What a relief! Anyone can do yoga

Sarah Stine was nervous about going to her first yoga class. She feared she would be pushed beyond her limits and made to feel less than limber.

But there were no such pressures at a recent Seattle yoga class for people with MS. The stretches were gentle, as were the words from veteran instructor Molly Kenny.

When the woman lying next to Sarah wondered aloud if she was doing a pose right, Molly bent over her, softly pressing her hands on the woman's right knee and shoulder, and said, "You are SO right."

Anyone can practice yoga, says Molly, founder and director of The Samarya Center for Integrated Movement Therapy and Ashtanga Yoga in Seattle.

The class, one of several in the region sponsored by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Greater Washington Chapter, is free to people with MS.

Yoga can be performed seated or standing and has been proven to calm the nervous system and increase serenity, focus and a sense of well-being.

Sarah, 39, decided it was time to "get up off the couch" and do something positive for her MS, which causes her fatigue and constant tingling and numbness on her right side.

She was joined in a recent class by two other women with MS. Nancy Davenport, 55, hopes yoga will ease the chronic pain she feels from the neck down, and Lyn Laielli, 41, came to stretch out her tight muscles.

Both said they felt better after less than an hour of stretching and relaxation poses.

"I feel stronger and more limber," says Lyn, who also does core-strengthening Pilates exercises at home. "I feel a better mind-body connection."

Molly, a nationally recognized innovator in the field of yoga-based therapy, has worked with students of all ages with exceptional challenges, including MS.

People with MS and other debilitating conditions typically become hyper-focused on the things they're no longer able to do, Molly says.

"Yoga takes into account multiple levels of being, not just the physical, but also the emotional, the energetic and the spiritual," she says. "It shows people they can feel good in their bodies."

Nancy says she was attracted to yoga because it is holistic and adaptable. "When you take yoga, there isn't a pass or fail," she says. "Yoga is very personal and your achievement is in being here."

Like Nancy, Sarah found she could do yoga at her own level and fit in just fine.

"I love it. I absolutely love it," she said after her second class. "I'm so glad I found the courage to go."

Adaptive Yoga class schedule

Free Chapter-sponsored adaptive yoga classes combine gentle stretching, deep breathing and low-impact exercise to help those with MS and other conditions feel better physically and mentally.

Seattle
Thursdays, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Instructor: Molly Kenny
To register, call 1-800 FIGHT MS (344-4867), press option 1.

Tacoma
Thursdays, Noon to 1:00 p.m.
Instructor: Hal Meng
To register, contact Tacoma Parks and Recreation at 253-591-5299.

Spanaway
Mondays, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.
Instructor: Hal Meng
To register, contact Spanaway Recreation Center at 253-798-4000.

Bellingham
Tuesdays, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., Fridays, 11:00 a.m. to Noon
Instructor: Abby Staten
To register, call Abby at 360-734-8001.

Pt. Townsend
Thursdays, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.
Instructor: Ilana Smith
To register, call Ilana at 360-385-2864

Scholarships are available for anyone wishing to attend other fitness classes. Interested in starting a program in your area? Call 1-800 FIGHT MS (344-4867), and press option 1.

Visit Our Website: nationalmssociety.org/was

Toll-Free Number: 1-800-FIGHT MS (344-4867)