

Yoga associated with reduced pain, pain interference in individuals with OA

Both chair yoga and health education groups had similar improvements in social activities and a decrease in depression.

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Juyoung Park

“This public health study is significant because of the high prevalence of osteoarthritis in aging populations and the potential impact of chair yoga on clinical outcomes, including pain, pain interference, fatigue and gait speed,” **Juyoung Park, PhD**, Hartford Geriatric Social Work Faculty Scholar and associate professor at Florida Atlantic University, told Orthopedics Today. “Chair yoga could reduce pharmacological treatment and expensive joint replacement or the need for assistance at home,” she said.

Reduction in pain

Park and her colleagues randomly assigned 131 community-dwelling older adults with osteoarthritis (OA) pain in at least one lower extremity joint to participate in a chair yoga program or health education program for 8 weeks. Primary measurements included pain and pain interference.

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Results showed 106 of 112 participants completed at least 12 of 16 sessions, for a 95% retention rate. Researchers noted the chair yoga group had a significantly greater decrease in pain interference during the 8 weeks and through 3 months vs. the health education program group. The chair

yoga group also had a significantly greater decrease in WOMAC pain and fatigue and a significantly greater improvement in gait speed. However, researchers found only pain interference sustained a statistically significant effect at 3-months post-intervention for the chair yoga group.

When it came to mental health, Park said participants in both the chair yoga group and in the health education group had a similar improvement in social activities and a decrease in depression.

“Pain medication is an issue in the senior population because they are already taking many medications for different kinds of conditions,” Park said. “In addition to that, them taking pain medication is going to be dangerous because of those drug interactions and some of the medications have serious side effects that could lead to their death. So [chair yoga] could be a safe, effective intervention that seniors can try.”

Continuing practice

During follow-up, participants were provided with a yoga manual and encouraged to continue their practice, Park noted. However, she said the participants reported they preferred practice in a group vs. alone and so future research should include a follow-up video session to see whether continued practice benefits individuals with OA. Park also noted several participants said that using techniques they learned in chair yoga helped them sleep through the night, which should be reviewed more in future research.

“A lot of people mentioned they wake up in the middle of the night because they are in pain,” Park said.

She continued, “Chair yoga has four components, such as physical poses, meditation, relaxation and breathing techniques, so they used some of the components, such as meditation and breathing techniques, and it helped them to sleep better.” – *by Casey Tingle*

Reference:

Park J, et al. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2016;doi:10.1111/jgs.14717.

For more information:

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PERSPECTIVE



Linda A. Russell

Patients with lower extremity osteoarthritis (OA) often have pain in their affected joints. As a result, patients become more sedentary and often gain weight. This can cause a vicious cycle of further weight gain, which can result in a greater force on the lower extremity and as a result, more pain. Patients become progressively more deconditioned. This may result in the patient becoming more socially isolated. This can result in loneliness and depression.

An exercise regimen can be designed for all patients despite having arthritis. A patient's physician or physical therapist can help to design and exercise program. Many patients are often surprised that even small amounts of exercise can have benefit. Most note less stiffness after completing an exercise program. Strengthening muscles around an arthritic joint has been shown to improve function and decrease pain in the affected joint. This has also been shown to delay the need for joint arthroplasty.

This study again emphasizes the benefit of an exercise program for adults with OA. Yoga is especially helpful in combating the frustration associated with not being able to do what patients could have done in the past, due to meditation and breathing.

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Disclosures: Russell reports no relevant financial disclosures.