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Spring Newsletter 2022

HYPERMOBILITY AND YOGA

Carol Trevor Hypermobility and Yoga – Risks, Skills Development and Longevity CPD Day

If you're a yoga teacher, have you ever felt concerned or just plain flummoxed when working with a highly flexible student? Or do you perhaps suspect (or know) that you are yourself hypermobile? Many yoga teachers are, and so are many yoga students. The question is, is this a safety issue? If so, is it purely on a physical level? And what happens with age?

Hypermobility can be asymptomatic. It can also be debilitating. In some professions, elite dance, gymnastics or music for example, hypermobility when paired with strength, painstaking training and an extraordinary degree of skill, is advantageous or simply an inherent part of the practice. More recently, research and experience have effected some change in certain training regimes in light of this.

So what is hypermobility exactly, and what do we, as yoga teachers and practitioners need to understand and do - or not do - about it? Is it a blessing or potentially a cause of injury and other challenges

on and off the mat? The short answer to this is, well, both.

Hypermobility – or more precisely joint hypermobility - is commonly explained as a greater than average range of motion in the joint(s). This may be local to one or a few joints, or generalised to many or all joints in the body.

Joint hypermobility is regularly seen in the general population. Simplistically, hyperextended elbows, locked knee joints and swayback posture are often clues; easily visible in the early part of a yoga class in *tadasana*, all fours for cat/cow, *adho mukha svanasana* and standing poses for example, or in how a student walks into class. Other signs can be more subtle, but easy enough to spot once you're aware of them.



If joint hypermobility isn't due to trauma (an accident or injury), it can, according to the NHS, be caused by four factors:

- The structure of a person's collagen ('loose')
- The shape of the ends of your bones ('shallow' joints)
- Your muscle tone (lower resting tonicity) and
- Your sense of your joint movements (proprioception)

Genetics are at play here. You might already begin to imagine how a body/nervous system organises itself around such a set of circumstances, and the types of patterns and habits that arise. It's not uncommon to feel tension (on all levels) with hypermobility.

The impact of hypermobility is often wide-ranging. As yogis, we're used to seeing a person as a 'whole', and hypermobility is relevant to our experience in all the *koshas*. If we've explored fascia at all (collagen is a structural protein in connective tissues), we know how significant it is throughout the body, including the nervous system, blood vessels, organs and the extra-cellular matrix.

Consider the relationship between lax ligaments and muscles around a joint for example. How might we promote joint stabilisation in

yoga practice? How do we respond to gravity and maintain integrated alignment through the whole body? How might we work with the breath, transitions and moderation in order to remain grounded, contained and peacefully focused, rather than slipping back into habits of excessive range of motion? Props and small awareness exercises can be skilfully and creatively used to support proprioception; to nurture a felt-sense of range of motion while building stability – of body, mind and heart. All of this benefits a whole class, not only the hypermobile.



Length of time in poses needs to be considered (not too much to strain and not too little to avoid engagement), and it's worth bearing in mind that yogis with a high degree of hypermobility, even if very experienced, fit and strong, may find sitting for meditation physically untenable after a period of time. Adaptations are required. Certain types of pranayama are more suitable than others.

In 2017, definitions relating to hypermobility were updated. There are three subtypes of Generalised Joint Hypermobility, four subtypes of Hypermobility Spectrum Disorder and 13 types of Hypermobile Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. There are multi-systemic implications that are helpful (perhaps essential) for yoga teachers to be aware of.

Hypermobility is a spectrum experience or condition, with potential associations with other conditions too, such as neurodiversity, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. Even if hypermobility is deemed to be asymptomatic, informed principles of yoga practice and teaching are greatly beneficial, as is avoiding approaches, techniques and 'styles' that are unhelpful.

A teacher's choice of language is important, as is the facilitation of responsibility taken by student for their own practice, greater awareness and wellbeing. It's a fascinating and enriching process that requires patience and empathy on both sides. When we combine the wisdom of yoga philosophy with functional anatomy we are well on our way. I hope you can join me in June to discover more.

Carol Trevor began practising yoga over 30 years ago and qualified with the BWY in London. She has been teaching for 20 years and contributing to teacher training programmes since 2008. She offers trainings in restorative



yoga and yoga nidra, and is qualified in sports massage therapy.

This CPD day is based on Carol's research, work with those with various presentations of hypermobility, and personal experience.

www.yogacarol.co.uk

Hypermobility and Yoga – Risks, Skills Development and Longevity

CPD Day, 26 June 2022,

Join us to explore principles for safe, beneficial and sustainable yoga practice for hypermobility, based on a practical understanding of the many facets and degrees of this common condition.