

Yoga : An Ancient Indian Science of Exercise and Healing

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ABSTRACT

Modern science authenticates that the practice of yoga has touchable physical health benefits that include improved brain function and denser bones, as well as resistant health, better nervous system functioning and strength. In whole world, there are a lot of people, practice yoga and enjoy the benefits of a calm mind, stronger body reduced stress and enlarged happiness. Yoga is beneficial for the health in ways that modern science is just beginning to understand. Although it has been applied with therapeutic intention for thousands of years, Yoga Therapy is only just now emerging as a discipline in itself. More health care practitioners are starting to include yogic techniques in their approach to healing -- and more yoga teachers give a therapeutic intention to their teaching. As science begins to document the importance of understanding the interrelation of all existing things, it looks to Yoga with an intrigued eye, for Yoga speaks Unity in every word. As yoga techniques are researched and new data is gathered, it becomes easier for science and the medical establishment to understand and accept the benefit of Yoga Therapy.

Keywords : Ancient Indian Science, Yoga, happiness, stress, Vedic Yoga, RCT, CCT

I. INTRODUCTION

The word yoga means 'unity' or 'oneness' and is derived from the Sanskrit word 'yuj' which means "union," 'to join'. This union is about the individual consciousness joining with something greater—some may call that God, the divine or universal consciousness. We also refer to yoga as the union of body, mind and spirit—a union we can reach through the yoga practices of specific postures (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama), relaxation techniques (pratyahara and dharana) and meditation (dhyana). Yoga is a science of right living and it works when integrated in our daily life. It works on all characteristics of the person: the physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. There are too many misconceptions clouding the science of Yoga. People recognize it to be some kind of black or white magic, sorcery, physical or mental debauchery through which miraculous feats can be performed. For some it is a very dangerous practice which should be limited to only

those who have renounced the world. There are few others think it to be a kind of mental and physical acrobatics that is compatible only to a Hindu mind. More than 5,000 years ago, yoga started its journey as an ancient Indian science of exercise and healing, passed along from teacher to student through oral tradition and physical practice. Yoga is also famous as one of the oldest holistic health care systems, not just because of its fundamental healing approach, but also because of its many benefits for physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. The history of yoga can be grouped into four periods. The earliest period of Vedic Yoga focused on the Vedas, the sacred scripture of Brahmanism that is the basis of modern-day Hinduism. The Vedas contain the oldest known Yogic teachings. This era was characterized by rituals and ceremonies that allowed one to surpass the limitations of the mind and live in divine harmony.

On the other hand, as a part of Hindu culture, the lineage of yoga dates back 3000 years. Traditional yogic practices have been translated from the ancient Sanskrit language. The original teachings of Patanjali helped shape the philosophy of yoga, much of which is still preserved to present day. Today, Patanjali is credited as being the “father” or founder of yoga. The authentic practice of yoga is comprised of Eight Limbs, or eight guiding principles. Physical asana practice, the “yoga” understood by Westerners, is just one of these eight principles. Historically, and presently, yoga is seen as mind-body medicine. The health benefits of yoga practice, as will be explored in the current study, extend greatly beyond that of other traditional exercise forms.

Today, yoga is considered as an alternative exercise approach to obtain personal health and wellbeing. Yoga is quickly becoming a go-to form of mind-body fitness. With its growing popularity, yoga has established itself as one of the top five mind-body medicines within the United States. Yoga’s holistic methodology strives to unite one’s body, mind, and spirit; it is a method of exercise mirrored in the physical, mental, and emotional benefits which result. This practice extends well beyond the yoga mat, with some now categorizing yoga as a health behavior or lifestyle choice.

The practice of yoga that has been widely embraced in the West is comprised of four essential components: asana or physical postures, dhyana or meditation, pranayama or breathing technique and savasana or relaxation. The branch of yoga with which Americans are most familiar is famous as Hatha yoga. Hatha yogic style consists of the integration of these four practice features. Yoga is in a state of growth as a form of exercise, yet the recent research on the health benefits of yoga is limited in its presentation. The reason of the recent study is to explore the different health benefits of yoga while also considering other exercise forms. The aim is to uncover yoga’s holistic approach to exercise and its potential as a complementary alternative option within healthcare.

Yoga as Holistic Therapy: Those who carry the burden of chronic disease can experience relative ease throughout regular yoga practice. A precise combination of yoga postures, breathing, and meditation is key to unlocking these health benefits, as the healing ability of yoga allows alleviation, prevention and recovery to happen naturally. Yoga can get better both visible and invisible cues of pain, suffering, and limitations which plague quality of life.

Yoga improves immunity, optimism, self-acceptance while minimizing fear, anxiety, and irritability. This is important for individuals who are battling mood disorders. The emotional shift provided by yoga can lead to increased quality and quantity of sleep, thereby improving symptoms of insomnia. Generally, yoga therapy leads to a healthier body image, self-confidence, and mindfulness, and, fascinatingly.

Yoga’s comprehensive approach has been shown to have a cumulative effect on internal healing by engaging internal systems, organs, all muscle groups and glands. Additionally, as with several forms of exercise, yoga therapy helps enhance blood flow, thereby circulating vital nutrients, oxygen, hemoglobin, and red blood cells to body tissues. Cancer patients in particular have realized the homeopathic effects of yoga therapy and have attributed the relief of fatigue, pain, nausea and even toxicity to yoga practice, minimizing their need for related prescription medications. Additionally, yoga has been credited for leading to increased flexibility, improved gait, and increased strength by alleviating pain that would otherwise hinder movement.

Benefits of Yoga: It has been established that higher intensity and integrative yoga practices coincide with greater health benefits. As the concept of yoga continues to commercialize, these benefits are becoming more evident to the general population. Yoga is gaining accreditation and popularity as it forges its way into mainstream USA. The ultimate question of yoga is why peo

ple practice and what makes one choose this exercise form. There are some practitioners, recognized as yogis (male) or yoginis (female), claim they were drawn to yoga for acclaimed aesthetic reasons, for example- health promotion, health maintenance, or weight loss. Others seek the benefits of yoga on a deeper level, desiring personal wellness and the yogic virtues of self-acceptance, mindfulness, and non-competitive spirit. Still others use yoga as a route which allows them to reduce, prevent or control diseases and their associated risk factors. For those combating chronic illness or rehabilitating an injury, yoga can be seen as an alternative outlet for therapy and healing, as discussed below. On the other hand, the most common reason for taking part in a personal yoga practice is to more effectively manage stress.

Stress, which contributes to 80% of all diseases and illnesses, inhibits an individual's immune function and quality of life. A review of literature on yoga and stress management in healthy adults was conducted by Chong et al. eight studies were reviewed, in which both randomized controlled trial (RCT) and clinical controlled trial (CCT) formats were used. The selection of studies featured Hatha, Kundalini, or Iyengar yogic styles. In all studies, a reduction in stress was noted immediately following yogic intervention. Along with reducing negative effect, yoga was found to increase cognitive function and one's perception of health or wellbeing. Participants also discussed improved sleep, optimism, and quality of life. Additionally, the yogic practice of diaphragmatic breathing is mentioned as a vital component to stress management. This breathing technique supports increased respiratory efficiency, improves functions of the endocrine and nervous systems, and encourages the fine tuning of the body to maintain a state of homeostasis.

Indian ancient science of Yoga: Yoga is an Indian ancient science which is useful even nowadays for people of any age, religion, country or in any profession. It is a science related to the body, mind and soul. It is not

merely a set of physical exercises (asanas) as some people in the world believe. Yoga has been divided into two parts. One is called "Ha" "Tha" Yoga (also written as Hatha Yoga) and the other is called "Raja Yoga". The former is generally related to the physical body and the latter to the mind. "Ha" "Tha" is a technical word and not a Hindi word. These two letters mean two types of different energies within a body. "Ha" "Tha" yoga science believes that disorders or ailments are the result of imbalances of these two energies and the imbalances can be removed by Yogic Shatkarma, Asana, Pranayama, Mudra and Bandha.

Yogic shatkarma are highly effectual cleansing procedures for the physical and subtle bodies. At the same time, they are also simple and can be easily learnt. There are many methods described in the yoga scripture but today one needs to learn merely a few of them to stay healthy and young.

Asanas or yogasanas are a group of numerous simple and difficult physical exercises. One needs to learn a few of them to stay healthy and young according to one's need, age, flexibility and strength. Difficult exercises are helpful to sportsmen, dancers, soldiers etc.

Mudras are also a group of asana but their method of doing is different. They are usually taught to only healthy persons.

Bandhas are also a group of some simple physical exercises. They are extremely effective in keeping body healthy and slim.

Pranayama is the formal practice of controlling the breath, which is the source of our prana, or vital life force. Here, read up on pranayama exercises & poses, breathing techniques and sequences. It is a science of regulation of the flow of pran. Pran is a technical word meaning an energy which keeps body and mind active, healthy, young and energetic. Pran has marvelous property to heal in addition to improve the quality of the functioning of both body and mind. Healing by pran is c

alled Pran Upchaar in Hindi (also known as Pran Therapy or Aura Healing or Pranic Healing or Reiki Healing or Energy Healing). This healing technique has done wonders in removing different problems and ailments. Prana plays a very important role in changing the mind and helps in opening doors for the realization of the soul or Samadhi also.

Since time immemorial asana, shatkarma, pranayama, mudra, bandha have benefitted innumerable patients by removing their mental, psychosomatic, physiological problems. Raja Yoga aims at the attainment of the highest state of mind or Samadhi. Maharishi Patanjali has written a beautiful book for this purpose "Yoga Darshan". He says that one needs to practise eight steps in all for the attainment of Samadhi (merely knowing cannot help) and that is why his method is called Ashtang Yoga. Ashtang is a Hindi word meaning eight. These eight steps are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahar, Dharna, Dhyana and Samadhi. It is difficult to understand this book so one needs a teacher to understand the meaning, significance and techniques of these eight steps.

The Rise of Yoga: Yoga is a system of poses, breathing exercises and meditations that invented in ancient India to motivate physical, mental and spiritual well-being first started to spread around the world as a form of exercise in the twentieth century. For decades, yoga seemed to capture the interests of quirky, white city dwellers and affluent suburbanite moms, other than over the last decade, it has expanded from the studio and can presently be found in public parks, hospitals, outpatient clinics, work spaces, military bases, rehab centers, elementary schools and even airports.

The origins of Yoga: Yoga is first talked about in the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient collection of Sanskrit poetry that is sacred to the Hindu religion, dating as far back as the second century BCE. Verse 48 of Chapter Two effectively describes yoga as a state of equilibrium. In Introduction to Yoga Sutras, Nicolai Bachman referenc

es the authoritative text on yoga to explore what it means to live a yogi life. He teaches that yoga is a path to positive transformation. Through a dedicated yoga practice, one can root out negativity and plant loving kindness. Citing Sutra 1.2, "yoga-citta-vritti-nirodhah," Bachman describes yoga as a powerful tool for calming the noise. While the validity of ancient texts may invite skepticism, the first professional-level medical textbook on yoga was released in the US in 2016. In Chapter One, "Introduction to Yoga in Health Care," licensed medical practitioners recognize the significance of developing habits that balance emotions and modify unhealthy thought-patterns and acknowledge that yoga can play an integral role in preventing disease.

The Spirit of Yoga: The person, who practices yoga, the spiritual benefits are clear. For instance, one requires only to join Janet Stone for Surya Flow to awaken the internal light inside. In less than one hour, the mind is clear, the body is warm and it's entirely possible to feel more connected to other living beings. With any yoga practice, the series of poses, breathing exercises and meditations still the mind as the body moves. The breath becomes a mantra. Meditation is a prayer. Yet, yoga is not magical. It cannot banish all worldly stress. Yoga can transform our brain chemistry while reducing the amount of stress we experience on a daily basis, but reaping its benefits requires dedication and time. Most prominently, the investment is worth it. Substantial scientific research is beginning to confirm what was once based simply on intuition.

The Science of Yoga: It is known that yoga stretches the body, supports circulation while flushing out the blood and lymph systems, stimulates every major organ, tones the muscles and helps to remove impurities while encouraging ultimate flow. While there is still a requirement for more in-depth, robust research, scientific studies suggest that a dedicated yoga practice can aid in the treatment of many common health afflictions, including: Cancer, post-traumatic stress disorder, gene alter

ation, cardiovascular disease and weight loss, depression anxiety pain, smoking cessation,

The Science of Meditation: Those seeking to handle stress, that feels intimidated by yoga, may find solace in the effects of transcendental meditation. Transcendental meditation is a state of mind that can be achieved anywhere at any time through deep breathing, the use of soothing mantras and an generally quest for stillness. Meditation is proven to enhance one's ability to control emotion, sleep more peacefully and possibly even enhance the memory power. In point of fact, group meditation may have the power to inspire world peace. Discussing this scientific phenomenon in *Beyond Cosmic Consciousness - Part 1*, David Wilcock asserts that, "a single moment of pure consciousness is worth more for humanity than a complete lifetime of good works."

The Science behind Yoga and Stress: The neuroscience behind Yoga can help clarify why regular Yoga is so effective in reducing stress and creating balance in the body. It can also help you deepen your Yoga practice and increase focus on elements that you might otherwise overlook. A famous medical doctor, neuroscientist, and yoga teacher explains the fundamental principles of the Science behind Yoga and Stress. "There are two functional parts of the brain that play a key role in stress. These serve the functions of emotion and cognitive function. So I am calling them the 'emotional' brain (amygdala and its connections and medial forebrain structures including the medial prefrontal cortex) and the 'logical' brain. The emotional brain is able to initiate a 'stress response' via the sympathetic nervous system which culminates in adrenaline and cortisol racing through our circulation. The logical brain is always trying to 'turn-off' this stress response and it is also trying to restrain the emotional brain. The stronger our logical brain, the better it becomes at doing these two things. When the stress response is 'turned off', our parasympathetic nervous system signal is 'turned on'. This

signal 'relaxes' the body. So a strong logical brain goes hand in hand with relaxation."

Yoga alters the chemical structure of your brain: Yoga engages the mindful and controlled entry into a pose- or asana- holding the pose in stillness, and then a controlled release. Dr Storoni says that as you go through this workout, it takes strong prefrontal cortex activity to maintain your stillness and concentration. "As you hold a posture, your prefrontal cortex is countering the raised sympathetic signal as it keeps you focused. This is how you train your mind to keep your stress signal under control. As your mind learns how to do this, you get better at doing this even outside of the yoga room. Ultimately, with practice, you will be able to maintain self-control in most stressful settings".

Yoga boosts brain chemicals that promote a sense of wellbeing. It increases the levels of the brain chemicals like GABA, serotonin, and dopamine, the happy chemicals responsible for feelings of relaxation and contentment. These neurotransmitters are targeted by the drugs for medicating mood, such as anti-depressants and anti-anxiety drugs. Yet yoga has long been shown to successfully reduce and heal depression and anxiety.

Yoga balances the Emotions: Yoga stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for calming us down. Activating the parasympathetic nervous system, starts the procedure of restoration and healing in the body. Blood is directed toward endocrine glands, digestive organs, and lymphatic circulation. Blood pressure and the heart rate are lowered, nutrients in food can be absorbed more easily and toxins are released from the body because of improved circulation.

Yoga as a tool for healing trauma: Yoga is progressively more being used as a tool to heal trauma and has successfully been used with PTSD. Psychologist, Richard Miller, the founder of iRest, a synthesis of modern day psychology and the thousand year old practice of Yoga Nidra, delivers classes of iRest to veterans with post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). "These are severely injured and often profoundly depressed veterans who are receiving treatment as inpatients for six to nine months or more.... We know that one of the effects of PTSD is that it leaves people to feel disconnected from themselves and from the world around them. During Yoga Nidra, these folks start to feel reconnected to themselves and the world around them and experience the feeling of finally coming home from the war, to themselves, their families, and daily life.

II. CONCLUSION

The purpose of Yoga is to create harmony in the physical, vital, mental, psychological and spiritual aspects of the human being. Yoga is a subject which can be looked at intellectually and some useful and beneficial ideas imbibed. Yoga can be imbibed by adopting certain attitudes which alter the nature of the samskaras. Yoga can be imbibed by living in an ashram environment and trying to be aware of the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions at the same time. Yoga can be learnt in a classroom environment as science, as psychology, as an applied subject, with the aim of providing new understanding and insight into the life process, into areas where karmas are performed, into areas which shape the inner being in terms of awareness, inner development, the experience of harmony or balance, eventually culminating in the experience of samadhi and the fullness of wisdom, prajna. Yoga is not mere practice for an hour or two in a day but it is the most scientific way of living, all the twenty-four hours of the day.

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