

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS Survey Report 2022/23

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS (SYME) has an established history in providing therapeutic yoga classes to people with ME/CFS. More recently it has welcomed people with Long Covid who share comparable symptoms and endure similar effects on their lives. This report describes a survey undertaken in March 2023 to gain feedback from its members and obtain data for funding providers. The evaluation forms part of wider, ongoing monitoring and development of its services.

ME/CFS and Long Covid are longstanding conditions characterised by a wide range of debilitating symptoms including extreme fatigue, cognitive impairment, sleep disturbance and pain. Individuals have difficulty performing basic everyday tasks, such as self care, and are often unable to or limited in their ability to work. As a consequence, they often have a reduced income and feel socially excluded.

SYME provides a unique service in the Sheffield region by organising therapeutic yoga classes specifically designed for adults with ME/CFS and Long Covid. These have traditionally been held at a local venue but, since the Covid 19 pandemic, accompanying live online classes have also been provided which are recorded for later use as required. These developments increase accessibility, choice and flexibility for members.

In addition to yoga classes, SYFME provides supplementary resources to assist in its aim to provide physical, social and emotional support to its members. Information is distributed through its website (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk) and regular newsletters.

A short, online questionnaire was distributed to regular users of the yoga classes; that is those who had used them on at least three occasions in the previous six months. Selection was established from attendance registers of the local classes and by specifying the criteria for “self-selection” in an email accompanying the questionnaire. To capture all relevant participants, including those who had used recordings only, the questionnaire was sent to every member registered for online classes.

The questionnaire used tick box, multiple answer questions to ascertain participants’ use of the various classes available and obtain their views on the potential benefits of the classes as consistent with the aims of SYME. Participants were also invited to provide additional comments.

Twenty four questionnaires were completed. Table 1 shows the distribution of use of the various class locations and illustrates that the majority of participants prefer to use a single location although a significant number (25%) attended both online and venue classes.

Table 1: Use of Class Locations (n = 24)

Online Only	7 (29.2%)
Venue only	10 (41.7%)
Both online and venue	6 (25%)
Online recordings only	1 (4.1%)

Table 2 displays the numbers of participants responding to their level of benefit from the classes, in each of five categories.

Table 2: Benefits of Classes

(n = 24)	A Great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all	NA/ Prefer not to say
Improving Symptoms	7 (29%)	9 (38%)	7(29%)	1 (4.1%)	0
Increasing General Wellbeing	15(62.5%)	7 (29%)	2 (8.2%)	0 (0%)	0
Managing their condition	10(41.6%)	12 (50%)	1(4.1%)	1 (4.1%)	0
Reducing social isolation	7(29%)	10(41.6%)	7(29%)	0 (0%)	0
Practising yoga independently	11(45.8%)	9 (38%)	4 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	0

Responses indicated that most participants benefited-in each of the categories; “no benefit at all” was indicated on only two instances for ‘improving symptoms’ and ‘managing their condition’. More than 50% indicated they benefited ‘A Great Deal’ or ‘Quite a lot’.

Comments were given by 22 of the 24 respondents which reinforced and expanded upon all aspects of the quantitative data. The overriding feedback was that the classes and other resources offered by SYME enhanced members’ physical, mental and social wellbeing. Additionally, wider benefits were described such as feeling

“understood and safe “and better able to deal with living with a chronic condition. Members stated the importance of SYME services in their lives and also the variety of location of classes, whether it be a particular preference for venue, online or recorded classes or the benefits of having a choice. Likewise, several expressed appreciation of employing different teachers which provided variety in the sessions.

Overall, the results of this questionnaire demonstrate that SYME is accomplishing its aims with considerable success. Data highlight the impact of its services in people’s lives and that the evolving changes, such as providing different ways of accessing classes and including sufferers of long Covid, are highly valued.

Of a small postal survey of nonattenders who wish to stay on our mailing list, 6 out of 6 who reported they were too ill to attend classes said the yoga was a goal for when they were well enough.

Appendix- Selection of Comments.

The online yoga classes are an absolute life line.

These yoga classes are tailor made for ME/CFS sufferers and provide a kind and comfortable environment. The benefits of these classes are both physical and mental. They also help alleviate the loneliness and isolation I suffer from.

The online yoga class is a weekly highlight. I look forward to the relaxation and contact with others. The relaxation helps with the anxiety of living with a chronic condition. The targeted movement helps to keep joints moving with minimum physical effort. I feel safe and understood.

I find the yoga invaluable at helping to manage my illness. It also helps things like fatigue, breathing, muscle relaxation, spine and joint flexibility and enables me to relax deeply. It is very good that most of the yoga is done lying down which helps those of us with orthostatic intolerance. It is great that we can now do yoga online as I am not always well enough to attend classes in the hall.

I enjoy having a range of tutors rather than just one, all of who are very good but have their own particular styles. Having a physical venue to attend provides more benefit to me than simply doing yoga at home. It is something I look forward to each week and provides a good reset and recalibration of my symptoms as well as a place of calm for me mentally.

I feel lucky that we have these classes in Sheffield -we have several teachers who are trained in delivering therapeutic yoga which is suitable for the needs of people with ME and it takes place in a lovely light filled hall with parking and access by ramp for anyone who can’t manage steps. I really appreciate and enjoy the classes.

The classes are the best thing I have come across to help with physical, mental and spiritual health in relation to my CFS/ME. I am deeply grateful to all involved and especially appreciate the time and care offered by all the teachers. Thank you.

It's great to be able to take it at my own pace and not feel judged if there's a movement I can't do. I love the relaxation element. I'm so glad I found this class.

SYME Classes provide a structure and focus in my life that would otherwise be lacking. It is so useful to have a choice between the online and Hall classes and to have the online recordings if I cannot make either. The classes provide mindful and therapeutic exercises that fit my capabilities no matter how I am feeling and help me to feel calm and positive regardless of how difficult the week has been. I look forward to the social connections from both classes as I am amongst people who understand the difficulties of living with ME. I am grateful to all involved.