

Chair Yoga

By Annette Wertman

Yoga with a chair? Are you serious? Absolutely! A chair replaces the traditional yoga mat, and then anyone of any age, sex or physical ability can practice yoga. What makes chair yoga so accessible is that most of the poses, known as *asanas*, are modified and adapted to meet the unique physical needs of each yoga student.

Originating in India thousands of years ago, yoga is an ancient set of physical and mental techniques for improving the body, understanding the mind and freeing the spirit. Yoga, meaning *to join*, is a “mind-body” medicine; it aspires to the balanced alignment between the physical, mental and spiritual self.

Yoga isn't only for the flexible and fit. The great advantage of yoga is that it is adaptable to different populations with diverse physical abilities and needs. In chair yoga, older adults (seniors) and people of any age with varying physical limitations are now able to take advantage of yoga's amazing fitness and health potential.

Today, more older adults are alive than ever before.

In fact, older adults represent the fastest growing sector of the population. Due to the “baby boomer bulge,” the older adult population is expected to reach 6.7 million in 2021. By 2041, nearly one out of four Canadians will be a senior. The older population is increasingly diverse and most older adults are interested in healthy, active aging. Yoga classes for seniors are popping up everywhere – health clubs, senior centres, assisted living residences and even church basements. Older adults are enrolling and the more knowledgeable among them express an interest in finding the right yoga class. More and more well-trained yoga teachers are in demand.

Yoga can relieve muscle tension, strengthen and calm the nervous system, increase blood flow to internal organs and bring more oxygen to the cells. Chair yoga sessions include centering, breathing exercises, warm-up movements, adapted traditional asanas, chanting, meditation and relaxation. In the safe, supportive and friendly environment of chair yoga, asanas are modified to bring the benefits of flexibility, balance, strength, increased lung capacity, attention and relaxation to all members of the class.

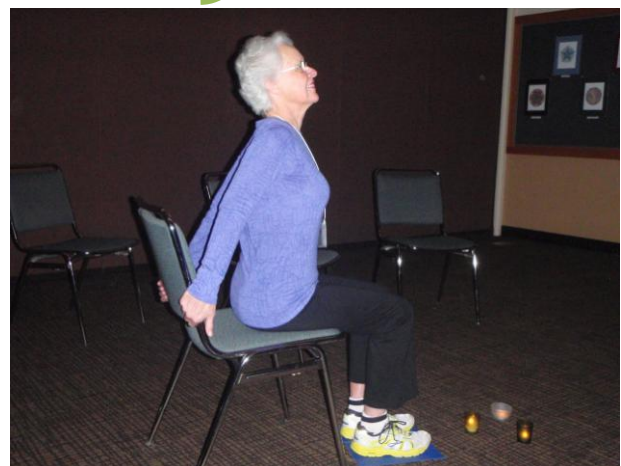
With sustained practice (stretching and strengthening) yoga can lead to reduced incidence of chronic back pain, improved quality of sleep and mood, improvement in heart health, arthritis and diabetes and a better sense of well-being and quality of life. Regularly attending a chair yoga class can also help establish a sense of community. With dedicated practice, the body and breath become stronger and better able to embrace the physical and emotional challenges of growing older.

To quote a well-known Bob Dylan song, “Forever Young,” “May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift.”

To learn more about chair yoga, visit Annette's site, www.agelessyoga.ca

Older adult yogis need connection, belonging, and friendship with others who have common interests.

These days, young families are struggling to take care of their children and do their jobs. They don't have enough time for grandparents, hence seniors feel lonely & isolated. Yoga teaches them to be happy with themselves. They feel inner warmth, calmness, and a sense of acceptance. — Vera, 71-year-old yoga teacher and student, Orange County.



From *BCFitLife Magazine*, Summer 2012, Vol 4, Issue 3