

Aging Gracefully

THE PHYSIOYOGA WAY

- Dr. Nilima Patel

Aging seems to be the only available way to live a long life.

Most people think that aging is irreversible and we know that there are mechanisms even in the human machinery that allow for the reversal of aging, through correction of diet, through anti-oxidants, through removal of toxins from the body, through exercise, through yoga and breathing techniques, and through meditation.

~ Deepak Chopra ~

Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art. Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength. Aging is not synonymous with disease. Ageing in humans refers to a multidimensional process of physical, psychological, and social change.

In the 1970s, the American Medical Association's Committee on Aging concluded a 10-year study by declaring that it had not found a single physical or mental condition that could be directly attributed to the passage of time. Stress- and diet-related conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, loss of muscle strength, reduction in motor fitness (i.e., balance, flexibility, agility, power and reaction time), reduction in respiratory reserves (breathing capacity), constipation and diseases associated with elimination, diabetes, sleep disorders and depression are experienced by young and old alike.

We now know that many of the classic symptoms of aging are caused by inactivity or the wrong type of activity (i.e., mechanical, imbalanced forms of exercise that strain the body), inadequate nutrition and accumulated stress and tension. Even such common outer symptoms of aging-poor posture, rounded shoulders, dowager's hump, closed chest, stiffness and loss of mobility-originate when we are younger and become increasingly pronounced as the years go by.

SIX SUGGESTED DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESSFUL AGEING INCLUDE:

1. No physical disability over the age of 75 as rated by a physician
2. Good subjective health assessment (i.e. good self-ratings of one's health)
3. Length of undisable life

4. Good Mental Health

5. Objective Social support

6. Self-rated life satisfaction in eight domains, namely marriage, income-related work, children, friendship and social contacts, hobbies, community service activities, religion and recreation/sports.

SPIRITUALITY AND AGING

Events or circumstances may threaten the strength and stability of spirituality in Older Adults. There may be symptoms or signs of unmet needs or unstable spirituality which could be the root cause of psychosomatic illnesses in elderly.

- Threats to self
- Insecurity, lacking self-esteem
- Seeking out spiritual assistance
- Questioning one's existence or meaning of life
- Depression
- Doubts, despair
- Guilt
- Boredom
- Anger

THE YOGA PHILOSOPHY: THE KARMA OF AGING

To overcome and combat the above mentioned threats, according to the Yoga tradition, there are three grades of karma. This, if practiced by aging population, the life process can be lived gracefully and successfully.

1. Karma that can easily be changed.

(Meditate rather than watching TV)

2. Karma that can only be changed with considerable effort.

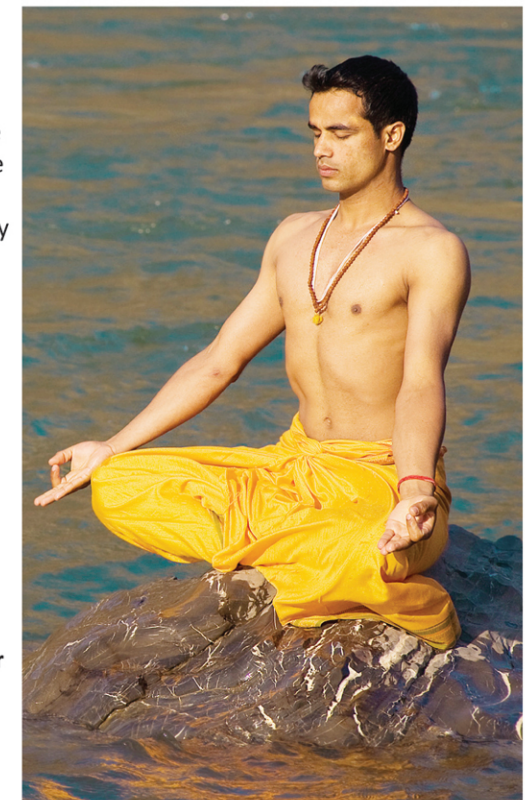
(Learning & Relearning-Positive Outlook)

3. Karma coming to you for good or ill that cannot be prevented.

(Positive over Negative – The Ashtangyoga ladder of Sage Patanjali)

Inevitable karma represents the lessons we cannot negotiate our way out of. While most karma can be redirected through the conscious application of our free will, there are some experiences in life we're destined to go through whether we like it or not. This might be something positive like a wonderful marriage or a financial windfall, or it could be something negative like a divorce, an accident, or the ailments and debility that often accompany aging.

Negative experiences can be hard to accept. In Ashtangyoga, the last of the ten yogic observances (the famous **first & second step of Astangyoga ladder - yamas and niyamas**) is **Ishvara pranidhana**, "surrender to God's will." When we have made every sincere attempt to avert a negative outcome and it materializes anyway, it's time for **Ishvara pranidhana**. This nourishes the Spiritual Health in the elderly.



The technical and experiential aspect of **Yogic Posture** – the third step of Ashtangyoga ladder strengthens the Physical Health of the aging person, **The Pranayam** – Fourth step of the ladder regulates the metabolic functions, **Pratyahar** – the fifth step re educates on lifestyle modifications, **Dharana** – the sixth step enhances the self-confidence and Mental Health, **Dhyana** – the seventh step strengthens the immunity which ultimately makes them reach the **eighth step of Aging Gracefully**.

GERIATRIC YOGA

Geriatric yoga is a great option for many looking to restore their health to a more youthful state. Those who practice Yoga in its purest form view it as much more than just a form of exercise. It is a Wholistic experience, which rejuvenates the mind, body and spirit.

According to yoga philosophy, it is the flexibility of the spine, not the number of years, which determines a person's age. Yoga is believed by many to be a tremendous tool for combating the concerns of an aging society.

Yoga is dynamite to make one feel younger with heightened mental prowess. Longer life often results from following yogic ways of health maintenance. When both external dangers and internal diseases and habits leading to degeneration are removed, one naturally lives longer.

PHYSIOTHERAPIST AS A GERIATRIC YOGA INSTRUCTOR:

It has long been advocated by the medical community that exercise is good for over all preventive care. Walking, for example, is recommended for weight loss and prevention of heart disease. However, fewer doctors of traditional medicine really understand the healing aspects of yoga so they do not suggest yoga to their patients. There is much

need for more clinical trials that prove the efficacy of yoga as a legitimate prescription for healing and wellness.

Armed with knowledge of Biomechanics, Community Psychology, Exercise Physiology and the medical conditions of her participants and the ability to modify poses to accommodate each participant's health circumstances, a well-informed Yoga Physiotherapist can benefit all of her class, particularly the senior participants, given the age-related health concerns that they face.

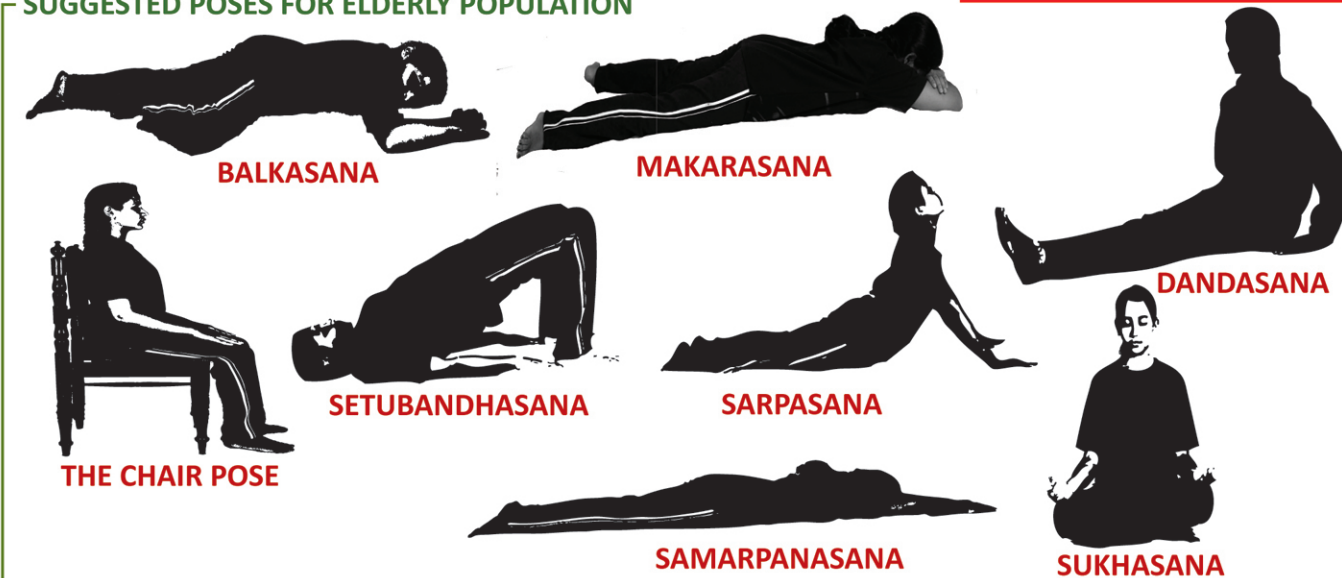
Following are suggested guidelines for practicing Yoga with active older adults:

- Be aware of health concerns and ability level for each of the participants.
- Slow down the transition between poses.
- Reduce the length of time for which an asana is held. The pose can be repeated, if desired.
- Train the participants to focus their gaze in a specific spot to assist with balance.
- Whenever you cue the class to stretch one area, cue them also to release tension in another.
- Focus on the participants' success. Encourage them and praise their efforts. Create a supportive environment, so that these elders can have, both, the health benefits and the psychological assurance.
- Focus on poses, which stretch and strengthen areas, which are typically tight or weak. Ankles, hips, hamstrings, low backs, and pectorals need special attention. Along these lines, be cautious of the weight that they put on their wrists, as their wrists are often weak.
- Do not perform many complicated poses, but always include at least one pose that is a bit more challenging.
- Maintain proper fitness etiquette at all times.

SUGGESTED POSES FOR ELDERLY POPULATION

Asana/Pose: The Sanskrit term "asana" is translated as pose or posture. The final positioning of an asana is achieved when all body parts are positioned correctly and mindfully. The goal of the positioning of an asana is that a balance is realized between each side of the body and that no undue stress is placed on any particular organ, muscle, joint or bone.

SUGGESTED POSES FOR ELDERLY POPULATION



PRANAYAM FOR ELDERLY POPULATION

Yogic Breathing: As we age, we stop breathing fully. Yoga reminds us that it is important to exhale as fully as we inhale. As we grow older, we lose flexibility in our ribcage, and sometimes suffer from spinal deformities, creating less room for lung expansion. Mindful breathing takes into consideration the three purposes of breathing: replenishing, warming, and cleansing. Focusing on full inhalations and exhalations serves to slow down the heart rate, which, in turn, improves focus and increases concentration.



All the elderly can practice Anulo Vilom Pranayam, The Alternate Nostril Yogic Breathing cleansing

techniques, as it has no contraindications or side effects.

MEDITATION BENEFITS FOR ELDERLY POPULATION

Diaphragmatic breathing is one of the most important foundation practices for meditation.

When the diaphragm muscle contracts, it pulls the bottom of the lungs downward, causing them to fill, while the ribs flare outward to the sides. The chest and abdominal muscles are not used in diaphragmatic breathing. Conscious diaphragmatic breathing is extremely relaxing to the autonomic nervous system and is essential preparation for deep meditation.

One of the most celebrated benefits of meditation is that it greatly helps the person's physical state. Among the physical benefits of meditation, involve the heart through a deep rest because it decreases the person's metabolic rate as well as the heart rate, which leads to the reduction of workload for the heart. Aside from that, it is also known to lower the levels of a person's cortisol as well as dissolving the chemicals that are closely associated with everyday stress.

Other physical benefits of meditation also include reduced free radicals in the body by eliminating oxygen molecules that are unstable, decreases a person's high blood pressure, develops the ability to have more resistant skin, lowering or totally dropping the person's level of cholesterol, improve air flow to the lungs to aid easy breathing, delays biological aging and increases the levels of DHEAS in older people.

MUSIC: It is essence of life. It connects one to his/her own Self and reality. It is for inner poise, calm and serenity. It communicates one with all and improves social health.

DIET: For **physique** is Antioxidant, fibre and mineral rich food, for **Mind** is reading good texts and socialization and for the **Soul** is Meditation.

BENEFITS OF PHYSIOYOGA:

The science of Yoga is not to be experimented and proved, but it needs to be experienced and felt. However, many research studies have quoted the valuable benefits of its practices.

Increased resistance to disease. Yoga produces a healthy strong body with increased immunity against disease.

Rejuvenation of the glands. Yoga has a marked effect on the pituitary, thyroid, adrenal and sex glands. This produces a feeling of well-being, prevents premature aging and extends sexual virility well into old age.

Look and feel younger. Yoga reduces facial wrinkles and produces a natural 'face-lift'. This is mainly due to the inverted postures. (To be practiced under supervision)

Vision and hearing improve. Normal vision and hearing depend to a large extent on the eyes and ears receiving a good nerve and blood supply. The nerves and blood vessels which supply the eyes and ears have to pass through the neck. Yoga postures and yoga neck exercises improve the condition of the neck, resulting in better eyesight and improved hearing.

Mental/Emotional benefits. Because of yoga's rejuvenation effects on the glands and nervous system, including the brain, yoga results in a positive mental/emotional state. It helps one to feel more confident, enthusiastic and generally optimistic.

Sleep: Yoga practice improved quantity and quality of sleep among the geriatric population. Significant decrease in the time it takes to fall asleep and an increase in the total number of hours slept

Arthritis: Handgrip strength in both hands (measured with a grip dynamometer) increased in non-arthritic adults and children and in rheumatoid arthritis patients following Yoga.

Diabetes: Type II diabetics can achieve better blood sugar control and pulmonary functions when they follow a daily Yoga regimen.

Hypertension: After three months of Yoga practice, the patients can experience a decrease in blood pressure, as well as a decrease in blood sugar, cholesterol and triglycerides. Feedback also indicates that the patients become calmer.

Chronic Pain: Many people speculate that any form of group activity, be it Yoga or otherwise, is mood-elevating for seniors as they may be living alone and/or have limited social interaction due to physical limitations. The social aspect of attending a group exercise class, is invaluable. The contact group provides a sense of belonging.

There are all kinds of yoga styles being taught to all kinds of arthritis patients. Not all yoga styles can be adapted, and not all yoga instructors are trained to work with people with arthritis disorders. You cannot go to the local gym and expect to receive therapeutic treatment. Practicing yoga regularly can bring relief from pain if certain and specific yoga postures (asana) are done correctly. If performed incorrectly, asana can be injurious and exacerbate the problem being treated. It is critical to know how to begin yoga for treatment. **In the arthritic patient, asana should be developed slowly.**

CHAIR YOGA SUITED FOR AGING

The chair replaces the yoga mat and becomes an extension of the body allowing you to take full advantage of yoga's amazing fitness and health potential.

Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ is based on the 5000-year-old yoga postures (called asanas) and breathing techniques plus other Eastern and Western movements her students find beneficial. Lakshmi has modified these poses for the chair making the health and fitness benefits accessible to everyone especially for the aging population.

Many of us are searching for ways to improve our quality of life and remain active as we enter our midlife and later years. Nationwide, the aging process. A complete health system, yoga not only restores vitality to the body, but also expands the mind and soul. Yoga transforms the years after 50 from a time of deterioration to one of increased perspective and illumination.

Yoga offers a uniquely holistic approach to health. This ancient science, with its deep roots in Ayurvedic medicine, is truly the most complete system of self-health care that exists. The best part of it is that it is something you do to yourself, for yourself. It is an active, rather than a passive, approach to keeping yourself healthy and fit throughout the life.

My general health, well-being and joy in life have increased immeasurably. It seems to me that the most important thing that seniors can do to enhance their lives is to change their lifestyle to include yoga with experienced and qualified instructors. To have it work for each of us, we must DO IT frequently.

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