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Podcast Script #3 Dr. Steffany Moonaz

Part 4_Script 3: What Science is telling us about Chronic Pain and Yoga

Jessica

If you are just joining us, I'm Jessica Boles, Licensed Social Worker, with Global Healthy Living Foundation and ArthritisPower. We are joined by our yoga expert in the field, Dr. Steffany Moonaz. In this podcast session, Dr. Moonaz will be providing us with an overview about what the science tells us about chronic pain and yoga. This is going to include the latest evidence-based research on this topic. So again, Steffany again thank you for taking the time we really enjoyed listening and learning from you.

Steffany

No problem. I'm excited to bring our research into the discussion.

Jessica

So, lets dive right in. After talking with you for the last few minutes during our other sessions I now have a better grasp on yoga practice itself but I think we are all really excited to hear about to is learning about what if any scientific studies of yoga have been done, or in particular what did your research find in relation to arthritis patients.

Steffany

Early studies showed promising results with some improvement in joint health, in physical functioning, and in mental/emotional well-being. Yoga has an important positive effect on quality of life. People with arthritis may also enjoy yoga more than traditional forms of exercise, and enjoying exercise helps people continue to do it. That is particularly important because research tells us that on average, 50% of everyone who starts exercise will drop out within 6 months. Most importantly, a review of yoga studies had also shown that serious injuries are rare if it's practiced appropriately and under the guidance of qualified instructors.

In our studies, we've provided critical evidence showing that appears to be safe, feasible, and enjoyable for people with both rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, and that it results in important physical and mental health benefits for those who practice it regularly.

Jessica

I'm just curious what happened to the patients during and after this study?

Steffany

Almost all benefits that we've seen in patients after an 8-week program were still present 9 months later and that's including pain, stress, mood, walking speed, physical function. The same yoga program that we used in that 8-week study was also used in a follow-up study specifically for underserved minorities with arthritis and that also found improvements in balance, functional reach, upper body function, and pain after the intervention. Participants from the initial clinical trial do communicate back to us that they continue to practice yoga, now almost a decade later.

Participants in this study practiced specially designed classes that were modified from an integral yoga approach that was tailored to arthritis patients. The poses that were used in the study included gentle forward bends, backbends, twists, balances, standing, sitting, and lying poses. These poses were modified based on the abilities and challenges of each individual participant. Blocks, straps, blankets, and chairs were used as props to modify poses. That program also included breathwork, mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and concepts from yoga philosophy, which can help to shift the experience of arthritis.

Evidence suggests that, when combined with a program of good medical care, yoga may provide important additional physical and psychological health benefits for arthritis patients.

Jessica

I have to say, I myself find it tough to avoid using Dr. Google to search for information. I know you have a great website, arthritis.yoga but where does someone like me, or better yet, where do you suggest arthritis patients to find reliable information?

Steffany

There are a few resources that offer safe practical information about yoga. You do have to be careful when searching the internet to find quality reliable information. NCBI or The National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health at PubMed.gov lists a few of these studies if you want to read the research directly.

Yoga for Arthritis, my organization, provides training for yoga teachers and therapists to specialize in working with people who have arthritis and related conditions and we also offer classes and workshops for people living with arthritis. I wrote a book last year that folks might find helpful if they want to learn more.

Yoga International is another resource that can be great for those new to yoga. That's a website and publication that has information about specific approaches to yoga, places to practice, online courses, the history and philosophy of yoga, and then links to a lot of other resources. There is even some arthritis-specific content available there.

Jessica

Awesome! To our listeners, we will post all the resources that we've mentioned including links that Dr. Moonaz just mentioned. If you want to access them, again they are free. Thank you, Dr. Moonaz, this has been incredibly helpful.

Steffany

Thank you so much for having me.

Jessica

Great! Lastly, I'd like to thank PCORI the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute for supporting this project and to all the patients, caregivers, and providers for listening and engaging in these sessions. So, thank you again Dr. Moonaz, and we thank you all for listening.