

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

# YOGA<sup>TM</sup> MAGAZINE

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**REFLECT & EMBRACE PEACE**

**HEART-CENTRED**  
*Yoga*

SUCCESS IN MEDITATION  
**AJAHN LEE**

**SAMADHI WATERCOLOURS**

**INCLUSIVE YOGA FOR**

**DEMENTIA**

**TEACHERS & THEIR TEACHERS**

विद्ययात्मया  
रोशना



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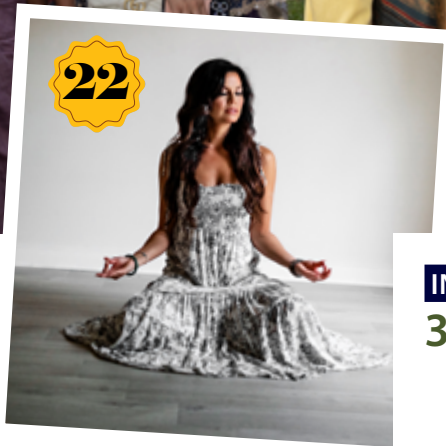
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# INCLUSIVE YOGA *for* PEOPLE LIVING *wish* DEMENTIA

Words: Dr Susan Jeffery, BWY Gentle Years Yoga Teacher and  
Sally Wise, Partner at Seniors Helping Seniors



Dementia, a complex and multifaceted condition, affects nearly one million people in the UK, with projections suggesting this number will rise to 1.6 million by 2040, according to the Alzheimer's Society. As the prevalence of dementia increases, the necessity for comprehensive approaches to prevent, diagnose, support, and manage the condition becomes increasingly critical.

Among the various supportive measures, yoga, particularly chair-based yoga, has emerged as a beneficial practice for people living with dementia.

Research indicates that chair-based yoga can enhance balance, reduce anxiety and offer soothing effects on people living with dementia. Improvements in physical aspects such as leg strength, walking ability, general flexibility and resting heart rate have also been reported, alongside improved mood and the social benefits of class attendance. There is also potential for yoga and meditation to delay cognitive decline.

## Making yoga more inclusive

My journey (Dr Susan Jeffery) into yoga for dementia began in 2013 when my mother was diagnosed with the condition. An avid participant in yoga and meditation, she was determined to continue her practice despite her diagnosis. However, the availability of chair-based yoga classes was limited. To address this gap, I initiated a class at our local Age Concern centre in Sandwich, Kent.

In 2016, I was contacted by Sally Wilse, CEO of Seniors Helping Seniors (SHS). Our collaboration aimed to integrate individuals living with dementia into group yoga classes effectively. With support from Cora Kemball-Cook, owner of Canterbury Yoga Studio and BWY Course Tutor, we developed a teaching-learning system, introducing client-carer pairs, which both allowed inclusion and created a stimulating yoga experience for all.

The SHS model focuses on creating a multidimensional carer-client relationship where a carer is matched to a client based on their unique situation. Sally recruited carers willing to be trained to assist in the yoga classes.

These carers, initially unfamiliar with yoga, quickly embraced the practice, attending classes alongside their clients. The pairing system allowed carers to provide focused support while clients enjoyed the security of having a companion during the sessions.

These established relationships also facilitated continued practice during lockdowns through online classes.

## The Role of the BWY

In 2018, the British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) launched the Gentle Years Yoga (GYY) programme to address the needs of older individuals with age-related conditions, including dementia.



The BWY Gentle Years Yoga focus has been instrumental in providing national coordination, training, and documentation of relevant research in this growing area of yoga.

## Impact and Benefits

The benefits of our inclusive yoga approach are multi-dimensional, positively impacting clients, their families, and carers. GPs at Northgate Medical Practice in Canterbury have observed notable improvements in their patients who participate in the classes, including better blood pressure control, stabilised symptoms, and enhanced physical and mental wellbeing.

## Carer's Perspective: Eileen's Testimony

Eileen, a carer for a client attending the yoga classes, comments: *"She started the class unable to walk into the studio unaided; now she does the tree pose. There has been a definite improvement in her balance since she has been going to yoga. She enjoys it, both the exercise and the social interaction."*

## Social Benefits: Sally's Insights

Sally highlights the social benefits: *"Usually clients struggle with even very light meals. It could be the social setting, the great food in a local hotel, or the yoga. Either way, clients enjoy a two-course lunch, and suddenly Mondays become a highlight of their week."*

## A Model for Success

The success of our inclusive yoga classes can be attributed to the SHS carer/companion model, which emphasises the importance of support, autonomy, and enjoyment for both clients and carers. Carers participate in the class as individuals, ensuring that everyone

benefits from the practice while maintaining a balanced environment. The SHS pairs constitute no more than one-third of the class to preserve this balance.

As dementia progresses, clients may require more specific focus, and these mixed-ability classes may no longer suffice. In such cases, classes composed solely of carer-client pairs are recommended, where carers help maintain the energy of a mixed-ability class. In residential care settings, involving visiting loved ones in seated yoga classes can maximize the benefits of the teacher's guidance.

## Five yoga practices useful for dementia

Based on our experience, we have found the following practices to be particularly useful for those with dementia.

### Combining simple breath and movement

Repeat 3-5 times - soothes and focuses attention

1. Breathe in as you lift your shoulders
2. Breathe out/sigh away as you drop your shoulders back down
3. Breathe in as you lift your arms forward up to shoulder height
4. Breathe out as you bring your arms back down

### Joint-freeing for feet and/or hands

Repeat all movements 3-5 times - improves mobility and comfort in the joints

1. Point toes and feet away from you and back towards you (i.e. point and flex toes and feet)
2. Put heels to the floor and point and flex just the toes, keeping the feet still
3. Lift feet again and rotate both towards the R (x3-5), then to the L, then both inwards towards the centre, then towards the outside

“  
Teamwork  
is crucial  
in creating  
an inclusive  
environment  
in which all  
members of  
the class feel  
valued and  
respected.  
”



You can do this just for the feet or combine with similar hand movements

You can slow this down with the breath: breathe in as foot/toes move upwards in the circle, breathe out as they move downwards.

### Alternating movements

Repeat all movements 3-5 times - good for balance, coordinating both sides of the brain.

1. Lift left heel, tap left knee with right hand
2. Lift right heel, tap right knee with left hand

### To progress:

1. Lift left foot up a little, tap left knee with right hand. Repeat 3-5 times on the one side and then repeat again on the other side. You can

then alternate as above.

2. On the exhale, stretch left leg forward and stretch into left heel, stretch right arm upward. On the inhale swap sides. On the exhale, stretch right leg forward and stretch into right heel, stretch left arm upward.

### Tree pose - with chair for support

Step through one foot at a time and hold each position for a few breaths - standing balances are strength-building.

1. Plant right foot down, press into ball of foot, then into heel of foot, feel grounded and let there be more weight through the right foot.
2. Bring left heel to right ankle, or near it
3. Bring one or both hands to the

heart/prayer position.

4. Keep chin level
5. Option to lift one or both arms stretching upwards and outwards and wriggle fingers (as if leaves in the breeze)

## 3-part breath

Improves breathing and concentration, helps relaxation

**Abdomen** - hands on the abdomen, breathe into the abdomen, counting to 3, breathe out counting to 3 (or 4 if wish to calm down/soothe). Observe/feel the abdomen expanding and contracting.

**Chest** - hands at the side of ribs or at the breastbone, focus on breathing into the chest area; feel the movement of ribs e.g. at side/front. Add a count of 3 or 4.

**Upper chest** – hands on the collarbone, focus on breathing into the upper chest, imagine breathing into armpits to help focus upwards. Add the count. Extra help – start with hands in prayer position at heart; as you breathe in, keep hands together and lift above head; breathing out, bring hands back to the heart

**3-part breath:** breathe into the abdomen, then the chest, then the upper chest. Breathe out, starting from the abdomen (pull in), then the chest, then the upper chest (bring shoulders down)

Add in **sound/chanting** on the exhale. This could be breathing out with a hum (as in *Bhramari* or bee breath) or using the A-U-M (A or aaah exhaling from the abdomen, U or ooo from chest, M or mmm from the upper chest).

## Expanding the Collaboration – Join the Project!

Teamwork is crucial in creating an inclusive environment in which all members of the class feel valued and respected and can learn not only yoga, but from each other.

SHS are keen to expand this project to other parts of the country where they have existing teams and clients who could benefit. This includes Solihull, Warwick, Guildford, Tonbridge, Windsor, Hastings, Brighton and Eastbourne.

We welcome discussions with yoga teachers interested in collaborating. For enquiries, please contact Sally Wilse or Dr Susan Jeffery.

For further information about the BWY Gentle Years Yoga course, please visit the BWY website here: <https://www.bwy.org.uk/train/professional-development/#profdev-gyy>

**Sally Wilse**, Partner at SHS, Sally is a dedicated partner at Seniors Helping Seniors, a leading in-home care provider that connects seniors who need help with seniors who can provide it. With a strong passion for enhancing the lives of older adults, Sally has been instrumental in expanding the organisation's reach and impact across the UK.

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**Dr Susan Jeffery** is a BWY Gentle Years Yoga teacher and YHLB (Yoga for Healthy Lower Back) registered teacher with over 10 years of experience in providing accessible yoga for older adults. She specialises in gentle, mindful yoga and meditation for mixed ability classes and is an advocate for integrating yoga in senior wellness programs.

You can find Susan's classes at <https://www.canterburyyoga.co.uk/teachers/>  
For her online chair-based class on Wednesdays 10.30-11.30am, please email her: [sjyogaandphilosophy@gmail.com](mailto:sjyogaandphilosophy@gmail.com)







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