

Yoga Therapy in Rheumatology

Clinical application and referral guidance for rheumatology teams

Prepared by:

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Clinical Rationale

Yoga therapy is a personalised, non-pharmacologic adjunct increasingly used alongside standard rheumatology treatment for conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and fibromyalgia. Delivered by certified therapists, yoga therapy integrates tailored movement, breathwork, meditation, and relaxation—providing holistic benefits while working collaboratively with referring medical teams.

Practitioner Lived Experience

As both a fully qualified yoga therapist and a rheumatology patient myself, I bring unique insight and empathy to my work. I live with *axial spondylarthritis, canal stenosis and severe bilateral foraminal narrowing in my cervical spine*. This lived experience informs my approach and enables me to truly understand the challenges faced by patients—ensuring my practice is not just evidence-based but also compassionate and realistic.

Integration into Rheumatology Care

- **Patient-centric:** Sessions are highly individualised, adapted for disease severity and comorbidities, and available one-to-one or in small groups.
- **Modifiable & safe:** Protocols are specifically designed to accommodate physical limitations and are delivered in conjunction with DMARDs and standard care.
- **Supports social prescribing:** Endorsed within NHS pathways for empowering patients' self-management and wellbeing.

Referral Pathway

- **Yoga Therapist:** Vicky Glanville Watson (Infinite Harmony), fully qualified yoga therapist and yoga teacher.

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Expanded Evidence Summary

Pain Relief

- Yoga therapy as an adjunct for rheumatoid arthritis has shown reductions in chronic pain severity, joint tenderness, and morning stiffness after 3 months of regular group-based yoga intervention, alongside improved joint health and physical function.[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih+3](#)
- Although large meta-analyses note mixed results for objective pain outcomes, qualitative studies and patient-reported measures demonstrate statistically significant improvements in pain and self-reported coping with chronic joint pain.[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih+2](#)
- Systematic reviews note mixed primary pain reduction results; however, improvements in subjective pain and quality of life are consistently reported in cohorts receiving structured yoga therapy.[digitalcommons.pcom+1](#)

Stress Management and Psychological Wellbeing

- Tailored yoga therapy programs have been associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as improved sleep and resilience. Breathing and meditation components are particularly valued for their immediate calming effect and support for stress management.[westminsterresearch.westminster+3](#)
- Longitudinal studies report sustained improvements in psychological health and increased patient engagement in self-care routines up to 12 months post-intervention.[westminsterresearch.westminster](#)

Evidence for Axial Spondyloarthritis

- Recent clinical reviews and trials specifically addressing *axial spondyloarthritis* (axSpA) and ankylosing spondylitis support the use of yoga and broader mind–body exercise for pain, stiffness, spinal mobility, and quality of life.[centerwatch+4](#)
- A 2024 meta-analysis highlighted yoga, Pilates, and Tai Chi as effective, safe adjuncts for reducing pain intensity and disease activity in axSpA, with improved patient-reported outcomes and very few adverse effects.[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](#)
- Feasibility studies demonstrate high acceptability of regular yogatherapy practice, with improvements in physical symptoms (including back pain and mobility), mental wellbeing, and perceived fatigue.[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih+2](#)

Quality of Life & Psychological Health:

- Multiple studies demonstrate benefit in psychological wellbeing, fatigue, and patient-perceived health status compared to controls.[sciencedirect+2](#)

Safety & Feasibility:

- All published trials affirm that yoga therapy is safe, well tolerated, and modifiable for patient needs when performed under expert supervision in clinical settings.[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih+2](#)

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- Moonaz S et al. “Yoga for Arthritis: Benefits for the Patient” [Hopkins Arthritis][hopkinsarthritis](https://www.hopkinsarthritis.org/yoga-for-arthritis-benefits-for-the-patient)
- Arthritis Foundation: “Yoga Benefits for Arthritis”[arthritis](https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/yoga/yoga-benefits-for-arthritis)
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- Number Analytics: “Role of Yoga in Managing Rheumatic Diseases”[numberanalytics](https://www.numberanalytics.com/paper-details/the-effectiveness-of-yoga-as-a-form-of-exercise-in-the-management-of-rheumatic-diseases/838367439497461760-6743)

These findings support the use of yoga therapy as a valid, evidence-based adjunct for pain relief, stress management, and functional improvement in inflammatory arthritis and axial spondyloarthritis, with high patient acceptability and safety in appropriate settings.[bohrium+10](https://www.bohrium.com/paper-details/the-effectiveness-of-yoga-as-a-form-of-exercise-in-the-management-of-rheumatic-diseases/838367439497461760-6743)

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