

U3A YOGA FOR THE THIRD AGE

PETER BURTON – U3A SUBJECT ADVISOR YOGA

As a teacher, trainer and coach I have been practicing Yoga for more than twenty years after taking it up to help address a knee injury (marathons) hamstring injuries and a shoulder strain (overzealous circuit training/gym).

Having practiced many yoga styles (including Hatha, Scaravelli, Iyengar, Hot Yoga, Vinyasa Flow.....) and with a wide range of teachers, in my 60s I joined a yearlong 200 hour teachers training programme with the Sussex based Yoga Garden. I qualified as a Vinyasa Flow Yoga teacher in 2015 and am registered and insured through Yoga Alliance Professionals UK (YAP).

I am group coordinator / teach weekly Yoga4thethirdage classes for two Sussex U3As. Although I have studied / been trained in chair yoga for the less physically able I do not run chair yoga classes. I run classes for people who are still able to sit on the floor and get up from the floor without assistance.

I have a strong interest in making Yoga accessible to those who might not usually consider it, especially, older people, sportsmen and women and people who feel prevented from taking part in Yoga because of injuries or health conditions. My classes are specifically tailored according to the people who attend.

SCHOOLS, BRANCHES AND STYLES OF YOGA

There are many kinds of yoga – Vanda Scaravelli who was still practicing and teaching in her 80s gave her name to one style 'Scaravelli Yoga' and this style is particularly suitable for older people.



The most yoga most commonly taught in the UK is Hatha Yoga (*more information about other types / schools / styles of yoga will be added to these pages at a later date*). Some styles of yoga would be unsuitable for people as they get older – others like Scaravelli, Viniyoga and Iyengar and generally very safe.

ABOUT HATHA YOGA

The practice of physical postures/poses (asanas) uses the movement of the body, linked to the mind and breath (Prana) to strengthen the body, build core stability, tone muscles and enhance flexibility. A hatha class will usually include physical postures, breathing exercises and guided relaxation. It may also sometimes

include chanting and meditation. Regular practice of hatha yoga increases concentration, stills the mind and promotes feelings of vitality, balance and tranquillity

IS YOGA 'SAFE' – CAN ANYONE DO YOGA?

Yoga can be practiced safely by anyone if approached 'mindfully'. Make sure that your teacher is experienced in teaching older people and that you tell them about any health conditions. By using recommended adjustments to postures, posture variations, props and by working to your own level, yoga is suitable for all levels of fitness and can help with a wide variety of injuries, ailments and health conditions.

Yoga teachers have a wide range (one book lists 1000!) of Asanas (postures) and breath awareness practices to draw from. Some postures should not be practiced by people with certain health conditions as they could worsen a condition. A good yoga teacher will be familiar with what are known as 'contraindications' associated with different poses e.g. shoulder, headstands and legs up the wall poses should not be practiced by anyone with Glaucoma or related eye problems and strong forward bends should not be practiced by people with osteoporosis (*I will be posting more information about yoga/exercise and osteoporosis at a later date*). The rule is if in doubt leave it out.

CONSIDERING STARTING A U3A YOGA GROUP?



- ✓ People get the most benefit from Yoga by practicing regularly, so it is important to gauge the level of interest and commitment at the outset. A weekly class is really the minimum.
- ✓ I am fortunate in being able to hire a large wooden floored room and a small, warm and carpeted room in a local community centre. (if a group wants to meet/practice together in someone's home they need to be mindful of health and safety issues)
- ✓ One of my groups meets in the morning 10.15 and the other in afternoon at 3.30 – avoid meeting earlier or later as this can be less inclusive.
- ✓ The community centre has been persuaded to buy and store some yoga mats, belts and blocks for hirers to use at no extra cost (www.Yogamatters sells good quality and inexpensive yoga mats) As a U3A group we also get a discounted room hire rate which make the rooms very affordable.
- ✓ In one of my groups everyone pays £2.00 a week to cover room hire. The other group pays nothing and has the room hire paid directly by the U3A out of annual membership fees.
- ✓ To ensure the benefits and avoid the dangers it is best if the Yoga Coordinator is a qualified teacher/ ex teacher (who of course cannot be paid). We are fortunate in living near several yoga teacher training establishments and teachers in training are always looking for opportunities to teach for free (and will be insured). A very experienced practitioner may be able to take on the coordinator

role but this needs to be led as collective self-practice rather than a taught class (contact me if you are considering this). U3A insurance may not cover this situation so check with them first.

- ✓ A good way to gauge interest for a sustainable U3A yoga group is by going as a small U3A group to a commercial yoga class (check suitability / class size / with the teacher first). I am happy to advise you on whether such a class might be suitable. A group trip to one of the many UK Yoga festivals is another great way to see what yoga's about and can be a lot of fun (see EVENTS)
- ✓ I ask everyone to complete a health questionnaire (I can email you a blank version) when they start yoga and also ask that they ensure the back of their U3A membership card has the details of someone to contact in case of emergencies.

SOME HATHA YOGA RELATED THOUGHTS AND INSPIRATIONS AS WE GROW OLDER:

- Aging can feel like a stiffening, rigidity and closing down - a letting go (good and bad), and giving up – a time of loss.
- As we journey through the third age we want our bodies, minds and emotions to work for us – to help us live fulfilling lives – and to last as long as we do!
- As we grow older it is liberating and exhilarating to feel more freedom of movement, openness and extension in our joints and muscles than we had in our younger years
- Through the practice of Hatha Yoga we can maintain and revitalise our physical, mental and emotional health, continuing to grow and develop
- Yoga promotes the 'Vitality 3S' – Strength, Suppleness and Stamina (and the 4th S – Spirituality)
- As we grow older we can engage with and enjoy the pulse of life, a quickening rather than a lessening
- We can reconnect, rediscover, explore and appreciate (marvelling at) our physicality – remembering we are designed to lie down, to sit, to stand, to walk, to skip, to run and TO DANCE!
- Through Yoga we can learn to Celebrate, Work With and Manage our body's journey through life – including our injuries, ailments and conditions (including pain)
- We can explore the aspects of our body potential that we don't fully realise or that we avoid using - addressing our bad habits of overuse and overcompensation
- We can adjust our bodies, minds and emotions to maintain intrinsic alignment, balance and equilibrium in our lives
- We can use Yoga's' balanced, sequential and progressive movements and postures (forward bends, backbends, twists, balances – lying down, sitting standing and inversions) for a safe full body workout

SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF YOGA PRACTICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

- Remove stiffness and inertia in the body/mind/emotions
- Enjoy a conscious, non-mechanical, intelligent and expansive approach to exercise that involves and engages the whole self (body, mind, emotions, spirit)
- Prevent injury and overcome bad habits / tendencies
- Rehabilitate ourselves after injury / ailments / conditions
- Gain greater perspective and illumination in our lives through expanded awareness and continued growth
- Address conditions like osteoporosis, arthritis and high blood pressure (using modifications and props along the way)
- Stretch the 'kinks' out of the body
- Strengthen our bones and muscles (remaining active throughout life halts the loss of muscle and skeletal tissue)
- Improve our posture – a healthy and flexible spine is fundamental to good health
- Maintain / improve joint mobility
- Breathe – to maintain and improve respiratory capacity and to feed and cleanse the body
- Relax and restore our body/mind/emotions
- Maintain and increase our range of movement – bending, twisting, reaching and balancing without strain
- Be able to sit comfortably and get up and down from the floor with confidence
- Move each joint in the body through its full range of motion – stretching, strengthening and balancing each part

- Maintain and tone the full range of body systems (respiratory, digestive, immune etc.)
- Develop our strength, flexibility and endurance
- Remove stiffness in the joints
- Remove tightness in muscles and tensions in the body
- Open and expand our bodies, minds and emotions
- Improve our ability to focus and concentrate
- Increase our feelings of wellbeing – zest, energy, enthusiasm, vitality, confidence and contentment in our lives
- Have fun / feel ALIVE!

IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT ATTENDING A LOCAL YOGA CLASS – HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU ENJOY YOUR CLASS AND PRACTICE SAFELY:

- ❖ Get a personal recommendation from someone you know – and look at the website
- ❖ Tell your teacher at the start if you have any health conditions, injuries or if you have had recent surgery
- ❖ Practice on an empty stomach by leaving at least 2 hrs after a normal meal or one hour after a light snack.
- ❖ Take a bottle of water to your class to ensure you are hydrated / can deal with a cough
- ❖ Wear loose, light, comfortable clothing and take in addition something warm to wear for the relaxation
- ❖ Don't yank, shove or force your body. Use props or alternatives – always STOP if you feel stabbing pain (and tell the teacher)
- ❖ Respect your body – listen to it, follow your breath and work to your own edge
- ❖ Take a towel to class as a 'prop' and keep it to hand if you tend to sweat - (respect other students)
- ❖ Before practicing remove any jewellery / watches that could cause injury
- ❖ Switch off your mobile phone for the class duration

FORTHCOMING YOGA EVENTS:

OM YOGA SHOW

London: 19th – 21st October 2018
 Manchester: 20 – 22nd April 2018

<https://www.omyogashow.com/>

BRIGHTON FREE YOGA FESTIVAL

Hove Cricket Ground: July 14th- 15th July 2018

www.brightonyogafestival.org/

If you are involved in a Local U3A Yoga Group please get in touch and let me know about your group so that I can share good practice and help / advise others!

If you want to promote any Yoga events let me know

I will be starting a U3A Yoga Groups Newsletter - would you like to join the distribution list?

RECOMMENDED YOGA BOOK AND RESOURCES:

(Additional information is being prepared for this section and will be posted soon)

If you have any questions about yoga, yoga classes, yoga styles or about running a yoga group please don't hesitate to email me Peter Burton: yoga4thethirdage@gmail.com