

Evaluation of an afterschool yoga program for children

Sir,

Children have engaged in low levels of physical activity (PA) and may face increased risk for negative health outcomes.^[1] Afterschool programs are an appropriate avenue to improve levels of PA and fitness among school-age children.^[2] Yoga is a PA that can be practiced over the course of a child's lifespan.^[3] The purpose of the current study was to examine the impact of an afterschool yoga program on children's perceptions of yoga and ability to practice and recall yoga poses. A total of 33 participants, mean age was 6 years, were recruited from an afterschool program at a local school. The majority of students attending this school were from low-income families. Children participated in a 3-month, twice per week, yoga program. A typical session started with a meditation session for approximately 1-2 min, and then was followed by instruction on 6-10 yoga poses. Yoga poses that were used in the intervention were the tree, mountain, warrior, dancer, cow, cat, boat, upward-facing dog, and downward-facing dog poses [Table 1]. Data were collected before the program began, mid-program, and at the end of the program. Baseline data indicated that 64% of children reported they had never practiced yoga. At the mid-intervention survey, 83% of the children reported multiple positive benefits of yoga practice, such as feeling happy, having fun, feeling relaxed, and feeling stronger after practicing yoga. These findings were consistent with positive findings of other yoga programs.^[4,5] Children demonstrated increased self-efficacy for performing yoga by the end of the program. The average number of yoga poses children recalled was five, and children reported the upward-facing dog as their favorite yoga pose. Feeling that performing yoga hurt and feeling yoga was hard to do were common reasons for children to avoid becoming involved in yoga classes [Table 2]. Some children also reported yoga "is not fun," which limited their participation. Regular PA is the foundation of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and incorporating yoga - an easy and cost-friendly exercise - in afterschool health promotion programs may be beneficial for improving children's PA levels and well-being. In the future, the influence of yoga on children's abilities to engage in regular exercise and the impact of yoga on lifestyle changes for children needs to be examined. Future yoga interventions could also add mindful eating lessons to the intervention and this might further promote healthy lifestyle changes for children.

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Table 1: Yoga poses practiced at sessions

Sessions	Yoga poses
1 and 2	Sitting meditation, sitting side stretch, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog
3 and 4	Sitting meditation, sitting side stretch, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, duck, bear
5 and 6	Sitting meditation, sitting side stretch, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, elephant waving his/her trunk, cow, cat, child
7 and 8	Sitting meditation, sitting side stretch, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, triangle, cow, cat, child, sun salutation
9 and 10	Sitting meditation, sitting side stretch, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, triangle, reverse warrior, cow, cat, child
11 and 12	Standing meditation, standing side stretch, sun salutation, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, triangle, reverse warrior, mountain, tree, cow, cat, child, push-ups
13 and 14	Standing meditation, standing side stretch, sun salutation, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, triangle, reverse warrior, boat, wheel, mountain, tree, child
15 and 16	Standing meditation, standing side stretch, sun salutation, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, triangle, reverse warrior, boat, wheel, mountain, tree, child, plane, dancer
17 and 18	Standing meditation, standing side stretch, sun salutation, sunflower, downward-facing dog, plank, cobra, waist rotation, frog, warrior, triangle, reverse warrior, mountain, tree, child, plane, dancer
19 and 20	Reviewed all the aforementioned yoga poses

Table 2: Results of children's reponses for barriers to practicing yoga

	Percentage (n)	
	Mid-intervention (n=22)	Post-intervention (n=23)
No barriers	72.7 (16)	69.6 (16)
Hurt	9.1 (2)	4.3 (1)
Dislike exercises	4.5 (1)	-
Hate yoga/yoga is not fun	4.5 (1)	4.3 (1)
Can't do every pose/yoga is hard/fall down	9.1 (2)	17.4 (4)
Did not practice enough	-	4.3 (1)

"-" means no child responded to this question


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