

Summary of recent evidence

Yoga, mindfulness & meditation in prison

In September 2023 an All Party Parliamentary Group heard from the growing body of evidence that yoga and meditation ease the mental health symptoms associated with trauma.

Dr Nora Kerekes presented her findings¹ (Kerekes 2017, 2019, 2021) that yoga improves positive emotional states, and reduces negative states that lead to re-offending. She found yoga in prison:

- increased sense of responsibility, self-acceptance, and self-control
- improves impulse control and sustained attention
- decreases antisocial behaviour and negative affect states
- reduces psychological distress, paranoid and obsessive thoughts



Oxford University

The Kerekes research builds on that of Amy Bilderbeck at Oxford University, whose 2013 study published in the Journal of Psychiatric Research² found that over 10 weeks of yoga classes, prisoners increased their ability to override impulse - recognised by prison services as a skill critical in reducing recidivism. Prisoners continued to do better after the course than peers in a control group. They also reduced stress, improved decision-making, concentration and mood.

PracticePlus Group social prescribing pilots 2021-23

209 patients in HMPs Stafford, Swinfen Hall and Drake Hall took part all with at least 6 months on their sentence. Activities offered included yoga.

- 95% of participants felt their health and wellbeing improved
- 96% felt more connected to other people and their community

Prisons reported:

- Reductions in self-harm, violent incidents, use of force, self-isolation
- Increases in uptake of employment, education, domestic visits, positive interactions with staff, community engagement

An earlier yoga pilot at HMP Dovegate found that 77% of prisoners who took part in yoga for three months experienced a 'meaningful' improvement in mental wellbeing. Some 68% improved from low to moderate mental wellbeing; those with 'high' mental wellbeing scores rose from 7% to 26%.

The PPT 8-week Mindfulness courses HMP Downview, summer and autumn 2023

- **81%** experienced a 'meaningful' improvement in mental wellbeing
- **Low** mental wellbeing fell from **87% to 7%**
- **Moderate** mental wellbeing increased from **13% to 73%**
- **High** mental wellbeing increased from **0% to 20%**

¹ N Kerekes: <https://www.yogatocare.com/publications/>

² Bilderbeck AC, et al., Participation in a 10-week course of yoga improves behavioural control and decreases psychological distress in a prison population, Journal of Psychiatric Research (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2013.06.014>

Hope and healing through meditation and yoga

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