‘It’s absolutely opened my eyes and opened my world’

Experiences of online yoga for older adults with multi-morbidities in the Gentle Years Yoga trial

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on behalf of the Gentle Years Yoga Study Group
Background

- Multimorbidity is common in older adults and associated with high cost burden and low QoL
- Yoga presents a low cost, simple way to address multiple health conditions simultaneously
- Gentle Years Yoga© (GYY)
  - Chair-based; Developed specifically for older adults; Adaptable to chronic health conditions
Gentle Years Yoga Trial

• Multi-site RCT with embedded Process and Economic Evaluations

• 12-week GYY programme of weekly 75-minute group-based classes *versus* Usual Care control

• Community-dwelling adults aged 65+ years with two or more chronic health conditions

• HR-QoL over 12 months
Covid adaptations

- Covid-19 restrictions necessitated adapting delivery from face-to-face to online Zoom classes
- Additional pre-class 1:1 session
  - Optimise computer and home set-up
  - Discuss health issues
Process Evaluation Sub-study

• Qualitatively explore participant and provider experiences of Zoom delivery
• Purposively sampled – Age; gender; living situation; health status
• Interviews conducted via Zoom or telephone
• 8 Yoga teachers and 18 participants; age 66-83 years; 2-8 health conditions
Four major themes

- IT skills
- Improved accessibility
- Facilitated self-practice
- Teacher attributes
1. IT Skills – Computer savvy and ready to go

- In contrast to perceived negative media portrayals, many participants viewed themselves as active engagers with computer technology

- *In situ* computer equipment common – External camera readily available and easily attached

- Widespread use of email, Zoom, Skype to maintain family, business, and social networks during Covid-19 restrictions
1. IT Issues – Process not skill

✔ Minimal IT proficiency required to access classes if single-click email link used
  ‘It was very simple, because I’m really a technophobe. I mean, I haven’t got a clue.’

✔ 1:1 session sufficient to provide basic audio-visual instruction
  ‘I didn’t know what I was going to get. Whereas [yoga teacher] zoomed me, and so I thought, “oh, righto, well, I know what this is all about then.” And he explained about the screen, and how to split off and I’d get to see other people in the group and everything.’

✖ ... but passcodes and waiting rooms caused issues
  ‘About two or three classes, I’ve got so frustrated that it wouldn’t link in and I couldn’t get on, so I missed at least 10 minutes, 15 minutes of some classes.’
2. Improved Accessibility - Independent of Covid restrictions

✓ Inclusion

‘I think it’s a whole new world. And I think technology can bring more people together and make people feel part of something else.’

✓ Acute health status

‘Well, as I said, the week before last I was awful, but I still did my yoga. If I’d have had to have gone out to do it, I wouldn’t have gone.’

✓ Transport

‘It’s easier with it being on Zoom, because I don’t drive anymore. I used to, but because of the arthritis in my neck and my knees, I was finding it quite painful.’

✓ Scheduling

‘But I was really, ready to go off to my next activity.’
2. Improved Accessibility but ...

✗ Restricted screen views for both participants and instructors

'I think he can only see mainly my upper body [...] I’m not sure if I’ve managed to get in the legs –'

✓ Pre-recorded classes would remove issues related to vision and IT quality

‘And if you’ve got a large screen television, which most people have now, then the image is a lot clearer. They’re not going to be impacted by a connection dropping out or anything like that, or that you come in and you can’t connect up and that you miss the first warmups –'
3. Online classes may facilitate practice

✓ Lack of external distractions

‘But with the Zoom, I’ve found I haven’t got anybody else to concentrate on besides [yoga teacher] and myself. There’s no distraction.’

✓ Privacy

‘I thought that I might be more comfortable doing it in my own home, not surrounded by people ... I have tried yoga, but only, you know, I think it was two classes I went for and, as I said, I felt embarrassed because, you know, they were probably the wrong type of classes, to be quite honest, too advanced for me. So, doing it at home felt right for me.’

✓ Visual feedback

‘And certainly, looking at myself on the screen, because I can see myself on the corner screen, and I think, “Sit up, you’re not doing it properly” [laughter].’
4. Yoga Teacher Attributes - Pragmatic

- Inherent limitations associated with online delivery required a different communication approach from yoga teachers.

- Both participants and YT's viewed **active facilitation** as key to class delivery:
  - Simple descriptive instructions paired with physical demonstrations
  - Moving close to the screen to demonstrate small movements
  - Consistent use of non-verbal feedback
Mixed participant views on personal vs anonymous styles

Then he might say, “[Name], are you okay?” Or, “[Name], are you okay? [Name], are you okay?” or something like that. So, we’re all on mute, but it’s – And then he’ll say, you know, “Thumbs up.” So, you do feel you’re part of a group, but not sort of seeing the group.

‘I think because there’s no feedback when you do a group.’ I guess [YT] had to be very careful not to say, “Oh, I think you’re doing that the wrong way,” as an example, if other people were listening.
Take home messages

- Older adults have **good IT literacy** and they want you to know that!
- Home-based classes **promote accessibly** for older adults with variable health presentations and time commitments
- Online classes are both acceptable and **preferred by some** older adults
- Addressing inclusion barriers will optimise accessibility in an older adult population
'I said, I won’t be disappointed if I don’t get on the Zoom. And I said, because, you know, *I don’t think that’s for me* […] Then when I got it, I thought, oh right, okay, and I thought, oh, I’ll have a go. And do you know, I have to say, *it’s absolutely opened my eyes and opened my world. I love it.*”

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1. Protocol

2. Review

3. Yoga reporting guidelines
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