

Yoga for Arthritis

Although there are many types of arthritis, two of the most common are osteoarthritis and (OA) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA). OA and RA have different causes but share some common symptoms. The most common are joint stiffening, pain, and at times swelling.

Medical studies on the benefits of yoga date back to the early 20th Century and in the last twenty years have become so commonplace they helped spread the word about yoga's benefits, which contributed directly to the yoga industry's fast rise in popularity beginning at the end of the last century. Yoga does so much for so many ailments that it bears mentioning what yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar once stated about it: "Yoga teaches us to cure what need not be endured and endure what cannot be cured."

Those with arthritis can make yoga part of their journey to learn firsthand the levels of curing and enduring that are available to them. There are many types of yoga. They provide different things to varying degrees for the practitioner:

Muscle through Cardio: Yoga that moves the body in repeating patterns is much like general cardiovascular exercise. It is muscle-building, and strong muscles that attach via tendons to joints can help create healthy joints. Movement-based yoga is called Vinyasa. Vinyasa is often called 'flow' or 'flow yoga.'

Strength through Stillness: Like Vinyasa Yoga, Hatha Yoga also strengthens muscles and so can help arthritic joints. Such strengthening is achieved through stillness and holding dynamic poses for several breaths or minutes.

Deep Stretch: Nowhere is yoga's benefit of increased flexibility more pronounced than in Yin Yoga. Yin Yoga takes place on the floor, so muscle strengthening is not a feature in the practice. Also, the poses are held for a long time to stimulate joints, ligaments, tendons, and cartilage. Whereas in a Vinyasa class you might do over 100 poses in an hour and hold each one for a few seconds, in a Yin class you might do ten and hold each for five minutes.

Relaxation: The key to this practice is deep relaxation and renewal. Restorative Yoga is practiced with props like blankets and pillows. Like Yin, Restorative Yoga takes place on the floor and the postures are long-held. The difference is that the props hold the pose for you so you don't have to. You receive benefit without effort. Arthritis sufferers certainly deserve this.