improved self-control predicted improvements in psychological health, including both general self-efficacy and self-efficacy for daily living. Self-efficacy, the belief that one can handle the challenges of life, has been shown to support improved health status and improved health behaviors in older adults.⁵⁶ Because yoga may increase the individual's sense of self-control and self-efficacy for daily living, patients who practice yoga may be more likely to develop and maintain health-promoting behaviors, such as healthful eating, maintenance of medication schedules, good sleep hygiene, and other self-care tasks.

Finally, yoga classes can support the development of social relationships with both other students and the instructor. In fact, for some students, social relationships may be a primary motivation for older adults to continue to engage in

Table 2. Recommendations for Yoga Professionals: Guidelines for Teaching Yoga to Older Adults

<p><i>Recommended Reading</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ross & Thomas (2010) “The Health Benefits of Yoga and Exercise: A Review of Comparison Studies”⁶⁴ (article) • Krucoff et al. (2010) “Teaching Yoga to Seniors: Essential Considerations to Enhance Safety and Reduce Risk in a Uniquely Vulnerable Age Group”⁶⁵ (article) • Wang (2009) “The Use of Yoga for Physical and Mental Health Among Older Adults: A Review of the Literature”⁶⁶ (article) • Mackenzie & Rakel (2006) <i>Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Older Adults</i>⁶⁷ (Textbook)
<p><i>Preparation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review ACSM Position Statement on Older Adults, and CDC Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults (http://www.informz.net/acsm/data/images/exerciseandpaforolderadults.pdf). • Remain current in the published yoga literature. • Establish relationships with appropriate medical and mental health professionals. • Maintain current certification in First Aid and CPR/AED. • Ask students to fill out health status surveys and/or ask students about specific health conditions and limitations so you can adapt yoga practices according to students’ needs.
<p><i>Class Environment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid background music out of consideration for students who may have difficulty hearing. • Avoid incense or candles out of consideration for students who may have breathing conditions, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. • Provide chairs to support students who are not comfortable or able to sit on the floor or complete standing poses without support for their balance. • Allow students to leave on shoes and socks if they prefer, out of consideration for foot conditions, balance conditions, and physical/psychological discomfort with being barefoot. (For instance, people with complications from diabetes may worry about going barefoot due to risk of foot injury, and individuals with foot conditions may be embarrassed about exposing their feet.)
<p><i>Class Format & Delivery</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that class environment and word choice while teaching are positive and encouraging, focusing on what students can do rather than any limitations they may have. For example, start with the simplest version of a pose and suggest that students can work up to more complicated options, rather than starting with the complicated version and offering modifications. Always think about how to make the class and each practice accessible to everyone. • Avoid physical adjustments to students’ postures, and instead focus on verbal correction. • Move away from the idea of the “perfect” yoga posture and instead focus on safe postures and overall health outcomes. • Provide students encouragement to take breaks where needed, even during a pose, to support their energy to complete the entire class. • Mirror your students when teaching and providing instructions (face your students and do your left side while telling them to do their right side, so that you provide a mirror image of the students). This will reduce student confusion about instructions.
<p><i>Recommendations for Specific Yoga Practices</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meditation practice supports internal focus, increased self-control, and mindful acceptance. For instance, learning to focus on the breath may provide a simple exercise that supports learning to cultivate attentional focus. • Relaxation exercises that provide strategies for stress management and stress reduction are an integral part of a yoga practice for older adults.

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<p><i>Recommendations for Specific Yoga Practices (continued)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing practice increases lung capacity and oxygenation, which supports increased energy and alertness. For example, learning to take deep breaths by relaxing the abdominal muscles provides a strategy for stress management, especially in contrast to the shallow breathing that may occur under stress. However, all breathing exercises should be carefully considered, especially those which involve rapid breathing or holding the breath, because these exercises may be contraindicated for older adults or individuals with chronic health conditions. • Standing poses (supported by a chair, if needed) increase leg and torso strength, to improve the individual's ability to complete activities of daily living and reduce the likelihood of falling. Also, standing poses support maintenance of thigh strength, which facilitates ongoing ability for walking and mobility. • Balance poses (supported by a chair, if needed) support muscle control, to reduce the likelihood of falling. This further increases the ability to perform activities of daily living. • Squats (supported by a chair, if needed) support pelvic, thigh, and buttock strength. When complemented with Kegel exercises, these can reduce the likelihood of urinary/bowel incontinence and thus improve daily quality of life. • Other key yoga exercises include those that focus on joint range of motion, joint stability, and overall balance, all of which can support improved ability to complete activities of daily living and thus improve overall psychological wellbeing.
<p><i>Contraindications</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot yoga practices (in a heated room) are contraindicated due to potential risk of overheating, stress on cardiovascular function, etc. • Avoid undue strain on the joints caused by jumping into yoga poses or placing excessive pressure on joints through extreme range-of-motion or weight-bearing. • Ensure adequate support and time for transitions between yoga poses. This is particularly relevant when working with older adults with balance issues, circulation/blood pressure issues, or with a history of joint injuries or joint replacements. Fast movements are inappropriate and may aggravate conditions and lead to injury. Instead, allow adequate time to rest between postures and slow, gently guided movement into the next exercise. • Pain and strain are not appropriate. When discomfort is experienced, the yoga practitioner should reduce the level of exertion. If discomfort continues, the individual should stop and consult a doctor prior to further yoga practice. • Medical practitioners, their patients, and the yoga instructor should engage in a dialogue to determine specific yoga postures that are inappropriate for the patient's personal health profile. For instance, individuals with osteoporosis of the spine should avoid spinal flexion in forward bends or any extreme spinal movement, as well as weight-bearing inversions (such as shoulderstand or headstand) due to risk of spinal and cervical fracture. Individuals with glaucoma should avoid all inversions due to the increased ocular pressure in the pose. Individuals with a history of psychological disorders, including anxiety, panic disorders, and bipolar disorder, should avoid certain <i>pranayama</i> (breath control exercise), such as rapid breathing exercises, due to the potential risk of overstimulation. Likewise, individuals with a history of heart disease should avoid certain types of <i>pranayama</i>, for instance, those that require holding the breath. Overall, yoga instructors who work with older adults should ensure that the yoga practice complies with ACSM guidelines for exercise in older adults, with particular attention to contraindications for individuals with chronic diseases or disabilities.⁶⁸
<p><i>Other Guidelines</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time for student interaction both before, after, and during class (if appropriate) to support students who come to class for social interaction. • Determine the student/class level of comfort with Sanskrit or Eastern influences, and adapt the yoga class format and language as appropriate.

group fitness programs, including yoga classes.⁵⁷ Social connection supports both physical and mental health in older adults and is an important contributor to overall psychological wellbeing.⁵⁸

Guidelines for Practice

Evidence-based practice recommendations for yoga for older adults are limited by the small, albeit growing, body of research on yoga with an older adult population. Yoga teachers and medical professionals must draw on the more extensive literature about the effects of yoga on physical and psychological wellbeing in general, as well as the benefits of physical activity and meditation for older adults. The following guidelines are based on the author's own familiarity with the scientific literature, as well as professional experience teaching yoga to older adults and conducting research on the benefits of yoga for older adults.^{53, 59}

Table 1, *Yoga Practice Recommendations for Older Adults*, provides an overview of key concepts, including primary benefits of yoga practice for older adults, general guidelines, and common yoga styles. Yoga teachers and yoga therapists may want to share this table with their students as a ready reference to encourage the student to engage in doctor–patient conversations around appropriate use of yoga practice in promoting psychological health and wellbeing. Medical professionals (doctors, nurses, physical therapists, etc.) may also find the table handy in providing a basic overview of key yoga principles, both for their own understanding and to share with patients.

Table 2, *Recommendations for Yoga Professionals: Guidelines for Teaching Yoga to Older Adults*, provides principles for yoga teachers to consider with regard to preparing for and teaching yoga to an older adult population. Table 3, *Guidelines for Medical Professionals*, provides guidelines for medical professionals to ensure they are informed about yoga practice and to facilitate understanding of, and conversation with, patients who may practice yoga.

Table 4, *Sample Yoga Sequence*,^{60,61} offers a simple (10–15 minute) seated yoga routine that older adults may use for at-home practice to promote general health and psychological wellbeing, and it also provides a ready reference for patients who are interested in implementing a gentle daily yoga practice in support of yoga classes or training under the guidance of an instructor. Yoga instructors can also use Table 4 as a supportive guide in tailoring a yoga class to an older adult population.

Guidelines for Collaborative Relationships between Yoga Teachers and Healthcare Professionals

A collaborative relationship between yoga professionals and healthcare professionals is needed to support a safe yoga practice with effective psychological outcomes. Yoga teachers and therapists who work with older adults should seek to develop relationships with appropriate healthcare professionals, such as general practitioners, internal medicine specialists, and specialized professionals such as podiatrists, pain management specialists, physical therapists, and psychologists. Healthcare professionals may be uninformed of the benefits of yoga practice for older adults, and therefore may discourage older adult patients from practicing yoga. Healthcare professionals will be more likely to make appropriate referrals when they have an established relationship with a yoga professional who specializes in working with older adults.

Likewise, healthcare professionals who refer older adults to yoga practice should seek out relationships with certified yoga instructors who have substantive training both in yoga and in special needs and common conditions of older adults. Further, healthcare professionals who intend to recommend yoga as a supportive self-care tool for their patients should have at least minimal experience with yoga themselves, and should try various yoga instructors in their locale in order to better make recommendations about appropriate yoga venues for older adult patients. In addition, certain research journals, in particular the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* and the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, provide good sources of peer-reviewed yoga research to support ongoing professional development and understanding of the potential applications of yoga in promotion of physical health and psychological wellbeing. These academic journals are also good sources of continuing education for yoga teachers who work with older adult populations, to ensure that practice and teaching are supported by the most current and relevant research-based evidence.

Conclusion

Yoga is an effective complementary approach to health maintenance and promotion for older adults and has been demonstrated to support many dimensions of psychological wellbeing, from everyday stress to anxiety, depression, and coping with health challenges. Yoga has the potential to be even more effective when consciously and systematically integrated into an individual's overall self-care and medical care program, through deliberate and open dialogue among patients, healthcare professionals, and yoga professionals.

Table 3. Guidelines for Medical Professionals: Yoga for Older Adults

Foundational Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish relationships with trained yoga instructors who have experience in working with older adults. Look for yoga teachers in your area with experience and training in working with older adults. Identify a trained, certified instructor via the Yoga Alliance (www.yogaalliance.org) and/or the International Association of Yoga Therapists (www.iayt.org). • Gain at least basic familiarity with yoga. Attend a few classes with yoga teachers who work with older adults to gain a better understanding of yoga practice with this population. • Review the published medical literature on yoga, in particular in the <i>Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine</i> and the <i>International Journal of Yoga Therapy</i>. (Also review the recommended reading list in Table 2.)
Patient Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss complementary and alternative therapies with your patients to ensure you are fully informed of their self-care decisions. • Suggest yoga as a gentle exercise option for patients who have not been active or who are interested in increasing their physical activity. • Provide patients with basic guidelines about the potential benefits of yoga for their health condition. Be clear about any contraindications for specific physical activities, so they can share this information with the yoga teacher. Empower patients with information that will allow them to make good decisions about physical activity and self-care.

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Table 4. *Sample Yoga Sequence for Yoga Class or At-Home Practice*



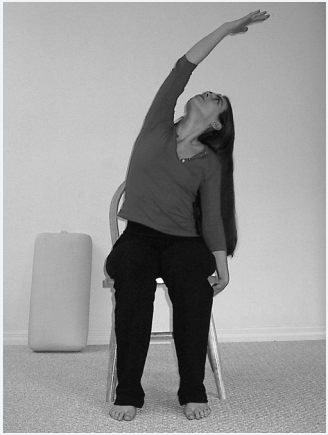
Asana (Yoga Pose)	Purpose	Description	Illustrative Figure
<i>Seated Meditation</i>	Centering and quieting the mind, increasing self-control over thoughts and breathing.	Breathing and meditation. Count the breaths or focus on a chosen mantra while slowing breathing in and out, 2–5 minutes.	
<i>Chest-Opener and Gentle Twist</i>	Opening of the chest and rib cage to improve breathing efficiency. Improved breathing during yoga practice supports better breathing throughout the day, which improves energy levels and alertness.	Seated, place right hand on left knee, and gently twist back to place the left hand behind you on the left thigh, left hip, or back of the chair (as appropriate based on flexibility level). Hold for 5–10 deep breaths. Repeat on the opposite side.	
<i>Side Stretch</i>	Opening of the side body, as well strengthening and stretching of the shoulders and arms. This stretch supports improved ability to maintain self-sufficiency in daily activities such as reaching up to shelves, combing one's own hair, etc., and thus increases self-efficacy.	Looking up toward the hand, lengthening from hip to fingertip, 5–10 deep breaths per side.	

Table 4. Sample Yoga Sequence for Yoga Class or At-Home Practice




Asana (Yoga Pose)	Purpose	Description	Illustrative Figure
<i>Seated Forward Bend</i>	Forward bends support internal focus and quiet reflection. Forward bends provide calming energy when over-stimulated by external forces.	Spread legs wide, fold gently forward from waist, resting hands on thighs, knees, legs, or ankles, 5–10 deep breathes, quieting of mind takes energy within.	
<i>Mountain Pose</i>	Mountain pose strengthens the legs and torso, increasing physical stability. This physical stability correlates to greater stability of mind and emotions.	Toes turned in slightly, heels slightly apart. Weight centers above arches. Shoulders roll down and back, chest lifts. Eyes close. Work toward stillness of mind and body. Hold for 5–10 breaths up to 10 full minutes.	
<i>Supported Triangle</i>	Triangle pose strengthens the legs and torso while opening the chest, cultivating the complementary forces of strength of purpose and open-mindedness.	Standing beside the chair, feet wide, hand rests on seat of the chair, opposite hand lifts upward; gaze focuses on upper thumb. Hold 5–10 deep breaths. Repeat on the opposite side.	

Table 4. Sample Yoga Sequence for Yoga Class or At-Home Practice


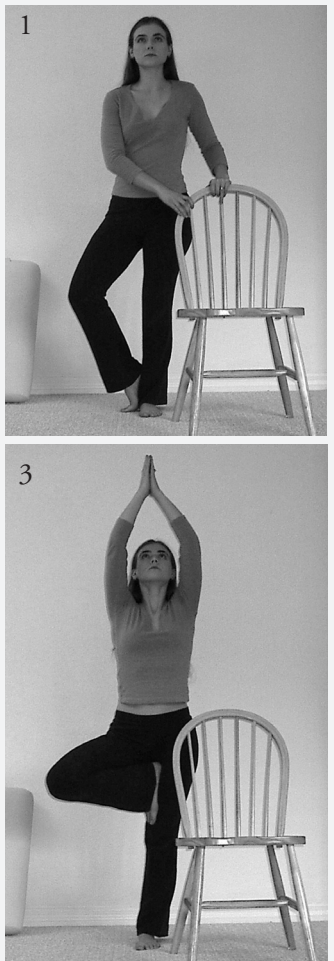
Asana (Yoga Pose)	Purpose	Description	Illustrative Figure
<p><i>Supported Chair</i></p>	<p>Squat improves thigh, buttock, and groin strength, thus promoting greater pelvic floor control. Increased pelvic floor control better supports bladder control and thus can improve self-efficacy for activities of daily living for older adults.</p>	<p>Feet are wider than hip width, knees are bent, tailbone tucked under, abdomen pulled back toward the spine. Gaze and chest lift upward. Hands may hold onto the back of the chair for support; if steady, extend one or both arms up toward the sky. Hold for 5 deep breaths.</p>	
<p><i>Supported Tree</i></p>	<p>Balance poses challenge the physical capabilities and increase stability, which can reduce the likelihood of falls and thus further support self-efficacy for activities of daily living. In addition, because of the inherent challenges in balance poses, they teach patience and self-acceptance during the process of attempting any new task.</p>	<p>Stand on left foot. Right foot comes to ankle, calf, or upper thigh with knee turned outward. Hands at the back of the chair for support, or one or both hands may come to center and then extend upward. Hold 5–10 deep breaths, gaze focused at one point. Repeat both sides.</p>	

Table 4. Sample Yoga Sequence for Yoga Class or At-Home Practice




Asana (Yoga Pose)	Purpose	Description	Illustrative Figure
<i>Standing Cow</i>	Gentle backbend to strengthen the back muscles and open the abdominal muscles, and counteract the normal contraction that occurs due to daily stress and tension. Also important for older women, who may suffer from diminished posture and bone mass to support maintenance of height and strength and thus support self-efficacy for activities of daily living.	Stand beside chair, feet directly above hips, bend at waist and place hands on chair, directly under shoulders. Inhale, lift the chest and chin, lift the tailbone, arch the spine. Breathe gently, 10–15 seconds.	
<i>Leg Lifts</i>	This exercise supports hip/leg flexibility and strength, to improve ability to complete activities of daily living. Hip/leg strength includes balance, ability to independently move to standing from a sitting position, and walk independently. These physical abilities support self-efficacy for activities of daily living.	Lift the right leg forward as high as possible, engaging the thigh muscles; hold for 5–10 deep breaths to cultivate mental and physical endurance. Repeat on the left side. Then, open the right leg out to the right and lift as high as possible, engaging the thigh muscles and hip flexors; hold for 5–10 deep breaths. Repeat on the right side. Repeat both forward and to the side for 2–3 rounds.	
<i>Feet and Hand Stretch</i>	Simple joint mobilization supports improved range of motion and normal functioning for activities of daily living.	Extend arms and legs. Focus on creating space between fingers and toes and extend the joints as far as possible, while inhaling to open up completely. Breathe gently, 10–15 seconds. Exhale, slowly curling in fingers and toes with control and contracting body. Breathe gently, 10–15 seconds. Repeat 2–3 times each side.	

Table 4. Sample Yoga Sequence for Yoga Class or At-Home Practice

Asana (Yoga Pose)	Purpose	Description	Illustrative Figure
<p><i>Seated Meditation, Hands in Namaste</i></p>	<p>Quiet reflection at the end of yoga practice encourages reflection on how the strength and peace of mind cultivated in yoga can be extended to daily life.</p>	<p>Hands to center for centering awareness, focus on maintaining the sense of calm mind and open body and extending that throughout the rest of the day, 2–5 minutes of diaphragmatic breaths.</p>	