



Mindful Movement Part 2: Yoga

Hosts: Rebecca Gillett, MS OTR/L and Julie Eller

Guest Speaker: Steffany Moonaz, PhD, Yoga for Arthritis founder

While any low-impact physical activity can help ease arthritis pain and stiffness, mindful movement practices, such as yoga, have been shown to help people living with arthritis manage not only physical but also mental and emotional effects of arthritis. Mindfulness emphasizes focusing on the present moment without letting the mind wander or become preoccupied with the past or future. Mindful yoga is adaptable to individual needs physically, and the mental aspects of it help reduce worry and rumination, improving mood and outlook.

In this Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast, hosts Rebecca and Julie discuss mindful yoga with Steffany Moonaz, PhD, founder of the Yoga for Arthritis program. She explains the benefits of mindfulness in yoga and provides advice for people who might be afraid to try it because of painful joints.

Dr. Moonaz attended Johns Hopkins University, where she studied the effects of yoga for people living with arthritis, then founded Yoga for Arthritis. She now serves as director of clinical and academic research at the Maryland University of Integrative Health, which offers the only master's degree in yoga therapy in the nation.

Additional Resources

[Yoga Benefits for Arthritis](#)

[How To Find a Yoga Instructor](#)

[Steffany Moonaz's Yoga for Arthritis](#)



Episode 43 Mindful Movement Part 2 | Yoga
Full Transcript
Released 9/21/2021

PODCAST OPEN

Welcome to Live Yes! With Arthritis, from the Arthritis Foundation. You may have arthritis, but it doesn't have you. Here, you'll learn things that can help you improve your life and turn No into Yes. This podcast is for the growing community of people like you who really care about conquering arthritis once and for all. Take a moment to subscribe to, rate and comment on Live Yes! With Arthritis wherever you get your podcasts ... and never miss an episode. Our hosts are arthritis patients Rebecca and Julie, and they are asking the questions you want answers to. Listen in.

Rebecca Gillett:

Welcome to the Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast. I'm Rebecca, an occupational therapist living with rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis.

Julie Eller:

And I'm Julie, a JA patient who's passionate about making sure all patients have a voice.

MUSIC BRIDGE

Rebecca:

Thanks for joining us on this episode of the Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast. At the end of our podcast today, sadly, we are going to take a few minutes after our three top takeaways to wish Julie Eller well and say farewell to her as she moves on to a new adventure. So, stay tuned to hear a little bit more about what Julie is doing next and plans for the podcast.

Today, we are tackling part two of Mindful Movement and focusing in on yoga in arthritis and the benefits it can have for you to keep mindful movement as part of your treatment plan.

Julie:

Certainly, an extension of some of the conversation we had earlier on tai chi. And we have another incredible guest with us, another amazing subject matter expert, Dr. Steffany Moonaz. She founded the Yoga for Arthritis program after eight years at Johns Hopkins University, where she studied the effects of yoga for people living with arthritis. She now serves as the director of clinical and academic research at the Maryland



University of Integrative Health, which offers the nation's only master's of science in yoga therapy.

She's passionate about ensuring that yoga practices are safe, welcoming and appropriate for people with arthritis worldwide. We're so excited to have her here today. Dr. Moonaz, welcome.

Steffany Moonaz, PhD:

Thank you. It's such a pleasure to be here.

Rebecca:

This month of Pain Awareness Month, we kinda have a focus on the podcast about mindful movement and how mind-body movement can benefit people living with arthritis to help manage their pain. Steffany, tell us how you got interested in specializing in yoga for arthritis.

Dr. Moonaz:

My mother was a dance teacher, and I started dancing when I was 3 years old. And there was a day some time in junior high when I went to the dance studio after school, as I always did, and I was in a foul mood because of something that I can't even remember. But what I noticed was that, halfway through my first dance class, I had completely forgotten that anything was bothering me. It was just like it had been erased, not only from my thinking, but also from my emotional state.

And I had this epiphany that most people didn't know that this existed. Most people didn't know that whatever was bothering them could be erased by what I now know as mindful movement, right? And so, I think at that point I kind of discovered my life's calling, or what in yoga we would call dharma, which is: There are people in the world who are suffering a lot more than I was at the time, and I want them to know about this.

There was a whole series of events that brought me from that idea to where I am now, but I think that looking back, that's exactly what I've done is to help people experience mindful movement that can reduce suffering. Arthritis is the world's leading cause of disability and it's incredibly prevalent. It's a source of pain and suffering. And so, to be able to bring these skills and tools and practices to that population is incredibly rewarding, and I think what I'm meant to do in the world.

Rebecca:

Oh, I love that. That's so inspiring.



Julie:
That's amazing.

Rebecca:
Can you get us started off in the conversation about what makes mind-body movement different than other types of exercise?

Dr. Moonaz:
We know that physical activity is beneficial for people with arthritis for a variety of reasons. And mind-body movement practices like yoga are particularly appropriate for this population because they're highly adaptable and individualizable.

Mindfulness means that you're fully attentive to the present moment. So, you're not focusing in on whatever may have happened earlier that day. You're not thinking about what you have left to do in the future. And that reduces rumination, worry and some of the mood changes that come with those that are also really common for people who are living with arthritis and chronic pain.

But when you're in a mindful state during movement, it means that you're paying more attention to what you're doing and, therefore, you can be more responsive to the subtle things that you might be feeling. Sometimes people with arthritis engage in a physical activity, and the next day or a couple of hours later, they realize, "Oh, maybe I overdid it. I probably should have done this or that to adjust." But if you're mindful during the movement, then you feel that unique... you notice that before it gets to be too much, and you can adjust and adapt in the moment.

It's actually retraining your mind to work that way in general. So, you're mindful in your yoga practice, you become more mindful when you're running errands, when you're doing the dishes, when... Right? And so, it applies to life outside of that practice because it literally does change the structure and function of your brain. No matter what form of arthritis you have, the ability to notice and adapt to subtle changes in your symptoms and in your disease severity is an important part of arthritis management.

Julie:
I think that's phenomenal. It's a helpful reminder that the everyday actions that we can take really can change not just your experience of life but also your physiology as well



and how you adapt and what you can do. Tell us about yoga and its origins and how we should think about it for arthritis.

Dr. Moonaz:

A lot of people think of yoga and they imagine somebody in a complex posture, and there certainly is an emphasis on the physical postures in the way that yoga is taught in the west, in particular. I think that that's changing a little bit, but yoga translates to mean union. And you can think about that union as being a lot of different things. It's a unification of the mind and body like we just talked about. It's a unification of movement and breath, because in yoga practice, there's a coordination of the breath with the movement.

Lots of people who practice yoga start to feel more connected to the natural world. It can mean different things for different people. But it involves a set of philosophies and practices, and it could be any combination of these things. You do have the physical postures. You have movement sequences. There are breathing practices that I mentioned. There are mental practices, which include mindfulness, but also include concentration, relaxation.

Even the philosophy of yoga applies to arthritis because you can change the way that you think about things, the way that you relate to your disease, what it means to you, how you respond to it. And also, how you relate to others, how you relate to your own self, your own sense of self. So, it's really broad, and it encompasses a lot of different ways of thinking and being in the world, as well as a variety of practices.

Rebecca:

I think it's very helpful to be reminded that yoga is more than just the physical practice.

Dr. Moonaz:

And also, Rebecca, that the non-physical practices are beneficial. And so, lots of people think that the real part, or the active ingredient, so to speak, are the poses. You know, the dessert at the end where you get to relax. Some people get up and leave then, because they think, "Oh, well, that's a waste of time," especially type A personalities, right?

But if you realize that, actually those practices are resetting my nervous system. Those practices are rewiring my brain, and that that is as much about the experience of arthritis. So, not only are those practices as essential, but also, of course, those practices are very accessible.



Rebecca:
Yeah.

Dr. Moonaz:
The physical practices can be adapted for anyone, but the mental practices can be done regardless of any physical limitations.

Rebecca:
I practiced yoga early in my 20s. Then I got diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, and I stopped. Because my wrists were what was highly impacted initially, and I couldn't do downward dog, which was my favorite pose. I couldn't do a lot of those physical practices of it, and I stopped, not knowing that there's ways to adapt it.

I know there might be people out there listening, like me, who used to do yoga, then they got a diagnosis of some form of arthritis. And it's affecting their joints, and they think, "Well, I can't do yoga anymore." Can you talk about that?

Dr. Moonaz:
The students that I see in Yoga for Arthritis classes, I would say fall into two categories: people who had a yoga practice and then got arthritis and need tools and strategies for adapting their practice to the changes that they're experiencing. And then people who have arthritis and found out that yoga might be helpful. So, for those who come to it who already have a yoga practice, you may notice that it benefits your arthritis, but, really, what we wanna do is help you keep doing the practice that you love in a way that makes sense for your new reality.

For you, I would have you doing downward dog with a chair that you hold onto instead of having your hands on the floor. And you can do a whole vinyasa flow sequence holding onto a chair in front of you as you do your lunges, as you come forward into your cobra, right? So, there you can still experience that in a way that doesn't put as much pressure on your wrist.

Julie:
I'm very similar to Rebecca, and so far as when I often think of yoga, I think about my wrists. I think about the modifications that you can make, and I often think about my pride as well. (laughs) I don't know that I get all of the benefits of yoga sometimes, especially when I'm in a class. Because I do feel anxiety about how to ask to do a modification, or maybe to use accessible equipment, or not be in downward dog for



the full expression of the movement. What guidance could you offer our listeners about how to navigate those situations?

Dr. Moonaz:

First of all, you are an autonomous adult, and you are in charge of your own body. You are also the world's leading expert of your body. Nobody knows more about what it is to be in your body than you do. And so, if your body is saying, "Eh, this doesn't feel so good," that is the wisdom of your own body telling you what it needs. And if you ignore that, then you're doing a disservice to yourself.

And that includes the people on the mats around you. They don't know what it's like to be in your body. Your instructor doesn't know what it's like to be in your body. It is not about what anybody else is doing in the room. Because if you think about it, if somebody in the back corner of the room was doing something slightly different, would you care?

Julie:

Not at all. Not one bit. (laughs)

Dr. Moonaz:

Not every yoga teacher has experience or training in how to work with people who have movement limitations, who have chronic pain. And so, for starters, make sure that you're in a class where that kind of guidance is available to you.

One of the things that we think about from a yoga philosophy perspective is attachment and aversion. The Buddhists talk about attachment and aversion as sources of suffering because everything isn't permanent. So, if you can get your sense of self elsewhere, and not really care about whether you could put your hands down on the floor that day, that's not only gonna serve you in your yoga practice. Because you're gonna do less harm; but it's gonna serve you in life in general. And that concept of non-harming, ahimsa in Sanskrit, is the foundational philosophical concept for all yoga.

We don't wanna do harm to others or to the world around us, but it starts with ourselves, and if we're doing something that we know is not good for our body in our own yoga practice, you might say that's not even yoga. Because it's not in alignment with non-harming.

Julie:



Yeah, I love that. I think really remembering yoga as a practice, as an experience of things that you can be doing to reframe and kind of change the way you think about your arthritis, I think a lot of us struggle with identity and arthritis. Having those 20 minutes, hour, however long you're gonna be doing a yoga practice. And just leaving it on the mat. (laughs)

Dr. Moonaz:
Right.

Julie:
And trying to say, "I'm gonna let this go for these 20 minutes that I can, have this experience." I think those small actions add up, and they make it easier to live as a person that lives with arthritis.

Dr. Moonaz:
As you say, Julie, it's a practice. So, don't beat yourself up if it's not easy to do that. This is something that we teach in meditation, when we do a meditation that is about concentrating. You hold something in your mind, but, inevitably, you're gonna get distracted. You're gonna get sidetracked. You're gonna be thinking about your breath, and then you're gonna notice that you're planning your grocery list.

But the key, and what changes your brain structure, is you noticed that you got distracted. "Oh, look. There I go doing that." And instead of berating ourselves or thinking that we're terrible at this, we just bring our awareness back to the breath.

Rebecca:
If you're being mindful, you're not judging yourself.

Dr. Moonaz:
So, you can give yourself a pat on the back.

Rebecca:
Yeah. Like, "Oh, wait a minute. I'm judging myself, and I shouldn't do that."

Julie:
Right, right, right.

Rebecca:



"I'm doing my yoga practice to help manage my arthritis symptoms and to take care of myself. So, it doesn't matter what anybody else around me is thinking."

Julie:
That's right.

PROMO:
Check out the Arthritis Foundation's new app, called *Vim*, to help people with arthritis gain power over their pain. The app features expert educational content, a goal and activity tracker and opportunities to connect with others. It'll help you set attainable goals and achieve small wins that add up to big victories. Download the app at <https://www.arthritis.org/vim>, spelled V-I-M.

Rebecca:
What does the research and the medical evidence show us about yoga as a therapy for arthritis?

Dr. Moonaz:
There are a myriad of health benefits associated with yoga practice. I will say that the studies tend to be small. We tend to see improvements in things like strength, balance, flexibility, mobility, agility, right? Like, how quickly somebody can walk a certain distance, or how easily they can get up out of a chair. So, that all changes because people become more physically fit, and you would expect that from a physical activity intervention.

But we also see a lot of changes in psychological outcomes. Things like depressive symptoms, which are common for people living with arthritis, partly because of the challenges of the disease, but also partly because of the relationship between inflammation and depression.

Stress, perceptions, self-efficacy, which is people's ability to engage in certain activities, whether that's their ability to manage their arthritis or their ability to fulfill their roles. And then things like quality of life, how people feel about their lives in a variety of different domains, their social roles, their emotional wellbeing. It's sort of across the board that people feel better.

We see changes in symptoms. And the big one, of course, is pain, which affects many people with arthritis. But then also fatigue. Having more energy, or really being able to



modulate your own energy and adapt to changes in energy, I think, is an important outcome of yoga.

We haven't necessarily seen consistency. Some studies show a reduction in inflammatory markers, for example. Others don't. And then plenty of studies don't even measure those things. So, I think that in interventions like yoga, we tend to be more concerned with the patient experience. How are people doing and the role of yoga in changing how people live with the arthritis, rather than expecting for it to necessarily change the underlying disease function. Though with future research, we might find that that's also happening.

Julie:

Whenever I'm on the cusp of a flare is usually when I start to return to some kind of yoga practice more consistently. Really, two days is usually all it takes, not a long time, two days and 15 minutes a day. And I know at that point that I feel calmer, I feel more flexible, my body feels more in my own control. That makes a difference, but that's my personal research. I don't know if that's gonna be the same for every person with arthritis. But I do think that those things add up, and they mean something. Especially within the greater context of research and all of the other data that we have as well.

Dr. Moonaz:

Different things work for different people. If you are gonna go out into the world and find some yoga, make sure that it's yoga that is safe and appropriate for you. And that might mean talking to your rheumatologist to find out, "Is there anything that I, in particular, should be careful about? Is there anything that I should avoid?" And then also noticing, "Does this feel OK or not OK?"

For somebody new, I would say go to a teacher who has some expertise, who can give you individualized guidance about your alignment and safety on certain postures. Because if you're doing it with a video online, there's no feedback.

You know, you can do online yoga with a live teacher where they can see you and make suggestions or answer your questions. But if you're doing a recording, you can't really get that back. Once you have more experience and you feel like you understand what works and doesn't work for you, then you can make use of all of that great pre-recorded material.

Julie:



I think finding a teacher, especially at the beginning for someone who has a diagnosis like arthritis, could be an intimidating process. Are there particular tools or programs for arthritis that you can talk a little bit about and share with our listeners?

Dr. Moonaz:

Sure. Of course, I'm gonna make a plug for my own work. I train yoga teachers to work with people who have arthritis. And on my website, there's a directory of people who've been trained by me. They're not all listed in the directory. So, if you're looking for somebody, and you don't see anyone in our directory near you, you can always reach out and ask. But, also, there is a field that has really grown in recent years called Yoga Therapy: A yoga teacher has a minimum of 200 hours of training, and they really learn in that 200 hours how to teach yoga to healthy people.

A yoga therapist has a minimum of 1,000 hours, and they learn a whole lot more about how to work with a wide variety of different populations. There are definitely yoga teachers who are skilled and experienced in working with people who have arthritis, but a yoga therapist is pretty much guaranteed to be.

So, there is an organization, the International Association for Yoga Therapists. You can go on to that website and look for a yoga therapist. You might pay a little bit more because they have a lot more training, but I think, especially when you're just getting started, you might wanna take a class from somebody who is a yoga therapist. You can have a one-on-one session on Zoom with a yoga therapist, and they can teach you some practices that you can do in your own home.

Yoga doesn't have to be something that you get on a mat and do for an hour. It could be 15 minutes. I actually suggest that people kinda sprinkle yoga throughout their day instead of thinking about it as something that you take an hour of time to do.

What are some stretches that you can do in bed before you get up? What are some mindfulness practices that you can do while you're brushing your teeth? How can you breathe differently or stand differently when you're waiting in line, because all of those little things add up to a change over time.

Rebecca:

I have a lot of spinal issues and arthritis in my spine and have had some surgeries. And I do stretches before I go to bed and in the morning. I do stretches in bed before I get up that are yoga-based stretches and try to add in my little bit of mindfulness. I find that it's so helpful for me. So, I'm glad that you said you can do yoga in bed. You can do it in a



chair. You can do it anywhere, really, to modify. As long as you find what works for you and having somebody trained to help teach you how to move your body the way you need to adapt it. So...

Dr. Moonaz:

Yeah. We sometimes call those yoga snacks. So, instead of like sitting down for a big meal. (laughs) It is great. When you work with a yoga therapist, they will talk with you about what your goals are. Because everybody comes to yoga for different reasons with different hopes and expectations, and the practices can be tailored toward the direction that you'd like things to go.

So, if sleep is a major challenge for you, which it is for some people with arthritis, then maybe something that you work on with the yoga therapist on is a relaxation practice that you do before bed, or some restorative poses that you can get into in the middle of the night if you've awakened and you're having trouble sleeping. We can really tailor those yoga snacks to who you are, your needs and your challenges when working one-on-one.

Julie:

I can't wait for my next yoga snack. I think that's phenomenal.

PROMO

Overcoming chronic pain takes chronic strength. That's why, in honor of Pain Awareness Month, the Arthritis Foundation has partnered with iHeart Radio to recognize the Chronic Strength Champions who fight chronic pain every day. And to celebrate their small wins by giving away one big trip. Enter to win a seven-night, all-expenses-paid wellness retreat for two at Hilton Head Health in South Carolina, valued at \$10,000. The winner will enjoy gourmet cuisine, exercise classes in a beautiful island setting and much more. The Arthritis Foundation is boldly pursuing a cure for America's #1 cause of disability while championing the fight to conquer arthritis with life-changing science, resources, advocacy and community connections. So, say Yes to starting your wellness journey.

*Enter to win this once in a lifetime trip at ChampionSweepstakes.com. And explore the Arthritis Foundation's tools and resources to help develop your chronic strength. That's ChampionSweepstakes.com. Again, ChampionSweepstakes.com. **This sweepstakes ends on September 26, 2021.***

Julie:

Can you tell us a little bit about the Yoga for Arthritis program specifically, and how you can get started enrolling in a course?



Dr. Moonaz:

We started our research in 2003 at the Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center. The Arthritis Foundation has been a funding source for our research since way back then. We're very grateful to the support of the Arthritis Foundation.

So, that research looked at an eight-week intervention, where people practiced yoga in a class with an instructor two times a week and then practice at home once a week. And after the eight weeks, there were myriad of changes. An example off the top of my head is that pain decreased by 30%, which, you know, is similar to some medications.

We also worked with the patients in the arthritis center to understand what works, what doesn't work, what feels good, what needs to be adjusted. And so, it adapted over time as we learned more about what people were experiencing. And once we finished that study, we went on to replicate it at the National Institutes of Health, specifically with underserved minorities with arthritis, who have less access to yoga. Arthritis at similar rates, but with worse outcomes. And so, being able to bring yoga as a self-care practice to that population was important to us.

The practice is comprehensive. It has physical postures, movement, breathing practices, mindfulness practices, meditation, philosophy. And it grows over the eight weeks. So, it starts out slowly and builds over time so that people are accumulating practices. And by the end of it, should be able to practice on their own.

Now, that program is taught by people who've been trained by me. And so, if you go to our website and you look in our directory, and you find our teachers, they are trained in that evidence-based protocol, right? They will deliver that eight-week series to people, soup to nuts. You can also take regular drop-in classes from people who are trained to do this work, and it will be a safe and appropriate and beneficial class.

Additionally, we have some online courses available. The classes that we teach, we have followed that model in some recorded classes that you can access. And then on the Johns Hopkins website, we separated what would be a whole hour-long practice into those little snacks. Those are all free.

Rebecca:

We do have a DVD that we worked with you, Steffany, on, right? The Arthritis Foundation has a Yoga for Arthritis video, too, right?



Dr. Moonaz:

Right. Everyone in the video has arthritis. And there are even little clips where the people in the video talk about their own arthritis and how yoga has been helpful for them. It demonstrates what a variety of options there are. Because, you know, everybody's bodies are different, and we all need to adapt our yoga practice in different ways. I think it's a great resource.

Rebecca:

How often do you recommend people start out to begin practicing?

Dr. Moonaz:

What I can say is really more about anecdotal evidence than it is about statistical evidence. And that is: If you are practicing a little bit of yoga at a time, I think it's great to do a little bit every day. As with everything else, pay attention to how you feel. Yoga should be making you feel more energized, not depleted. And so, if you're feeling depleted by it, you're probably doing a little too much. If you do a full practice once a week, you will probably notice some benefit over time. If you do it more than once a week, you're probably gonna notice the benefits sooner, because I think six days is a long time to go without it.

My recommendation is about three times a week. But if you're doing small bits, I think it's fine to do it more. And if once a week is all you can do, then it's better than not doing it at all.

Julie:

One thing that I always worry about when I start doing yoga as my main source of exercise is that a lot of times you hear from providers like, you know, the recommendation is 150 minutes of vigorous exercise each week. Work up a sweat. However you're gonna do it, whether it's a snack or otherwise, get that heart pumping.

And when I do yoga, I definitely work up a sweat. I have a hard time holding some of the postures and doing all of the pieces. But I don't always know that it's the same as some cardio exercise or something high intensity. Is it all equal getting some movement in? Help me understand some of that.

Dr. Moonaz:

That's a great question. Not all yoga is cardiovascular exercise. Because sometimes the yoga practice that is appropriate for you is seated in a chair, and you're not necessarily



gonna work up a sweat, and you're not necessarily gonna be breathing more heavily. Maybe that's not your cardiovascular exercise. Maybe your cardiovascular exercise is a brisk walk around the block or some time on an exercise bike. And your yoga practice is about strength building, or it's about relaxation, or it's about reducing the stiffness in your joints, right? So, it depends on what the yoga practice is intended for.

And what sometimes happens is that people, when they're really concentrating on something, they stop breathing, their breath becomes shallow, they hold their breath. And so, then it shifts from being what we would call an aerobic activity, where the exercise is fueled by oxygen to an anaerobic activity because we're not getting enough oxygen. And if we do that, then we're more likely to be sore the next day because lactic acid is a byproduct of it.

It's important to be breathing fully and deeply. But especially if the yoga is physically challenging, it's important to be breathing fully and deeply. I think those guideposts of try to break a sweat every day, try to do something that gets your heart rate up every day... If you are engaging in a yoga practice where your heart rate is up, even if at periods of time, you're doing some sort of vinyasa flow sequence. And you can feel your heart rate goes up. And then it sort of tapers down as you move into something that counteracts that a little bit. Your yoga very well could be your aerobic exercise, but it might not be.

Why I don't refer to yoga as exercise, and why instead I call it physical activity, is because exercise uses up energy. So, we can think metabolically, of course: It's using ATP, it's burning calories, all of those things; but on an energetic level, when you exercise, you often feel tired afterward, right? (laughs)

Whereas, if you're doing a mind-body practice, the idea is that it's opening up the energy channels that's helping energy to move more fluidly throughout your system. And so, it should be giving you more vitality and not making you feel depleted. So, that's a good barometer for your yoga practice, and whether or not you're overdoing it. Yoga practice actually makes you feel energized enough to do something like a brisk walk. And there's actually evidence that yoga can be a gateway drug in a good way.

We're actually doing some research to study why people who practice yoga start doing a whole bunch of other healthy things. Seemingly automatically. They start practicing yoga. And they start doing more of other forms of physical activity. They start practicing yoga, and they drink less alcohol, eat healthier foods, sleep better, you know? Are kinder, have better relationships, right? Like, all of these other things that we



would love to recommend to people, it turns out if they just start yoga, all that other stuff might happen naturally.

Julie:

What an image. I love it.

PROMO:

The Arthritis Foundation couldn't do awesome things without your support. Your donation fuels our powerful movement to advance arthritis research and resources, like this podcast and much more. Every dollar makes a difference. Give a gift now at <https://www.arthritis.org/donate>.

Rebecca:

For those of our listeners who maybe haven't really tried yoga, one thing that I love about it is doing the yoga breath, especially when you're having pain. Can you walk us through a good yoga breath?

Dr. Moonaz:

I can sort of explain it to you and you can maybe try to practice it as I'm explaining it. The first thing is: It can be helpful to put a hand on your abdomen, because some people don't actually breathe diaphragmatically. When you breathe diaphragmatically, you're gonna get more oxygen exchange. And it's gonna be more calming for your nervous system.

So, your abdomen should move out when you breathe in. And then it should go back in as you breathe out, and that's just because as your diaphragm descends, it sort of pushes the abdominal contents out, and then your diaphragm moves back up again, everything goes back again. Think about it as toning your abdomen as you breathe. So, if you're doing that and your abdomen is moving as you breathe, that's a really good sign. That's a good place to start.

The second thing to think about is making the exhale longer than the inhale. You can do that first just by counting in your head and noticing how many counts your inhale is compared to your exhale. Maybe it's three counts to breathe in, three counts to breathe out to start with, and then you can think, "Maybe I can make it three counts to breathe in and four counts to breathe out." So, you're slowly extending that exhale.

And what that does is it engages the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the relaxation response. It's the opposite of the stress response. Stress makes pain worse,



and pain makes stress worse. When we engage the relaxation response and turn off the stress response, it can also help us to manage pain.

If there's a particular part of the body that is hurting that is bothering you, you can put a hand on that part of the body. And with imagery, just think about sending the breath. Obviously, physiologically, we're not sending the breath to your shoulder, but if you think about sending the breath to your shoulder, it can help you to just relax all of the tension, holding what you have in the muscles surrounding that joint that are intended to protect it, but can actually make the pain worse. So, that's another little trick that can be helpful.

Rebecca:

It takes practice, a lot of practice to get used to doing that kind of breathing.

Julie:

Would you mind giving us your top three takeaways, to help our listeners get started with some yoga practice for arthritis?

Dr. Moonaz:

I think that my three takeaways are all about listening. And so, the first one is to listen to yourself, to pay attention to what you're noticing in your own body, to trust yourself as the world's leading expert of your own body, and to respond to whatever you're noticing in your body. Not ignoring it, not stuffing it down, not pushing through it. In yoga, we say, "Adapt, adjust, accommodate." And so, I think that that's a useful mantra when it comes to paying attention to what we're feeling and then responding accordingly.

But in addition to listening to ourselves, and what we're experiencing, it's also important to listen to health care professionals and their expertise. Because while we may know how we feel, they know what's going on with the underlying disease.

And then the third is about listening to yoga experts. And so that starts with finding someone who has the right expertise, training, experience, to offer you appropriate guidance. And then taking that guidance and making use of it in your own practice. So, listen to yourself, listen to your doctors, and then listen to a really good yoga teacher.

Julie:



Thank you so much. We've just so enjoyed this conversation today. And it's been helpful to frame up our thoughts on Mindful Movement and Yoga for Arthritis. Thanks for joining us.

Rebecca:
Thank you so much.

Dr. Moonaz:
My pleasure.

MUSIC BRIDGE

Rebecca:
So, this is a very bittersweet episode. Today will be the last podcast that we have Julie Eller as a co-host for the Live Yes With Arthritis Podcast. When we launched this thing together, we had no idea where it was gonna go. We just knew that both of us wanted to be able to use our voices to help other patients with arthritis, too. And I remember, Julie, that first day of recording, and we had a dance party before we recorded our very first session to get hyped up.

Julie:
That's right. (laughs)

Rebecca:
And it's been a dance party this whole year and a half, and nothing but joy and laughter and putting together some really good information, I feel, for people with arthritis. So, Julie, I want you to tell everybody what's next in your adventure, so they don't wonder where you are when we have a new episode drop and it's not you on there with me.

Julie:
Yeah. Well, I feel very thankful for the time we've gotten to spend recording this thing together and being a part of just a really unique way to talk with patients and, hopefully, empower folks across the country to share their story a little bit differently. And think about their arthritis a little bit differently. It's been a very important time in my life to take control. And I hope it has been for listeners as well.

I feel just really grateful to have been asked to be a part of this little family with Rebecca and our podcast team. I have felt very inspired by the work that we get to



do. And, at the midpoint of the pandemic, it inspired me to start thinking about what comes next. And I decided that that was deeper education in public health.

And so, I am really so excited, and feel very lucky to take this next step. I'm gonna be starting a full-time master's program in public health at Harvard. I am leaving D.C. I am leaving the Arthritis Foundation. I'm heading to Boston. And I just have nothing but love for this work. And I hope that I can be someone who does it really well. And then with another hat on someday, (laughs) with some new education. But it is certainly a, whew, hard goodbye, a hard goodbye.

Rebecca:

Well, I say bittersweet because, my goodness, not only is she going off to get off her master's in public health, she's going off to Harvard, and that's no small apples right there.

Julie:

Thank you.

Rebecca:

That's amazing. And I couldn't be more proud and excited for your next steps in your future. I know it is so bright. I remember first meeting you as a volunteer with the Arthritis Foundation, and you were doing grassroots advocacy. And although I am older, I felt then, "Gosh, I wanna be like her more one day, because she's so articulate and she's so intelligent, and she does such a good job of teaching people how to advocate for themselves," and patient engagement is such a passion for you.

And so, thank you for your friendship. Thank you for all you've done for the Arthritis Foundation and the arthritis community. I know that, for me, this is not a goodbye. This is a good luck. And I'll see you in Boston soon when I come to visit.

Julie:

Yeah. (laughs)

Rebecca:

Tony Williams is our voiceover on the podcast, and he's actually on today, too. Tony, I remember when Daniel edited, that's our editor for the podcast, the first episode. And we heard your voice, and we thought... we heard all of our voices and thought... "Is this real? Are we really doing this?"



Julie:

Oh, gosh! It was so fancy. We were in that sound booth. We're getting in there. We're talking. And Tony is the voice of God that comes in. And we're like, "OK, guys, this is real."

Rebecca:

That's it. Yeah.

Julie:

"This is real."

Tony Williams:

Yeah. It's been so much fun. And, Julie, I want you to know how thoroughly I've enjoyed working with you since the very beginning of the podcast, as well as you, Rebecca. Julie, you're such a ray of sunshine. You're so inspiring and encouraging. And we're gonna sorely miss you. So, good luck, and thank you.

Julie:

Thank you very much. I'm just really thankful for you guys. I won't be far. I'll be a volunteer. I'll be a podcast listener to the next generation. And I'll just be missing everyone so deeply, but so, so enthusiastic to be rooting you on from afar. So, Tony, thank you.

Rebecca:

Well, I will still be channeling your sunshine with finger dancing...

Julie:

(laughs) Some finger guns, yeah.

Rebecca:

Yeah, finger guns. I will be channeling your sunshine with finger gun dancing and dancing before a recording to get the energy up.

Julie:

That's right.

Rebecca:

And you're gonna be in the back of my head when I ask questions. "What would Julie have asked?"



Julie:

(laughs) Well, that's perfect. We'll live on for that. (laughs)

Rebecca:

You will be vicariously living through my brain. And I'm sorry 'cause it's a little mixed up. But if you ever have a minute while you're in grad school, maybe you can come back as a guest.

Julie:

You know what? You know my number. I'll be on. It won't take much convincing. I'll be desperately wanting to be a part of it all again. So, thank you. Thank you.

Rebecca:

Well, on behalf of all of our listeners and Arthritis Foundation staff, Julie, thank you for your service to all of us. We love you. We will miss you and best of luck. Go get them.

Julie:

(laughs) Thank you. Right back at you. I love you. Miss you forever. Thanks, guys.

PODCAST CLOSE:

This Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast was brought to you by the trusted experts of the Arthritis Foundation. We're bringing together leaders in the arthritis community to help you make a difference in your own life in ways that make sense. You may have arthritis, but it doesn't have you. The content in this episode was developed independently by the Arthritis Foundation. To download our new Vim pain management app, visit <https://www.arthritis.org/vim>, spelled V-I-M. For podcast episodes and show notes, go to <https://www.arthritis.org/liveyes/podcast>. And stay in touch!