

A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF YOGA AND MEDITATION ON HEALTH AND ITS BENEFITS

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Abstract: In an age where the younger generation is increasingly turning obese and facing health issues at an abnormal rate, fitness plays a very vital role. One can achieve complete control of mind over body by being both physically and mentally fit...Yoga and meditation have been practiced in India since ancient times and provides a healthy mind and a sound body, something which the stress filled youngsters of our generation need. Yoga is considered a comprehensive practice that integrates mental, physical, and spiritual elements of the human body. The purpose of this study was to examine the benefits of yoga and meditation on the physical and mental health. This study provides support for Deep relaxation and meditation practices cultivate awareness and ultimately more profound states of consciousness. Beneficial effects might involve a reduction of distress, blood pressure, and improvements in resilience, mood, and metabolic regulation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's society that is fast approaching a more sedentary lifestyle, there is a greater need than ever to increase the daily activity levels in order to maintain both cardiovascular fitness and body weight. Fitness does not refer to being physically fit alone, but mentally state as well. Any individual can function optimally only if the individual is both mentally and physically fit. Such individuals tend to be less prone to medical conditions as well. While most people tend to focus on physical fitness alone, they forget that a sound mind exists only in a sound body.

Rapidly emerging in the Western world as a disciplined way of life, for integrating the mind and body into union and harmony, yoga improves physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual health. It also offers an effective method of managing and reducing stress, anxiety and depression and there have been numerous studies that demonstrate the efficacy of yoga on mind related disorders.

The physical exercises (asanas) in yoga tends to increase the patient's physical flexibility, coordination, and strength, while the breathing practices and meditation helps calm and focus the mind to develop greater awareness and diminish anxiety , and

thereby resulting in higher quality of life. One simply cannot separate the aspect of health from their emotional well-being. Comprehensively Ideal Fitness Program includes aerobic, anaerobic, and resistance training, in addition to flexibility and core-building exercises likes yoga and meditation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bhole (1977), in his paper "Psycho Physiological Importance of Some Yoga Practices," presented at the International Seminar on Stress in Health and Diseases, explained different aspects of Yoga. Yoga as a "way of life" encompasses the philosophy of the following 4 forms of Yoga which are: Karma Yoga (path of detached action), Jnana Yoga (knowledge of self), Bhakti Yoga (trust in the supreme order) and Raja Yoga (asana, pranayama, meditation, etc.). Bhole says that Continuous and regular practice of this knowledge may even bring about a complete transformation of one's personality ,on mental, on physical, emotional, and spiritual level which tends to strengthen one's ability to cope with stress at all levels.

Yoga practices basically aim at the integral development of the personality as a whole by a fine combination of the above mentioned four forms of yoga- Karma Yoga, Bhakthi Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga , which is called as Integrated Yoga. The paper on " Managerial effectiveness and quality of work life: Indian insights" (1987) and "Managerial Transformation by Values: A Corporate Piligrimate" Saga by Chakraborty SK proves that practicing Yoga gives the managers and workers the ability to take control of their distracted mind and also to lose the sense of false ego , thereby helping in personality development.

According to Chakraborty SK, a Holistic and Integrated Yoga Module comprising of the philosophy of Raja yoga (Asanas, dhyana ,pranayama, etc), Jnana Yoga (knowledge of self), Karma Yoga (path of detached actions) , Bhakthi Yoga (trust in the Supreme order).

In the paper “randomized, controlled, six-month trial of yoga in healthy seniors: effects on cognition and quality of life” By Barry S. Oken , Daniel Zajdel , Kristin Flegal, Shirley Kishiyama, Mitchell Haas, Dale F. Kraemer, Julie Lawrence, Cathleen Dehen ,And Joanne Leyva focuses on the impact of yoga on cognitive functions, mood, fatigue, and overall quality of life among the seniors. The study was conducted on 135 men and women within the age groups of 65–85 years and their cognitive measures focused on attention and alertness were studied for a six month period.

In this paper, “Benefits, barriers, and cues to action of yoga practice: a focus group approach” published in the American journal of health behavior, authored by nancy l atkinson, rachel permuth-levine, studied focus groups of individuals who had never practiced yoga before in their life and studied the positive changes that were recorded.

The paper “Psychology of Meditation and Health: Present Status and Future Directions” written by Dilwar Hussain and Braj Bhushan reviews the effects of meditation on mental health. Effects of meditation on human physiology such as heart beat, blood pressure, cortical activity, metabolism, respiration, and skin resistance are also discussed. Human perception and cognitive abilities are also discussed in this paper.

3. APPROACH

3.1 IMPACT OF YOGA:

3.1.1 *Physiological Impacts:*

Through Yoga , the body triggers a line of beneficial chemical processes within the body, slows the heart rate, reduces the level of blood lactate, lessens the muscular tension, leads to more efficient gas exchange in the lungs, lower levels of cortisol and adrenal levels. This not only boosts the immune system, but also results in higher energy levels, and increased strength.

3.1.2 *Normalizing Blood pressure:*

Blood circulation can be improved in the body through Yoga and Pranayama and has proved to treat both High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) and Low Blood Pressure (Hypotension). Practicing Yoga stretches keeps the arteries ductile and reduces the stiffness of the arteries which again lowers the blood pressure.

It results in the creation of positive energy leading to a better and improved lifestyle. Certain Asanas have the power to slow the heart rate by soothing the nerves and minimizes the chances of a heart attack.

3.1.3 *Mental Benefits:*

It has been found through studies that the benefits of Yoga include increased focus, concentration levels and mental clarity. It also helps to bring down the stress levels, reduce depression and anxiety. Since the stress is reduced, the sleep cycle is improved. Yoga as a way of life boosts feelings of self image and well being.

3.1.4 *Immune System Boost:*

When regularly practiced and being in the relaxed state on a regular basis , the brain produces more of the positive neurotransmitter ‘serotonin’ and stimulates less of the negative ‘cortisol’ which impairs cognitive skills, trigger high Blood pressure and blood sugar imbalances, affecting the immune system badly.

3.1.5 *The Less Demonstrable*

One of the most unique benefits of Yoga is that it leads to a better understanding of one’s self, a certain tranquility and awareness level. While some enjoy the spiritual aspects of the practice, the fact is that it has the power to change a person as a whole by developing their personality.

3.2 IMPACT OF MEDITATION (MINDFULNESS):

Meditation, or as Westerners like to term it “Mindfulness”, has the ability to enhance skills like attention, memory, and emotional intelligence.

3.2.1 *Building resilience:*

Studies show that meditation has proved to decrease anxiety levels, thereby increasing resilience and performance under stress.

3.2.2 *Enhances emotional intelligence:*

Brain imaging studies suggests that meditation can help enhance your ability to control and regulate your emotions. To be more precise, it helps the mind to take control over the body and not the other way round.

3.2.3 *Boosts creativity:*

It has been proved scientifically through various studies that the human mind is most creative and come up with the brightest insights and breakthroughs when the mind is in a relaxed state of mind.

During meditation the mind is in a relaxed state and thereby encourages divergent thinking at its best and comes up with the maximum number of plausible solutions to a given problem, which is one of the most important aspects of creativity.

3.2.4 Improves relationships:

Under stress, individuals tend to narrow down their perspectives and this reduces the sense of empathy, thereby affecting the performance and relationship.

Meditation has a direct connection to improving the mood of the individual, which improves both the performance and relationship in a team.

3.2.5 Enhanced focus:

Meditation helps curb our tendency to be distracted thereby increasing our abilities to think better and stay focused. It also helps improve the cognitive and decision making skills in an individual.

3.2.6 Improves sleep and energy levels:

Practicing meditation results in decreased sleep disturbance and helps to improve their quality of sleep. Better sleep means lower levels of stress and fatigue.

A consistent sleep cycle helps regulate your circadian rhythms, which makes sure your energy levels stay throughout the day.

3.2.7 Improves feelings of wellbeing:

Emotional stability is very vital for better sense of well being. The ability to master one's emotions plays an important role to become more resourceful and productive.

Developing a meditation practice will empower to become more aware of your emotions. Meditation is a remedy for the stress of modern day lifestyle. It brings the nervous system into balance.

4. FINDINGS

The study has given insights into the benefits of Yoga practice in daily life and how it is used to maintain a sense of well being and alleviate a range of health problems and ailments. Therefore it can be used as an alternative for medical therapy for numerous health issues like stress, anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders.

5. CONCLUSION

The benefits of increased feelings of relaxation, improved self-confidence and body image, improved efficiency, better interpersonal relationships, increase in attentiveness through Yoga and meditation as a way of life encourages an optimistic outlook on life.

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