Teaching Yoga to Seniors

Moving From Chair Yoga to Standing
Aging in America

Senior populations (55-75+) are increasing and are expected to continue to do so.....

While the number of younger people (0-54) is decreasing....
Physical Changes Commonly Associated with Aging

- Bone density decreases
- Synovial joint cartilage is less elastic
- Muscle tissue atrophies (strength decreases)
- ROM decreases
- Kyphotic posture develops
- Gait widens, center of gravity shifts
Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice to the treatment of health conditions and involves instruction in yogic practices and teachings to prevent reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional and spiritual pain, suffering or limitations.
Where we began...

Students remained seated for 75-80% of class time

Students wore street clothes and shoes throughout the class

Jackets and bags hung on chair backs or underneath seats
Primary observations of seated postures

- Forward head
- Rounding in upper back, heaviness in shoulders
- Weakness in core muscles
- Lack of engagement in muscles of lower body
Primary Objectives of Yoga for This Population

Lift and Expand Chest
Increase stamina through breathwork and chest opening exercises
Strengthen and stretch lower body: legs and hips
Develop awareness of posture and improve balance
Teach importance of strong base in order to lift spine and chest
Increase confidence and overall sense of well being
Introducing Changes: Feet First

What are the tennis balls for?
Improving the foundation

Using the lower body in seated postures
Engaging legs and feet to lift the spine and chest
Creating stability in standing postures
Introducing yoga mats
Creating Lift

Working with the breath to increase vitality

Beginning with meditation on the breath at start of class

Using the breath to create expansion and release in the body

Focusing on actions which lift and expand the chest and open the shoulders
Building Strength and Confidence

Exploring new standing postures
Discovering new possibilities - introducing props
Learning from each other - demonstrating poses
I recently ran into some old family friends who observed, “I haven’t seen you standing up so straight for years!” Elaine, xx yrs

I had an MRI which required me to hold my breath. Afterward the technician asked what I did that enabled me to do this so easily. I told him, “I do yoga!” Jean, xx yrs

My legs have always been week. This program has given me a reason to hope that this can change. Connie, xx yrs


Older Adults Health and Age Related Changes, American Psychological Associations, http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/guides/older.aspx

Sources con’d

Percent of Population in Five Age Groups,