



YOGA AND ITS THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS

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Abstract: The study provides information regarding the therapeutic effects of yoga as it has been studied in various populations concerning a multitude of different ailments and conditions. Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice to the treatment of health conditions and involves instruction in yogic practices and teachings to prevent reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional and spiritual pain, suffering or limitations. Results from this study show that yogic practices enhance muscular strength, body flexibility, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life.

Keywords: Depression, Pain, Quality of life, Therapeutic yoga

Introduction:

The word “yoga” comes from a Sanskrit root “yuj” which means union, or yoke, to join, and to direct and concentrate one's attention. Regular practice of yoga promotes strength, endurance, flexibility and facilitates characteristics of friendliness, compassion, and greater self-control, while cultivating a sense of calmness and well-being.

Yoga is a form of mind-body fitness that involves a combination of muscular activity and an internally directed mindful focus on awareness of the self, the breath, and energy. Four basic principles underlie the teachings and practices of yoga's healing system. The first principle is the human body is a holistic entity comprised of various interrelated dimensions inseparable from one another and the health or illness of any one dimension affects the other dimensions. The second principle is individuals and their needs are unique and therefore must be approached in a way that acknowledges this individuality and their practice must be tailored accordingly. The third principle is yoga is self-empowering; the student is his or her own healer. Yoga engages the student in the healing process; by playing an active role in their journey toward health, the healing comes from within, instead of from an outside source and a greater sense of autonomy is achieved. The fourth principle is that the quality and state of an individual's mind is crucial to healing. When the individual has a positive mind-state healing happens more quickly, whereas if the mind-state is negative, healing may be prolonged. Yoga philosophy and practice

were first described by Patanjali in the classic text,

Yoga is recognized as a form of mind-body medicine that integrates an individual's physical, mental and spiritual components to improve aspects of health, particularly stress related illnesses. As participation rates in mind-body fitness programs such as yoga continue to increase. Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice to the treatment of health conditions. Yoga therapy involves instruction in yogic practices and teachings to prevent reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional and spiritual pain, suffering or limitations. Yogic practices enhance muscular strength and body flexibility, promote and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, promote recovery from and treatment of addiction, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life.

Method:

For research studies and interventions that examined the therapeutic effects of yoga, databases were searched through Google Scholar via a universities web browser. Initially, the following key words were entered into the database via the advanced search option: “yoga,” and “therapeutic effects.

Result:

One of the main goals of yoga is to achieve tranquility of the mind and create a sense of well-being, feelings of relaxation, improved self-confidence, improved efficiency,

increased attentiveness, lowered irritability, and an optimistic outlook on life. The practice of yoga generates balanced energy which is vital to the function of the immune system. Yoga leads to an inhibition of the posterior or sympathetic area of the hypothalamus. This inhibition optimizes the body's sympathetic responses to stressful stimuli and restores autonomic regulatory reflex mechanisms associated with stress. Yogic practices inhibit the areas responsible for fear, aggressiveness and rage, and stimulate the rewarding pleasure centers in the median forebrain and other areas leading to a state of bliss and pleasure. This inhibition results in lower anxiety, heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, and cardiac output in students practicing yoga and meditation.

Consistent yoga practice improves depression and can lead to significant increases in serotonin levels coupled with decreases in the levels of monoamine oxidase, an enzyme that breaks down neurotransmitters and cortisol. A range of therapeutic approaches is available for the management of depressive disorders, but many patients turn to complementary therapies due to the adverse effects of medication, lack of response or simply preference for the complementary approach. A number of studies demonstrate the potential beneficial effects of yoga interventions on depression, stress, and anxiety.

Improved flexibility is one of the first and most obvious benefits of yoga. With continued practice comes a gradual loosening of the muscles and connective tissues surrounding the bones and joints; this is thought to be one reason that yoga is associated with reduced aches and pains. Yoga helps to build muscle mass and/ or maintain muscle strength, which protects from conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis and back pain. During a yoga session, the joints are taken through their full range of motion, squeezing and soaking areas of cartilage not often used and bringing fresh nutrients, oxygen and blood to the area, which helps to prevent conditions like arthritis and chronic pain. Without proper sustenance, neglected areas of cartilage will eventually wear out and expose the underlying bone. Numerous studies have shown that asana, meditation or a combination of the two reduced pain in people with arthritis, Carpel Tunnel syndrome, back pain and other chronic

conditions. Yoga also increases proprioception and improves balance.

Yoga increases blood flow and levels of hemoglobin and red blood cells which allows for more oxygen to reach the body cells, enhancing their function. Yoga also thins the blood which can decrease the risk of heart attack and stroke, as they are often caused by blood clots. Twisting poses wring out venous blood from internal organs and allow oxygenated blood to flow in when the twist is released. Inverted poses encourage venous blood flow from the legs and pelvis back to the heart and then pumped through the lungs where it becomes freshly oxygenated. Many studies show yoga lowers the resting heart rate, increases endurance, and can improve the maximum uptake and utilization of oxygen during exercise. Consistently getting the heart rate into aerobic range lowers the risk of heart attack. While not all yoga is aerobic, even yoga exercises that do not increase heart rate into the aerobic range can improve cardiovascular functioning.

In summary, stress has a negative impact on the immune system and prolonged exposure increases susceptibility to disease and leads to physical and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Practicing yoga and meditation as a means to manage and relieve both acute and chronic stress helps individuals overcome other co-morbidities associated with diseases and leads to increased quality of life. As a non-pharmacological form of treatment, yoga based interventions are an alternative option for the treatment of mood disorders. Further investigation of yoga as a therapeutic intervention in depressive disorders is needed and future studies should seek to identify which of the yoga-based interventions is most effective and what levels of severity of depression are more likely to respond to this approach.

In addition to the effects of yoga on mood disorders and stress reduction, yogic practices are shown to improve cardiorespiratory performance, psychological profile, and plasma melatonin levels and also significantly reduced systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, mean arterial pressure, and orthostatic tolerance. Furthermore, yoga helps to improve the cardiovascular efficiency and homeostatic control of the body and results in improvements in autonomic balance, respiratory performance, and overall well-being. Yoga based lifestyle modifications were also shown to aid in regression of

coronary lesions as well as to improve myocardial perfusion in patients with CAD. Inevitably, cardiovascular parameters alter as one ages, but these age-related deteriorations in cardiovascular functions are slower in persons who practice yoga regularly as yoga practitioners had lower heart rate as well as lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure than matched controls.

Numerous studies show that asana, meditation or a combination of the two can reduce pain and disability while improving flexibility and functional mobility in people with a number of conditions causing chronic pain. Additionally, in some cases use of pain medication was reduced or eliminated completely. Yoga was also shown to improve gait function and reduce age-related changes in gait among a group of healthy, non-obese elders.

Yoga's ability to increase relaxation and induce a balanced mental state was studied to evaluate its effect on sleep quality and improving insomnia. Regular practice of yoga resulted in a significant decrease in the time taken to fall asleep, an increase in the total number of hours slept, and in the feeling of being rested in the morning. Additionally, yoga had a positive influence on sleep patterns in individuals with lymphoma. Furthermore, participation in yoga classes improved self-reported quality-of-life as well as measures of physical function among an elderly population.

Discussion:

When yoga is adopted as a way of life, it improves physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual health. Yoga offers an effective method of managing and reducing stress, anxiety and depression and numerous studies demonstrate the efficacy of yoga on mood related disorders.

Treatment for anxiety and depression involves mostly psychological and pharmacological interventions; however, mind-body interventions are becoming increasingly popular as a means to reduce stress in individuals. Yoga, a form of mind-body exercise, has become an increasingly widespread therapy used to maintain wellness, and alleviate a range of health problems and ailments. Yoga should be considered as a complementary therapy or alternative method for medical therapy in the treatment of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders as it has been shown to create a greater sense of well-being, increase feelings of relaxation,

improve self-confidence and body image, improve efficiency, better interpersonal relationships, increase attentiveness, lower irritability, and encourage an optimistic outlook on life.

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