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## Podcast Script #1 Dr. Steffany Moonaz

### Part 4\_Script 1\_Mind body practices for people with rheumatic diseases

#### Jessica

Global Healthy Living Foundation, we welcome you to *Pain Explained*, an introductory podcast session on mind and body practices for people with rheumatic diseases. I am your host, Jessica Boles, Licensed Social Worker with GHLF and ArthritisPower. And we are really excited today. We'll be joined by our guest Dr. Steffany Moonaz, Director of Research at the Maryland University of Integrative Health. Dr. Moonaz is a certified yoga therapist. She is the founder of Yoga for Arthritis which is a wonderful organization. Their mission of providing evidence-informed practices and trainings for yoga professionals and students it combines the foundation of yoga with accessible movement and modern research. So, Dr. Moonaz has been a trailblazer for teaching other yoga providers to tailor their practice techniques for the arthritis community.

And, in the next 3 sessions, Dr. Moonaz will talk specifically about yoga for arthritis patients as well as provide practical tips patients may consider with regards to chronic pain management.

So, welcome Dr. Moonaz, thank you for joining us.

#### Steffany

Thanks so much, Jessica. I'm so happy to be here and talking with you about this today.

#### Jessica

That's so great and honestly, this topic we are so excited to talk about. As you can imagine, many patients are dealing with chronic pain, they as us all the time whether yoga can help them, whether it's psychologically, physically, and so on. We know exercising is very important, but we've also learned from our patients, that exercising can be very difficult when living with chronic pain, or a condition of some sort. It's easy for the doctor to say 'get your exercise' but for a patient who has difficulty walking, climbing stairs, I mean the list so of goes on. Exercise can be a big challenge. What I'm getting at is what can you tell patients living with a chronic illness about their options?

#### Steffany



Yes, absolutely. I totally understand that for patients already in pain, exercising isn't easy and can sometimes be very painful. So, the important thing is to start off with exercises that are gentler or easier - even starting with a 15-minute walk can be beneficial. Physical activity, as we know, is an essential part of effective treatment for osteoarthritis (OA) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA), according to treatment guidelines published by the American College of Rheumatology. For those with osteoarthritis, physical activity is safe and doesn't exacerbate pain or worsen disease. In fact, exercise may play a key role in promoting joint health, since those who don't exercise generally suffer more joint discomfort than those who do. The health and the psychological benefits of exercise are widely recognized. However, regular physical activity is especially important for people with arthritis because they often have decreased muscle strength, physical energy, and endurance, in part due to their arthritis and the tendency to be sedentary. So, when you have pain, you try to stay still, you try to rest and not move. Rest is important especially in something like rheumatoid arthritis if you're having a flair, but also remember, not moving can increase stiffness and it can exacerbate muscle strength. So, one has to find a balance. Being sedentary can begin a downward spiral where pain increases, and that leads you to be more inactive which leads to greater pain and disability. The psychological benefits of movement such as stress reduction, fewer depressive symptoms, improved coping and well-being and more regulated immune functioning also contribute to greater overall health, whether you have arthritis or not. It is very important to develop a plan with your doctor or physical therapist with the activity that will work best for you.

### Jessica

That's very helpful to know. For many patients living with arthritis, lower back pain and other chronic conditions, I think it would be helpful to know what the best way to try yoga might be. Maybe you can tell us about any suggests you have about getting started?

### Steffany

If you are an arthritis patient, talk with your doctor first and ask specifically if there should be any limitations or restrictions to your activity. In fact it is important for everyone to consult with their doctor and have that conversation, especially if they have other medical conditions (like high blood pressure, lung conditions, or heart disease) or if you are on medications that may need to be taken into consideration in your plan. If your doctor has specific recommendations or concerns, ask for these in writing and then take that information to your yoga instructor before the class or session begins.

The best introduction to yoga is with a qualified yoga therapist or teacher who has specialized training and experience working with arthritis. So, for group classes, generally a beginner, "gentle" or therapeutic class would be appropriate. There are even some classes available that are specifically geared toward arthritis. Another option that patients may consider is 'restorative yoga'. So that's a practice that involves slowing down and allowing the body to rest and relax in supported positions. It is important to balance relaxing yoga practices that may

help with stress management and more active practices that can help you maintain strength and physical function.

### Jessica

So now that you mention other forms of yoga, I'd really excited to get your expertise. I've heard of terms like "hot yoga". I've seen videos on YouTube labeled yoga for beginners, stuff like that. Can you tell us anything about the different classes or styles that we should know about?

### Steffany

Yeah, there's a lot of terminology in yoga that can be confusing when you are first are starting out. The combination of what we call asanas (or physical poses) and pranayama (which are the breathing practices) are called "Hatha Yoga" together. So, the poses and the breathing exercises together are called hath yoga. And there are a variety of styles or approaches to hatha yoga. Most also end with a relaxation practice and some also include meditation or chanting. Because yoga has been passed down through many teachers to many students, there are different schools or styles have emerged and they have different methods of practice. Some of these styles are fairly gentle and safe for people with arthritis while others should generally be avoided. Especially when first starting out, it's helpful to be in a gentle class, a Chair yoga class, or a class geared toward beginning students.

Some patients may want to start with a private session because then you can get individualized instruction and guidance. This can be done with an experienced yoga teacher or a yoga therapist who specializes in arthritis and related conditions. Once you learn the basic skills and safety measures, you can practice yoga at home on your own or with videos that are designed for your level of mobility.

Hot yoga classes happen in a heated room. This might feel good for some people with arthritis, it can also carry some health concerns. Hot yoga also tends to be more vigorous and fast-paced. So, speak with your doctor and with the instructor before trying a hot yoga class.

### Jessica

You know I myself have a chronic condition and I'll be honest; I am not flexible really whatsoever and often times I'm sedentary, I'm sitting at a desk. In my limited research on yoga, I've really seen some pretty intimidating poses. What I'm wondering is, what are my options, or options for others like me or those living with arthritis and other conditions?

### Steffany

Absolutely, you know we hear that all the time. I'm not flexible enough to do yoga or I can't do yoga because I'm not flexible. But, actually, people who have limited range of motion or poor flexibility, because of arthritis or otherwise, might actually benefit the most from a yoga

practice, because the yoga practice can increase your flexibility, as well as strength and balance. Now, this happens over time so practicing consistently is important in order to see benefits. Even if you aren't able to kneel or have difficulty getting up and down, there are modifications available for all the poses. There are also, as I mentioned earlier, "chair yoga" classes and some of those are taught entirely in a seated position. In fact, part of yoga philosophy is also about not judging yourself and about being patient – yoga is about bringing together mind and the body. So, it is important to reframe any thoughts that you aren't doing it well enough. It may feel a bit disheartening at first when challenges arise but overcoming those kinds of judgments and accepting where you are is actually an important part of yoga. So, you want to make sure that you're working with a yoga provider who is approaching the practice from this perspective and is able to provide pose variations for different bodies. Because not all yoga providers have the changes or that experience. There is a movement called Accessible Yoga that works to make yoga more safe, appropriate, and available to everyone regardless of the labels they carry, no matter what their age, ability, where they live, what their beliefs are, so that can be a good source for finding understanding teachers.

The general rule for arthritis patients (and really anyone in general) is that if it hurts, stop, and make an adjustment. The old adage of "no pain, no gain" in the exercise world does not apply to yoga, particularly if you have activity limitations. You may feel a little stretch or some strengthening in your muscles from any new activity, but you shouldn't feel an increase in joint pain during your yoga practice. That would be a sign to adjust and find a different version of the pose that works for you. So, it is important to distinguish between the sensation of muscle engagement that happens when you are doing any new activity and the pain of aggravating your joints. Part of yoga is becoming being mindful and building awareness in the body so you can notice when a movement or activity feels okay or not okay.

### Jessica

So, Dr. Moonaz I know that patients sometimes find it difficult to leave their home due their symptoms, due their illness. Are there options for them, and I kind of heard you mentioned this earlier, but are there options to do any of these activities at home?

### Steffany

Yeah, certainly, but even when thinking about doing yoga at home, it's still really important to speak with your doctor first. We do generally recommend that people have their first yoga experience with an instructor in person. Now that can happen in a yoga studio, but you can also have someone like a yoga therapist, or a private instructor come to your home. As you become more confident and experienced, you may want to supplement any kind of classes with a home practice. In fact, I recommend that everyone do that. Home practice requires very little space, very little investment. You need a mat and you can use household items as props. You don't need fancy yoga props. You can use a throw pillow, a necktie, a folded blanket. A yoga therapist, or a private yoga instructor, will give you "homework" to practice between sessions, and as you mentioned there are lots of online resources available too. So, you want to find

resources that are appropriate for you and you can ask your yoga provider what might be best suited to you in particular.

**Jessica**

Well, thank you Dr. Moonaz, this is very helpful. As I've been hearing you say it's important to first consult one's physician. There is no one-size-fits all, really with any type of activity, but these are great conversation starters to have with one's doctor.

**Steffany**

Yes, absolutely. For people with arthritis it is important to talk with your doctor about any concerns that you may have.

**Jessica**

Absolutely, thank you Dr. Moonaz we'll stop there for this session. To our listeners, there are many benefits to yoga as we've been learning, this go far beyond the poses that Dr. Moonaz has shared with us. We'll be learning a lot more as far as techniques as well as what the latest research is saying, so do stay tuned.