



The Role of Yoga in Supporting Healthy Aging and Active Living

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Abstract

Healthy ageing involves maintaining functional ability, independence, mental well-being, social participation, and quality of life as people grow older. Yoga is a multimodal mind-body practice that can combine physical postures, breathing, relaxation, and mindfulness and can be adapted to different ages and abilities. This paper examines the role of yoga in supporting healthy ageing and active living, focusing on balance, mobility, strength, flexibility, mental well-being, sleep, independence, social participation, and safe lifelong practice. The World Health Organization's 2026 focus on “Yoga for Healthy Ageing” highlights yoga's potential contribution to balance, flexibility, strength, mobility, independence, and quality of life. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 22 randomized controlled trials found significant improvements in balance, lower-body flexibility, and lower-limb strength compared with inactive controls, alongside improvements in perceived physical and mental health, sleep quality, depression, and vitality. Another systematic review of 12 trials involving 752 adults aged 60 years and older found a medium effect on health-related quality of life and a small effect on mental well-being. The paper argues that yoga can be a practical complementary activity for healthy ageing when appropriately adapted, while emphasizing that it should complement broader physical-activity, preventive-health, and clinical care strategies.

Keywords

Yoga; Healthy Aging; Active Living; Older Adults; Balance; Mobility; Flexibility; Strength; Mental Well-Being; Quality of Life

Introduction

Population ageing has increased the importance of approaches that help people maintain independence, mobility, psychological well-being, and participation in everyday life. Healthy ageing is not simply the absence of disease; it involves maintaining functional ability and opportunities to live meaningful and active lives.



Yoga is particularly relevant because it can combine movement, balance, flexibility, strength, breathing, relaxation, and mindful attention. It can also be modified through gentle, seated, or supported practices for people with different physical capacities.

WHO's 2026 International Day of Yoga theme focused on healthy ageing and highlighted yoga as a lifelong resource that can support vitality, independence, mobility, mental well-being, and dignity at different ages. ^[cite\turn0search0\turn0search6]

Evidence from systematic reviews is encouraging. A review of 22 randomized controlled trials found benefits in balance, flexibility, lower-limb strength, perceived physical and mental health, sleep quality, depression, and vitality among older adults.

^[cite\turn0search2] A separate review of 12 trials reported a medium improvement in health-related quality of life and a small improvement in mental well-being. ^[cite\turn0search5]

This paper examines nine dimensions of yoga and healthy ageing: mobility, balance, strength, flexibility, mental health, sleep, independence, social participation, and safe lifelong activity.

1. Yoga and Mobility in Later Life

Mobility is essential for active living because it supports walking, household tasks, community participation, and independence. Yoga involves controlled movement and postural transitions that can contribute to physical mobility. A systematic review of adults aged 60 years and older found a medium effect of yoga-based exercise on physical mobility. ^[cite\turn0search3] Regular, appropriately adapted practice may therefore help older adults maintain movement capacity. Yoga should be viewed alongside walking, resistance exercise, and other forms of physical activity rather than as a complete replacement for them.

2. Balance and Fall-Risk Considerations

Balance becomes increasingly important with age because impaired balance can contribute to falls and loss of confidence. Yoga postures involving controlled weight shifting, standing, and body awareness may challenge balance in a structured way. A systematic review and meta-analysis found a small improvement in balance among adults aged 60 years and older. ^[cite\turn0search3] Another review found a larger effect compared with inactive controls, although evidence was not uniformly superior to active exercise. ^[cite\turn0search2] Balance practices should be modified for individual ability, with support available when needed.

3. Strength and Functional Capacity

Maintaining muscle strength is important for carrying out daily activities such as rising from a chair, climbing stairs, lifting objects, and maintaining posture. Some yoga



postures require controlled weight-bearing and muscular engagement. The 22-RCT meta-analysis found improvements in lower-limb strength compared with both inactive and active controls. ^{□cite□turn0search2□turn0search4□} Yoga can therefore contribute to functional fitness, while older adults may still benefit from additional resistance exercises that specifically target major muscle groups.

4. Flexibility and Physical Independence

Flexibility can support movement efficiency and make everyday tasks easier. Yoga's stretching and controlled range-of-motion exercises may help maintain lower-body flexibility. Systematic-review evidence found improvements in lower-body flexibility compared with inactive controls and, to a smaller extent, active controls. ^{□cite□turn0search2□} Flexibility should be developed gradually. Older adults should avoid forcing joints into uncomfortable positions and should use modifications appropriate to their mobility.

5. Mental Well-Being and Emotional Health

Healthy ageing includes psychological well-being. Social changes, retirement, bereavement, chronic health concerns, or reduced mobility can affect mood and emotional health. A systematic review of 12 trials found a small improvement in mental well-being among adults aged 60 years and older who participated in yoga. ^{□cite□turn0search5□} The larger review also found improvements in perceived mental health and depression compared with inactive controls. ^{□cite□turn0search2□} Yoga can support mental well-being as a complementary activity, while clinically significant depression or anxiety should receive appropriate professional care.

6. Sleep, Vitality, and Recovery

Sleep quality and vitality influence the ability of older adults to remain active. Poor sleep can contribute to fatigue, reduced concentration, and lower participation in daily activities. The systematic review of older adults found improvements in sleep quality and vitality compared with inactive controls. ^{□cite□turn0search2□} Gentle evening yoga and relaxation practices may be useful for some people, although persistent sleep problems require appropriate assessment and should not be attributed solely to ageing.

7. Yoga, Quality of Life, and Active Living

Quality of life reflects physical, psychological, and social dimensions of health. Yoga may influence quality of life through multiple pathways, including mobility, physical confidence, sleep, mood, and participation. The 2018 meta-analysis found a medium effect on health-related quality of life among people aged 60 years and older. ^{□cite□turn0search5□}



Active living involves more than exercise sessions. Older adults should be encouraged to participate in walking, household activities, recreation, social activities, and other meaningful forms of movement.

8. Social Participation and Lifelong Engagement

Social participation is an important part of healthy ageing. Group yoga classes can create opportunities for social interaction, routine, shared activity, and community engagement. WHO's 2026 discussion of yoga and healthy ageing highlights community and social connectedness alongside physical and mental well-being. [cite]turn0search6[The social benefits of yoga depend on the setting, however. Inclusive community programs should be accessible to different abilities and should avoid creating pressure to perform difficult movements.

9. Safe, Adapted, and Sustainable Yoga Practice

Yoga can be adapted through seated, supported, gentle, or lower-intensity approaches, making it potentially accessible to many older adults. WHO emphasizes that adapted poses can allow people with mobility limitations to practice safely. [cite]turn0search1[Older adults should consider existing injuries, balance limitations, medications, cardiovascular conditions, and other health circumstances when choosing a yoga program. Qualified instruction and gradual progression are important. Yoga should complement, not replace, recommended physical activity, preventive healthcare, medical treatment, and rehabilitation when required. The aim is sustainable participation that supports independence and active living over the long term.

Illustration

The following illustration presents yoga as a multidimensional approach to healthy ageing, connecting balance, mobility, strength, flexibility, mental well-being, and independent active living.

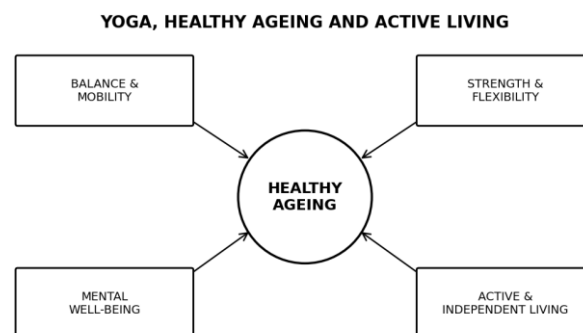


Figure 1. Yoga, healthy ageing and active living.



Conclusion

Yoga can support healthy ageing by combining movement, balance, flexibility, strength, breathing, relaxation, and mindful awareness. Evidence from randomized trials suggests improvements in several physical-function and health-related quality-of-life outcomes among older adults. □cite□turn0search2□turn0search5□

The strongest potential contribution of yoga is as a flexible and adaptable form of physical activity that can help older adults maintain mobility, functional capacity, mental well-being, sleep, vitality, and independence. WHO's 2026 healthy-ageing focus further emphasizes yoga's potential as a lifelong and adaptable activity. □cite□turn0search0□turn0search6□

Yoga should nevertheless be part of a broader active-living strategy that includes aerobic activity, strength training, healthy nutrition, social participation, preventive healthcare, and appropriate medical care. Safe adaptation and regular participation are essential for making yoga a sustainable part of healthy ageing.

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