

YOGA BENEFITS FOR SENIORS

Interested in updating your fitness routine? If you haven't already, consider yoga. It's among the best exercises for beginners and is even more beneficial to seniors. Yoga promotes flexibility, strength, mobility and balance – all of which are important factors as we age. The practice is good for stress relief as well, making it an all-around fitness activity targeting mind and body with positive energy.

Studies have proven that practicing yoga helps reduce falls in older people, one of the most important benefits since falls are the number one cause of injury in seniors. And yoga is helpful in reducing chronic pain, as well as the joint pain and stiffness of arthritis.

Specific yoga protocols have even been shown to be effective in treating OCD and other anxiety disorders. Research has uncovered yoga techniques for controlling fear, anger, and negative thoughts. And evidence suggests that regular yoga practice strengthens the character as well as the body.

If you're seeking good health and active fitness, think about including a gentle yoga practice.

What to Know If You're New to Yoga

No, you don't have to stand on your head or bend over backward while twisting yourself into a pretzel shape (unless you want to!). Yoga is all about flexibility, strength, and balance, for sure, but that kind of activity is certainly not suitable for beginners.

And yes, yoga poses are called asanas and have Sanskrit names, but you don't have to learn them (unless you want to!). A good instructor or video lesson will give both English and Sanskrit names as well as good cues to posture and alignment during asanas.

There's no big initial investment in special yoga wear, either, so it's easy to start a practice inexpensively. As long as your clothing is comfortable and allows freedom of movement, you'll be fine. Supportive undergarments are always a workout necessity no matter the activity, so you probably already have acceptable attire at hand. Almost all athletic or casual wear is suitable. Shorts or leggings are just as good as fancy yoga pants, especially when starting out. Just avoid baggy tops or other clothing that might get in your way while bending or stretching.



Yoga requires no special equipment or supplies to begin, other than a good mat to cushion hard surfaces. If you later find you need props, substitute with handy household items before making expensive purchases. Belts and scarves can stand in for straps, throw pillows provide cushioning, and sturdy books or boxes work as well as blocks, for example.

But once you realize how good you feel following a consistent practice, making the leap to buying a few essential items isn't exorbitantly expensive. You'll easily find everything you need online or at local retailers and specialty stores.

As with any physical activity, consult your health care professional before beginning yoga. People with certain medical conditions should avoid specific poses, so guidance is best left to a health care professional who knows your limitations.

Good Yoga Variations For Seniors

Don't make the mistake of discounting yoga, assuming that moving more slowly and deliberately means you're not really challenging your muscles or cardiovascular system. Holding the poses provides balance and flexibility training. And yoga is a bodyweight workout that's easy on the joints but still strengthens bone and muscle.

Some variations of yoga are more practical and effective for seniors and people with special needs due to injury or disability. Investigate some of these methods so you can make an informed decision about the type of practice best suited to you.

Hatha yoga pays attention to basic breathing matched with movements and poses, and is usually a good choice for beginners or those with mobility/balance issues. But check with the instructor before attending any classes since some might teach a more fast-paced style than you're ready for when just starting out.

Iyengar is also good for beginners since it's focused on proper alignment and transitions from pose to pose. This style gives a great foundation for learning basic techniques, but the poses are held longer so it's not fast-paced enough to provide cardio benefits.

Restorative yoga concentrates more on stress relief, so it's superior for getting back into shape after an injury. Props are used extensively to provide support, making it suitable for beginners and those with physical limitations.

Vinyasa yoga isn't as beginner-friendly, though, because it features a more fast-paced flow between movements. It's definitely aerobic, but it's probably best to build up to this style.

Chair yoga either modifies poses so you can do them while seated, or uses a chair for balance in standing poses, so it's easily adaptable to most physical needs.

You can even practice **aqua yoga**, which provides similar benefits to water aerobics.

These are only a few of the different types of yoga practiced, and no matter your requirements you'll find accommodations available in every approach.

Starting Your Practice

Do a little research before you begin. Google articles and watch YouTube videos to learn basic poses, understand breathing techniques, and confirm that the movements are within your capability. Not all online information is of the same quality, though, so be mindful of the source and steer clear of unverified claims or uncertified “instructors.”

Try a yoga app. If you're comfortable with technology, [Simply Yoga](#) is highly rated and offers video workouts with audio instructions. You can program your own practice with custom options, and even preview some routines at their YouTube channel. I use it myself and recommend it without hesitation. It's free to download from your favorite app store.

Take a class. Get trained guidance at a local yoga studio. Certified instructors can help you with alignment, breathing, and alternate poses for special needs. Googling “yoga near me” brings up a multitude of possibilities, so be sure to contact the studios of your choice for more information before signing up for a class.

Classes also have the advantage of social interaction. It's so much easier to stretch your limits when you're not working out alone! And although you should ideally focus on your instructor and your own posture during class, don't be afraid to take an occasional peek around. Once you notice there are all different levels of ability and realize everyone struggles with something, you won't be so hard on yourself if you need more time to master certain poses.

But don't be discouraged if you don't find a video or class that fits with you right away. Not all instructors are the same and every class has different qualities. Try a few and you're sure to find a class or training situation that will give you a greater understanding as you learn.

And once you start practicing yoga, go slowly and get comfortable with your schedule and routine. As you gain proficiency and confidence you can add more time or try different poses.

Options for beginning a yoga practice abound. If you're serious about it there are no excuses!

So Go For It!

Yoga is an excellent choice to help you improve flexibility, strength, and balance; relieve stress, anxiety, and depression; and gain a host of other wellness benefits. If you're looking to incorporate a new fitness regimen in 2020, consider starting a yoga practice.

Namaste!

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