



# Yoga for people living with dementia in residential care settings

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## Project background

According to Dementia UK, dementia is ‘a broad umbrella term used to describe a range of progressive neurological disorders’. Symptoms may include loss of memory, difficulty performing everyday tasks, language problems, disorientation in time and space and misplacing items. Dementia can also cause changes in personality, including depression, anxiety, anger and loss of initiative.

Yoga- and mindfulness-based exercise have been shown to be an effective intervention for common conditions present in care home residents living with dementia, including anxiety, depression, coordination and balance problems. However, to date few residential care homes offer yoga as a regular activity. Marlborough Court Care Home is a 78-bed nursing home in Thamesmead, south-east London. It offers nursing, residential dementia care and residential care on three separate units.

## Aims and objectives

To develop, implement and evaluate regular, tailored, chair-based yoga classes, led by care home staff for residents living with dementia in order to promote health and wellbeing. To achieve this, the objectives identified were to:

- Develop, pilot and document (photograph and record) a number of simple, adapted yoga-based interventions and sequences
- Understand more about the barriers to introducing simple yoga-based exercises in residential care settings and how to overcome these barriers
- Develop the activities coordinators’ skills in how to deliver and use these interventions
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions
- Make recommendations about how to scale up these interventions and offer a blueprint to promoting them in other residential care settings

## Implications for practice

- Using a yoga expert to work with and develop skills of the activities coordinators enabled sustainability of the project
- Providing a workshop for staff to experience yoga helped them to see the benefits for residents
- Simple yoga exercises for people with cognitive impairment/dementia can improve their wellbeing

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## Online

Further information about the project can be accessed from: [fons.org/library/report-details?nstd=71167](https://fons.org/library/report-details?nstd=71167)

## Key activities and outcomes

### • Develop, pilot, adapt and implement appropriate yoga sequences for those living with dementia

The project team, comprising the yoga teacher and two activities coordinators, designed and tested a number of yoga sequences to find ones that worked for the residents.

### • Workshop for the staff

A key success factor for the project was involving other staff in the care home via an interactive workshop. The workshop lasted for three hours and was an opportunity for staff to look at their values in caring for people and to experience some simple yoga exercises. The introduction of any intervention, including a yoga programme, into the busy daily schedule of a care home needs wider support and understanding of its purpose and expected benefits.

### • Selection of suitable residents to be involved in the pilot yoga sessions

One activities coordinator began running some test sessions in April 2015 to help select residents for the pilot. For the purpose of this project it was agreed to involve residents whom the coordinator thought would benefit from and enjoy the gentle yoga exercises. Seven residents were initially chosen. The coordinator and a healthcare assistant chose the residents to be involved in the sessions based on previous knowledge of those residents, their participation in other activities and their reasonable levels of mobility.

### • Pilot sessions

The yoga classes were run twice a week in a trial period from 19 May to 22 October 2015 (and they have continued to run since). During the trial period, observations were made about the residents’ involvement in the sessions and the benefits. The yoga exercises were also refined based on feedback from those delivering the sequences and from the residents.

### • Assessment and evaluation of resident involvement and benefits achieved

At the end of the project, evaluation interviews were carried out with a number of key project participants. From these interviews and observation of the sessions a number of benefits were found, including residents reporting physical improvements, improved wellbeing and a greater sense of relaxation. The project team was therefore able to conclude that specific yoga exercises can be a successful intervention that provides people living with dementia with meaningful and beneficial activities in residential care settings.

Project videos can be seen at [www.yoga4dementia.com](http://www.yoga4dementia.com).

IMPROVEMENT INSIGHTS