

Turn your chair into a yoga prop

By Linda Richards

Sherri Evert, 63, of Kansas City, Mo., practiced yoga for many years, but neck and back pain from OA started making it difficult. “When I couldn’t achieve the ‘perfect pose,’ I felt as though I wasn’t doing it right,” she says, admitting to giving up on yoga. One day she noticed a group of smiling women, all about her age, departing their yoga class. Intrigued, she discovered they attended ‘chair yoga.’ She joined them twice a week, substituting with video instruction when she couldn’t. “Within two months, my neck pain was gone. The relaxation portion of the classes and videos eventually released my lower back pain, too,” Sherri says.

A small but growing number of yoga centers and senior centers offer chair yoga, which includes relaxation exercises and yoga moves while seated in a chair or wheelchair, and many yoga instructors are able and willing to modify regular poses for people with limited mobility. Classes sometimes include a few standing poses where participants use their chairs as props to help stabilize them as they stretch.

“If done correctly, modified yoga brings the same physical, mental and spiritual health benefits as regular yoga – helping to prevent muscle loss, improve joint stability and diminish pain and stiffness,” says Steffany Haaz, a research associate and certified movement analyst with Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center, Baltimore.

Begin chair yoga moves seated in an armless chair with feet firmly on the floor, legs hip-width apart and back straight. As with all exercises, ask your doctor if it’s OK for you to add these exercises to your routine and stop if you feel any pain.

-Arthritis Today published by The Arthritis Foundation