

Remember: You can live well with osteoporosis!

Yoga and osteoporosis: suggestions for safe and appropriate practice

By Dr. Caitlin McArthur - Registered Physiotherapist, PhD

One of the most common questions I get from people with a new diagnosis of osteoporosis is can I do yoga? [Yoga is defined as](#) “a system of physical postures, breathing techniques, and sometimes meditation derived from Yoga but often practised independently especially in Western cultures to promote physical and emotional well-being.” While yoga has many benefits to mind, body and spirit, there are some postures that might not be safe for people with osteoporosis. Some people may be worried about the yoga practice they have been doing for many years, while others may be wondering about starting yoga to become more active. In this article, I will give practical tips for people thinking about starting yoga and those who have some experience, including what to look for in a yoga class and instructor, and how to practise safely if you have osteoporosis.

The objectives of this article are to:

- Discuss the overall principles of a safe yoga culture
- Provide an overview of what movements in yoga practice should be modified and why they should be modified for people with osteoporosis
- Provide suggestions for yoga postures that should be encouraged, modified and avoided

Overall principles for a safe yoga practice with osteoporosis:

Tip 1: Consult a physiotherapist if you are new to yoga, have a history of spine fractures, or you are feeling uncertain about what to do. It is especially important to find a physiotherapist who has training for working with people with osteoporosis. Bone Fit™ is a training program for exercise professionals, like physiotherapists, who work with people with osteoporosis. You can find a Bone Fit™ trained physiotherapist using the Bone Fit™ locator here: <https://www.bonefit.ca/bonefit-map-locator/>

Tip 2: Seek out a yoga class designed for people with osteoporosis and other health conditions (e.g., osteoarthritis), and ensure your instructor has proper training for working with this population. Yoga instructors can also become Bone Fit™ trained, so check on the locator (above) to see if you can find one close to you. Also make sure

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Fracture

Fact:

In 2017, the number of people in the US doing yoga was approximately 27.4 million. On a per capita basis, Canadians practise yoga more than Americans.

one close to you. Also make sure your yoga instructor is certified. Certified instructors are listed on registries such as this one: <https://www.yogaalliance.org/Directory>

Tip 3: Make sure your yoga instructor knows you have osteoporosis, so they can give you the appropriate modifications throughout the class. If they don't know, they won't be able to help you practise safely.

Tip 4: Focus on controlled movements, and less on intensity of the postures. Yoga is not about competition between you and the person on the mat beside you, so work at your own level and pace. Injuries can occur when you try to force yourself into extreme positions.

Here are some things you can think about throughout your yoga practice to help keep you safe:

- keep your balance steady: focus on one point with your eyes and maintain firm contact with a support object (wall, ground, steady chair) with your feet and/or hands
- keep good alignment: try to keep your spine as tall, lengthened and as straight as possible throughout each posture and transitions between postures

What movements should I modify?

You should modify any postures or movements that:

- make you bend your spine forward, backward or twist as far as you can (example: rag doll)
- are done in sitting (example: seated twists)
- force your hip into full rotation (example: pigeon)
- are repetitive (doing a movement over and over – example: rolling like a ball)
- rapid (moving quickly – example: jumping your feet to your hands from downward facing dog)
- weighted (holding a weight or something heavy while you do the movement - example: Russian twist with a dumbbell)
- any of the above in combination (e.g., repetitively bending forward as far as you can)

Sometimes it is not the end position that is the problem, it is how you get in and out of the position. For example, downward facing dog encourages a straight back and is a safe posture to do with osteoporosis – but, it is dangerous for your spine to get out of the posture by jumping your feet to your hands and rolling up through your spine. A better way to transition out of downward facing dog is to drop to your knees. Come into standing by bringing one foot forward into a kneeling position and push up into standing keeping your back tall and straight. If that is difficult or your balance is wobbly, then do it next to a wall or very sturdy chair.

Why do I need to modify these movements?

You need to modify these movements because they put a lot of pressure on your spine and hip bones in ways that increase your risk of breaking a bone. Since osteoporosis already makes your bones more susceptible to being broken, you should try to decrease any other factors that could cause them to break. Modifying the movements listed above may help decrease your risk for a broken bone when practising yoga.

Which yoga postures should I modify or avoid? How do I modify them?

Here are some suggestions for yoga postures to continue to do, to avoid and to modify. This is not an exhaustive list but will help give you an idea of what you might need to start or stop doing. If you are uncertain, contact a physiotherapist for advice as discussed above.

Yoga postures you should continue to do with proper instruction and guidance:

- Corpse
- Bridge
- Warrior
- Mountain
- Chair
- Crocodile
- Sphinx
- Locust

Examples of poses that are OK to perform with guidance:



Tree Pose



Mountain Pose

Yoga postures you should avoid:

- Spinal rocking
- Rag doll
- Saw
- Plow
- Pigeon

Examples of poses to avoid performing:



Seated Twist



Pigeon Pose

Yoga postures you should continue to do with proper guidance, instruction, AND modifications:

- Twists – don't go as far as you can, do them lying down instead of sitting: in a knees-down twist lying on your back, rest your knees on a nearby wall or folded blanket so you don't go too far
- Child's Pose – put a yoga block under your head or place your forehead on stacked fists to avoid a rounded back
- Thread the needle – do it lying on your back, keep your head down on the ground to avoid a rounded back

Examples of poses to modify:



Downward Dog



Child's Pose



Triangle Pose

Should I use props, like blocks, blankets, or yoga straps to help me?

Props should only be used when they help you make the posture safer or more aligned but shouldn't be used to help push you further or deeper into a position. For example, you could use a sturdy chair to help you do a modified downward facing dog, but you shouldn't use a yoga strap to help pull you further into a forward bend.

What about chair yoga? Or hot yoga?

Chair yoga may be appropriate in some situations but could increase the risk for spine fracture if not done carefully. If you are very unsteady on your feet or are unable to get down to the ground, then chair yoga could be an option. However, you must be very cautious about alignment since all the yoga postures in chair yoga will be done in a seated position. Sitting puts a lot of pressure through the bones in the back, increasing the risk for a broken bone. Sitting and bending or twisting increases the risk even more. If you are doing chair yoga, you should be especially careful to modify bending or twisting the spine and focus more on postures that encourage a straight or lengthened spine. Standing or lying down are better positions to be in if they are safe for you. Hot yoga can cause people to overstretch into unsafe positions and should be avoided for people with osteoporosis.

With the guidance of an exercise professional who is trained to work with people with osteoporosis, yoga can be safe, beneficial and enjoyable. Remember to seek out a yoga instructor that has training to help you make modifications and a class that is appropriate for you, and to practise at your own level.

WEBINAR
OSTEOPOROSIS AND YOGA:
Suggestions for Safe & Appropriate Practice

Date & Time
Thursday, September 13, 2018
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM ET



Featured Speaker
Dr. Caitlin McArthur, PhD (Kinesiology)

- Registered Physiotherapist and post-doctoral fellow, GERAS Centre for Aging Research, McMaster University
- Specialist in aging, health and well-being; expertise in bone health, exercise and physical activity

Dr. McArthur will provide

- An overview of what movements should be modified, and why, for people with osteoporosis
- Suggestions for yoga postures that should be encouraged, modified or avoided
- A discussion of the principles of a safe yoga culture

To Register <https://osteoporosis.ca/bonematters>

OSTEOPOROSIS



osteoporosis.ca/copn

BONE MATTERS

Take charge of your bone health

Upcoming Presentation
Osteoporosis and Yoga: Suggestions for Safe and Appropriate Practice

Enjoyed this article but want more information on yoga and osteoporosis? Join us for a virtual presentation with the author, Dr. Caitlin McArthur, who will share how to you can continue – or start – to practice yoga safely by following recommendations geared towards individuals with osteoporosis. You will also have the opportunity to submit your question to be answered by Dr. McArthur at the end of the presentation.

This presentation will air live on **Thursday, September 13** from **1:00-2:00PM ET**.

For more information and to register, [click here](#).
Registration is required to participate in the live event.
Registration closes at 9AM Thursday September 13.

National Pharmacare Consultations

The Federal Government wants to hear from you!

The Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare is leading a national consultation on how to implement affordable national pharmacare for Canadians and their families, employers and governments.

You are invited to share your thoughts and ideas on what a national drug plan could look like. There are a number of ways to participate, including a questionnaire. To make your thoughts known, go to

<https://www.letstalkhealth.ca/pharmacare>.

Note that the questionnaire will be available online until **September 28, 2018**.

We Welcome Your Feedback

- Have a question?
- Is there an osteoporosis-related topic that you would like to see featured in the newsletter?
- Looking for a great volunteer opportunity?

Please contact us by calling Osteoporosis Canada's toll-free number **1-800-463-6842** or emailing copn@osteoporosis.ca.

FUNNY BONE:

The art of negotiation is something you learn at an early age. You'd be amazed how many teenagers get their first car by asking for a motorcycle. –James Hewett

LEMONY GREENS BULGUR BOWL WITH BEANS

Preparation Time: 10 mins

Cook Time: 5 mins

Serves: 4

Calcium: 174 mg



A mixture of greens, white beans and salmon make for a filling dinner with lots of flavour and texture.

Ingredients

- 1 tub (312 g) cooking greens (which include baby kale, spinach and arugula)
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) sodium reduced vegetable broth
- 2 tsp (10 mL) extra virgin olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (398 mL) white kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 tsp (5 mL) finely grated lemon rind
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) lemon juice
- 3 tbsp (45 mL) chopped fresh parsley
- 2 cups (500 mL) cooked bulgur, reheated
- 2 cooked Portobello mushrooms, sliced
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 4 salmon fillets, roasted (optional)

Preparation

Combine greens and broth in large nonstick skillet and sauté until wilted. Add oil and garlic, cook; stirring for 2 minutes.

Stir in beans, pepper, lemon rind and juice; cook for 1 minute to heat through. Remove from heat and stir in parsley.

Divide bulgur among 4 bowls and top with greens mixture, mushrooms and tomato. Place salmon fillets over top if using to serve.

For more information, [click here](#) to view the recipe online.