

Last year we mentioned a research study undertaken by Northumbria University  
Here is the summary of the results

## RESEARCH ARTICLE – YOGA FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Yoga therapy teacher, Korinna Pilafidis-Williams, runs a class for neurological conditions including multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's at Iyengar Yoga London. MS is an incurable neurodegenerative and chronic inflammatory disease that affects the central nervous system.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Iyengar Yoga London moved the weekly studio class online so that students could maintain their yoga practice from home on Zoom. The weekly livestream Iyengar Yoga class for people living with Multiple Sclerosis was used by health researchers from Northumbria University and the School of Health and Life

Sciences at Teeside University to investigate the motivations, experiences and sustainability of home-based yoga practice for individuals living with MS in a study called 'Yoga provision for individuals living with Multiple Sclerosis: Is the future online?'

The researchers used a focus group and semi-structured interviews on Zoom with the teacher and the livestream class students to gather data. They found two key themes. The first concerned the environment, which included issues around setting up for Iyengar Yoga practice at home, the differences in experience between home and studio practice and levels of social interaction in



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## **The students at the MS & Neurological Conditions Iyengar Yoga class said that they valued the social interactions with peers who understand each other's condition.**

a livestream class versus an in-person class. They named the second theme they identified from the data: Future Provision. This covered the benefits of live versus recorded online classes and the potential for hybrid classes (simultaneous studio and online teaching).

The main point of difference between home and studio was the absence of physical support from a teacher. In the studio the teacher, or one of her assistants, can help students get into the correct yoga asana and fetch equipment to improve a pose if needed. Students value this physical support and some felt less confident practising more demanding poses without physical help at hand. Others felt that they did not push themselves as hard without the teacher observing them in person.

An important point to note is that when a new student joins the studio class, Korinna spends some time with them to understand their condition and their physical boundaries. Before the student joined the livestream class, she managed to carry out a thorough assessment of their practice space by Zoom considering safety and visibility.

The students at the MS & Neurological Conditions Iyengar Yoga class said that they valued the social interactions with peers who understand each other's condition. While they still appreciated the social interaction online, they preferred the face-to-face contact. The

social interaction with the teacher was made more problematic in livestream classes as the students needed to keep their microphones switched off so that they could hear the teacher without any background noise. This made asking questions during class more difficult because they had to come back to the device to unmute.

Students preferred the livestream Iyengar Yoga class format to pre-recorded classes as it allows for social interaction. Livestream yoga classes also allow the teacher to personalise the sessions and tailor yoga poses to individuals in the class. The students suggested that a hybrid approach, where they could attend the studio but would have the option to practise from home if they were not feeling well enough to travel to class, would be ideal. Travel can be a major barrier for students with MS as mobility can often be affected and for those for whom public transport is not an option, getting to the studio can be expensive.

### **Here is the full article:**

<https://iyengaryogalondon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Northumbria-MS-and-Yoga>

**Update:** When students were able to return to the studios after lockdown restrictions ended, the class for MS & Neurological Conditions became a hybrid class for students in the studio and at home on Zoom.

**Class for Neurological Conditions: Thursday 12.00-13.30 (term time only)**