Yoga for the Blind

An Ashtanga Yoga – based Therapy (AYT) Program for Visually Impaired Individuals

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Common Interest Community Session
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Motivation

* The population of people with vision loss is expected to increase from 4 to 7 million by 2030 due the aging population.

* VI are at greater risk for falls due to irreparable damage to visual sensory input contributing to balance.

* Balance is regulated by 3 sensory systems: somatosensory, vestibular, and visual.

* Yoga may improve balance by strengthening the remaining sensory systems.

* Adults may also develop a “fear of falling” (FOF) and other psychological distress, which may further limit their activity level, increase anxiety, and reduce confidence.

* Modifiable risk factors include fitness, balance, and psychosocial factors (e.g. anxiety).

* Ashtanga-based Yoga Therapy (AYT) – developed during pilot study, may be used as a multi-sensory, multi-factorial behavioral intervention to reduce fall risk and improve psychosocial factors in VI.
Balance is regulated by 3 integrated sensory systems

VISION
(e.g. changes in retinal disparity, image size and position)

VESTIBULAR
(e.g. changes in head position)

SOMATOSENSORY
(e.g. kinesthetic, proprioception)

Can yoga promote the development of other sensory systems to compensate for visual sensory loss, i.e. to improve balance?
Vis-Ability

- Blindness is not all or nothing
- Peripheral vs. Central Vision loss impact on balance
- Congenital vs. Age-related vision loss differences for balance
- Cause of blindness varies…
Ashtanga-based Yoga Therapy (AYT)

- Ashtanga is a system of yoga taught by Sri K. Pattabi Jois in Mysore, India.
- Integrated system of *asanas* (postures), *vinyasa* (movement), and *breathing*
- The Ashtanga-based Yoga Therapy (AYT) is a highly modified yoga sequence developed specifically for the visually impaired population
WHY ASHTANGA-BASED?

Drishti

Translated point of gaze or focus yet has little to do with physical sight.

* **Primary Function** -- Cultivate inner focus, reign in the senses and focus on the sound of the breath.

* **Secondary Function** -- Alignment, relative position of neighboring parts of the body. Proper alignment minimizes risk of injury. Every pose has a drishti, usually facing in the direction the stretch.
WHY ASHTANGA-BASED?

Ujjayi

Ashtanga is a *breathing* practice, first and foremost. (strained vs. steady)
WHY ASHTANGA-BASED?

Vinyasa (flow)

* Set sequence when learned leads to dynamic moving meditation.
* Every pose has a modification to suit the student so they are able to stay in the flow.
WHY ASHTANGA-BASED?

Bandhas (energetic locks)

- energetic practice (with biological components that can help with balance, e.g. pelvic floor).
- Moola, Uddiyana, Jalandhara
Tips and Pics—Permission to touch
Tips and Pics-Building blocks
Tips and pics – Gross to subtle
Tips and Pics – Using the mat for Alignment

What about blocks and straps?
Barriers to Access & Next Steps

* Transportation
* Cost
* Uncomfortable in Sighted Classes
* Developing training module for yoga teacher training
Relevant References


Experiential

* Breathing exercise
* Tree pose
* Tight rope