

Hatha yoga practice and fear of falling in older adults

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Indiana University researchers found promising results in an exploratory study involving yoga practice by older adults who expressed a fear of falling. After a 12-week, twice weekly hatha yoga class, taught by a professional yoga therapist, study participants reported a reduced fear of falling, increased lower body flexibility and a reduction in their leisure constraints.

Fear of [falling](#) is an important public health concern because it can cause [older adults](#) -- even those who have not fallen -- to limit their social and physical activity. This effort to avoid falls can create a harmful cycle that can diminish health and quality of life.

"Our study found that [yoga](#) was a feasible intervention with older adults and that they perceived great benefit from it," said Marieke Van Puymbroeck, assistant professor in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Studies in IU's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

Van Puymbroeck discussed some of her findings this month at the International Association of Yoga Therapists' Symposium for Yoga Therapy and Research in Los Angeles and will discuss her findings further at conferences hosted by the American Geriatrics Society and the American Therapeutic Recreation Association. More about the study:

- The study involved 14 men and women with an average age of 78. Five participants had fallen previously.

- Van Puymbroeck said the 90 percent weekly attendance rate was notable, as was the 6 percent dropout rate, which she said was much lower than most physical activity and yoga studies. The participants took a class in hatha yoga, which is a gentle form of yoga that easily can be adapted for individual needs and can be performed from a seated position. The twice weekly classes each lasted 60 minutes.
- After the 12-week class, participants reported a 6 percent reduction in their fear of falling, a 34 percent increase in lower body flexibility, and a statistically significant reduction in [leisure constraints](#).
- Van Puymbroeck said participants reported "tremendous benefits," with emerging themes that included the ability to generalize principals of posture to other situations, increased range of motion, increased flexibility and improved balance.

Source: Indiana University

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