

YOGA

Continued from A1

in order to do that well, one has to really relax and allow your muscles to become more limber and flexible. That seems to be the time when deep thoughts can occur and it's a very peaceful activity." Hildner said that while many enthusiasts enjoy playing other sports, such as pickleball, softball or golf, yoga provides them a much different avenue to improve their overall health and well-being. "There's a sort of spiritual and mental component," he said. "People who have been exercising in other ways and experience yoga for the first

time will often comment on how much they're getting out of it, that they never knew there was to get." Dr. Robert Reilly, medical director of The Villages Health's Creekside Care Center, agreed, adding that he's a big fan of yoga because it provides so many different positive results for participants. "It focuses on mind and body, and I think that's the key with yoga," he said. "You've got an emphasis on stress management and emotional stability, plus you've got stretching and building core strength." In fact, Reilly said, yoga really is a best-of-both-worlds exercise. "I have a lot of patients who engage in it and they look

forward to the release it gives them," he said. "It gives them an outlet to kind of go and blow off steam and manage their stress and tension." Hildner said another positive about yoga is that participants generally don't have to worry about injuries that can come with other, more rigorous forms of exercise. "You could certainly imagine harm happening when weight training if you're lifting too heavy of a weight or with people that pushed a little too hard with aerobic exercises," he said. "But with yoga, it's just a very peaceful, low-impact process where it's pretty hard to imagine that it would be harmful in any way." And in some cases, Hildner said, yoga might be the only

form of exercise some people can enjoy. "Those who have suffered a stroke or other major disabilities may never again be able to participate in jogging or riding a bike or swimming," he said. "But they can absolutely enjoy yoga." Hildner added that he's thrilled to see The Villages Health sponsoring Yoga on the Square as the community continues down the path to become America's Healthiest Hometown. "We believe that yoga is a wholesome, safe, impactful activity that many have not discovered," he said. "By sponsoring it and getting out there in a public forum, that sends the message that we want to send - we are about wellness."



George Horsford | Daily Sun

MVP Athletic Club at Spanish Springs members, from left, Cheryl McLean, of the Village of Calumet Grove, Kathy Farmer, of the Village of Virginia Trace, and Robert Jackson, of Lakeshore Cottages, demonstrate a few yoga poses on Lake Sumter Landing's boardwalk recently.

TALKING WITH ...

Dr. Joe Hildner

The director of medical affairs for The Villages Health offers his thoughts on the many different benefits of yoga.



How much does someone have to practice yoga to reap some benefits? Any at all provides benefit. Even a few minutes per week is felt to be better than none at all. One does not need to commit to prolonged sessions numerous times per week. Even brief sessions can deliver early benefits. Yoga enthusiasts often report that even their earliest, brief experiences of yoga seemed to achieve surprisingly noticeable improvements in their abilities to relax and feel more agile or able. And it often is these early benefits that lead to more enthusiastic discovery of the benefits of yoga. But even those who only

spend a few minutes per day or per week in yoga activities report feeling genuine benefit. **What effect does stretching have on the body?** Muscles and joints were meant to move. Many of us do not move our muscles and joints to the degree that they are capable of being moved. The old adage about "use it or lose it" has a lot of truth. Even something as simple as

turning one's head, as we age, can become difficult, where looking for something on the top shelf or preparing to back up one's car can become significantly restricted. But through yoga, stretching muscles can maintain their flexibility and elasticity, preserving one's ability to live a full and productive life, free of such avoidable limitations that tend to creep up on those of us who do not take the time to systematically maintain that mobility. **People think of yoga as relaxing, but can you also burn calories and build strength?** Yes. Muscles that are able to move smoothly, in full "range of motion" without stiffness or discomfort, are more capable of being used in more vigorous forms of activity or exercise. Any activity that involves muscle use necessarily burns calories and improves the strength of the used muscles, so naturally, participation in yoga does expend calories. Having said that, yoga is not considered a useful method - in itself - of

expending calories. The benefit yoga provides in terms of calorie expenditure and muscle strength is primarily through improving flexibility and mobility, opening the door to more vigorous use of the improved musculature. So someone who may have a very limited ability to even walk or swim can - through yoga - participate much more fully in such activities. And it is in this enhanced participation in those activities that yoga enables calorie expenditure and muscle strengthening. **What are some precautions that should be taken to prevent or avoid injury?** Common sense. Like any bodily activity, one

needs to be attuned to prudent limits. If one aspires to taking up jogging, one would not try to run a marathon in the first week. Yoga is gentle. There is very little risk of harm, particularly if early participants explore yoga with the help of someone

more experienced. A delightful aspect of yoga is that, unlike many other bodily activities which may be completely out of the question following a stroke or serious injury, almost anyone can participate in some beneficial yoga activities.

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