

Yoga study finds mix of health benefits

Drill sergeants and yoga instructors may seem like polar opposites. But a group of veterans at the VA San Diego Healthcare System is now dutifully “following orders” from their yoga teachers—and feeling less pain as a result.

According to a pilot study appearing in the November *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, veterans with chronic low-back pain who took part in at least eight weekly yoga classes reported a significant reduction in pain. They also reported improvements in mood, energy and quality of life. The more classes they attended, the greater the gains.

The data were based on survey feedback from 33 men and women,

average age 55, who had back pain for at least six months before starting yoga.

“The decreased pain, decreased depression, and increased energy and quality of life are all very important findings,” said lead author Erik G. Groessl, PhD, a psychologist and health-services researcher with VA and the University of California, San Diego. “Pain is their main complaint, but depression is also important in this population.”

VA physician Sunita Baxi, MD, who studied yoga therapy extensively in India, started the classes at the San Diego VA in 2003. Weekly classes have been ongoing

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Boot camp wasn't like this—Veterans (from left) “Big D” Donaldson, Jay Shufeldt and Art Harrison take part in a yoga class with instructor Dawn Landon at the San Diego VA.



Photo by Kevin Walsh



VA screenings yield data on military sexual trauma

A VA study found that about 15 percent of female veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who use VA health care experienced sexual assault or harassment during their military service. The rate among men was much lower—less than 1 percent.

The study was presented Oct. 28 at the American Public Health Association annual meeting. The researchers examined screening data on more than 125,000 veterans of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom who were seen at any VA facility between September 2001 and October 2007.

“Rates obtained from VA screening cannot be used to estimate the actual rate of military sexual trauma experiences for all those serving in the military,” noted coauthor Rachel Kimerling, PhD, of the

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