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Yoga Guidelines for Health Conditions

Yoga has been proven to help a number of medical conditions, however, it is not intended to replace medical care. Remember that yoga is meant to be practiced with comfort, steadiness and ease. Do not force, stress, or otherwise strain during yoga, instead, stretch to your edge, breathe fully, and let gravity and nature do the rest. If any pain is felt, it should be temporary. Persistent pain is a sign of incorrect alignment or a physical problem. The quickest way to make progress in yoga is to go *slow*. Do not underestimate the value of good nutrition, enough rest, and plenty of water. A partial list of recommendations is listed; it is not intended to be inclusive of all postures or conditions. As with all exercise, please consult with your health care provider about your own needs and concerns.

Arthritis: If you have any form of arthritis, it is important to make sure you warm up before practice and stay warm throughout your session. Practice in a heated room or wear heavy clothing to hold in your body's heat. * Good alignment is vital for moving joints back into their proper position. * Whenever possible, give each joint as much space and range of motion as possible. * Don't work a joint that's hot, red, or swollen. But it's important to move an inflamed joint gently through its range of motion twice a day. * Take your time working your way into the pose. Focus on creating change rather than on how the pose looks. * Although building strength is essential for decreasing joint fragility, it is unwise to try holding a pose for extended periods; instead, practice several short repetitions of each modified pose. * Keep your breathing smooth, even and full. Whenever the breath shortens or fluctuates, try a less demanding position. (By Arthritis Advisor & Sandra Kozak)

Back Problems: Proper alignment is very important. Be sure to move the low back and spine as one and keep your pelvic area level and aligned. Focus on pelvic stabilization poses like ones to strengthen the abdominals, adductors (inner thighs), lower back muscles (front, sides and back), and stretch hamstrings and quadriceps. Avoid rounding the spine. Do not do forward bending poses until you are absolutely certain that your back remains aligned with a straight spine and with its natural curves. Do not emphasize poses that accent your back problems. I.e. if you have a sway back, back off on poses that accent that position. Smaller movements are often much more powerful than you think. Aim to increase blood flow instead of doing strong stretches.

Cancer: Take your energy level into consideration and do not exert yourself. Make adjustments to poses to accommodate recent surgery or discomfort. Do not squeeze muscles tightly, including during progressive muscular relaxation. Focus on relaxation, breathing, and positive visualization exercises.

High Blood Pressure: Emphasize deep breathing, meditation, relaxation and visualization exercises to reduce stress. Do not stiffen the arms or legs in poses or hold your arms up over your head for very long. Keep neck movements relaxed and easy, especially if you have carotid artery problems. Inversions and back bends tend to increase blood pressure. Shoulder stands with your back on the floor and your lower legs resting on a chair seat or against the wall are fine. Spinal twists tend to balance and soothe the nervous system. Always lie on your side before moving from being on your back to being upright.

Menstruation: Listen to your body and respond to its needs. Avoid inversions during menstruation.

Pregnancy: Ask for separate handout. Written medical clearance needed prior to taking a class.

PMS and Menopause: Symptoms can be helped through the relaxing effects of yoga and the poses that balance the endocrine system. Focus on breathing and relaxation exercises. Do inversions for hot flashes; forward bends for mood swings and depression; twists and back bends stimulate the kidneys and adrenals; relaxation and deep breathing for anxiety; bridge, boat and bow for food cravings, inversions, up dog and cobra for memory loss and confusion; gentle inversions and wide angle pose for water retention and weight gain.

Compiled by Julie Lusk