



LEARNING CAN
IMPROVE OUR QUALITY
OF LIFE—AND THE
EFFECT IS TWOFOLD
FOR COURSES
ON WELLNESS AND
SELF-BETTERMENT.

「LOGGING」 INTO Online Wellness

Lifelong learners already know that studying new skills can be a joyful experience. But formal research has also shown a connection between education and health. Continued learning may even help ward off dementia and heart disease. There are also strong connections between adult learning and an enhanced sense of wellness, including more formal mental health benefits, such as reduced levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression.

Jennifer Cohen Harper is the founder of Little Flower Yoga and a longtime faculty member with the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, which had to transfer its coursework online during the pandemic. She points out that online learning allows “people with challenging schedules or those in remote locations [to] find courses online that would be impossible for them to join in person.”

She also pointed to some benefits we typically don’t think of, including how “people benefit from things like captioning, audio recordings, the ability to pause and review recorded materials multiple times.” This can be crucial for people with disabilities or those who have trouble learning in a traditional setting.

The pandemic changed the way people participate in

BY **JESSICA BARON**



these courses. Cohen said that “before Covid, many people would register for an online workshop, and complete the content entirely on their own without joining live streams or reaching out for support. Now, I find that people are more likely to value the connection opportunities, join in live when there’s the chance, participate in Q&A calls.”

Cohen’s course “Navigating Anxiety in Children” draws many busy parents and caretakers. She wants students to show up in whatever way works best. “I had one student join a Zoom workshop sitting in their empty bathtub propped with pillows. It was probably the only place in the home to get some privacy!”

While large companies like EdX, Coursera, and Udemy cater to everyone, they often assume that all students know what to expect from online learning. That’s one of the reasons course providers like GetSetUp are so unique. GetSetUp caters specifically to adults over 55 who want to learn and find a community online. Among its most popular offerings are courses on using Zoom and classes on healthy eating, aging well, and fitness. With over 2,000 offerings and 4.4 million students, it hosts everything from live and recorded lectures to social hours.

GetSetUp instructor Glenda Springer teaches several wellness classes, including “Meditating Together,” “Breathwork Techniques for Healing and Meditation,” and “Mindful Chair Yoga.” Springer says that the students who are most successful in her classes are the ones “who live alone or who are caregivers for others.” She also dispelled the myth that online courses don’t have the same wellness effect as in-person instruction:

People think that they can’t experience mindfulness and a sense of a connection online. That is not true. A good teacher in mindfulness and meditation can create a peaceful, meditative online experience. Students have shared with me that they feel more flexible, calmer, and stronger as they encounter their physical, mental, and emotional challenges.

Despite the success of online courses, many people don’t complete them. In fact, only around 10 percent of people see a course through to the end. If you’re thinking of taking the

leap, here is some advice on how to be successful from those who have been through it:

1 *Keep in mind that most courses are risk-free.*

Many online courses require registration with an email address but no fee at all. While you can pay extra for a certificate of completion, these are optional upgrades (typically costing anywhere from \$50-200).

2 *Be ready for the challenges posed by total flexibility.*

Having the option of completing a course on your own time means learning is available to many more people, but it also requires accountability. Especially in cases where you don’t have money invested in a course, you may be tempted to slack off over time. It may be helpful to plan in advance what days and times you can set aside for your coursework.

3 *Pace yourself.*

Cohen noticed that students would binge-watch courses early in the pandemic and then their participation would taper off over time. She says, “There’s nothing wrong with that, of course, but I’ve found that for myself, and for students who join my online courses, they retain more and have a better experience if they pace themselves, and even write up a simple plan for their own journey through the material.”

4 *Take advantage of live offerings, forums, and group chats.*

According to Cohen: “Connecting with the instructor and with fellow learners often offers the opportunity to put the learning into context in one’s own life and ask questions, and it generates inspiration and motivation. Being a part of the group, even virtually, creates a bit of accountability to others in the best sense, making us more likely to show up and keep going.”

While not all courses are created equal, nearly all e-learning sites are set up to show basic information about instructors and course plans before registration, including introductory videos from the teachers. Many new students are surprised to find that courses by renowned wellness experts are completely free and come with organized schedules, course materials, and exams to test your knowledge (although getting those tests graded often requires paying the fee).

The possibilities are endless. They only require us to press play.