

Yoga as a Stress Management Technique

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Abstract: Yoga, originating from the Sanskrit term *Yuj* which means 'to unite', encompasses the discipline of psycho-physiology that aims to achieve harmony between the body and mind. The practice of Yoga involves the utilization of various techniques and procedures to regulate both the physical and mental aspects. Furthermore, Yoga holds a broader meaning as it represents a way of life that strives for holistic development. Initially derived from the religious traditions of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism in India, Yoga was considered a science of consciousness. Over time, it transformed into a science of possibilities, addressing the fundamental challenges of human existence. Presently, Yoga is recognized as a comprehensive approach that has the potential to refine various latent aspects of human life. The ancient Indian sages, including Patanjali and other Yoga pioneers, developed and implemented the Yoga system to facilitate the attainment of a transcendental state. They possessed profound knowledge in establishing a harmonious coexistence between oneself and the surrounding environment. Yoga possesses the ability to alleviate stress, a prevalent issue among individuals, while simultaneously enhancing self-confidence, promoting a sense of well-being, and fostering relaxation and tranquillity. In fact, Yoga combines multiple techniques to effectively combat stress, including breathing exercises, asanas (postures), and meditation. Consequently, Yoga serves as an excellent remedy for stress and offers relief from its burdensome effects.

Key Words: Yoga, Stress, Anxiety, Tension, Depression, Stress Management.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the Vedic literature, particularly in the *Kathopanishad*, Yoga is depicted as a comprehensive system that encompasses all aspects of human life. The *Bhagavad-Gita* by Veda-Vyasa explores the practical application of Yoga in real-life situations. Sri Aurobindo views Yoga as a systematic endeavour towards self-improvement, disregarding the limitations and imperfections of individuals, leading to holistic personality development. *Krishnamurti* perceives Yoga as a state of awareness without choice. The concept of '*kriyayoga*' holds a specific significance within the Yoga Sutras, referring to the practical aspects of the philosophy. It pertains to the attainment of a "union with the supreme" through the performance of one's daily duties. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Yoga is described as equanimity (2.48), skill in action (2.50), and the separation from suffering (2.48).

Yoga, as a whole, aims for liberation and freedom from stress. However, the specific manifestation of this goal may vary depending on the philosophical or theological framework it is associated with.

2. WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a sudden biological change that has become a prevalent issue in the 21st century, posing a significant threat to human life. It can disrupt the physical, mental, emotional, and behavioural equilibrium of an individual. Stress can adversely affect various parts of the human body, including muscles, tissues, organs, and blood vessels. It can elevate heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and body temperature. Additionally, it can interfere with bodily functions such as metabolism, digestion, appetite, sleep, sexuality, and fertility. Stress is associated with several diseases and conditions, including cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, diabetes mellitus, and colitis. While stress is a natural response to physical threats or psychological distress, it triggers a cascade of chemical and hormonal reactions in the body. This response prepares the body for action by increasing blood flow to the heart

and muscles while shutting down non-essential functions. While this reaction is beneficial in critical situations, it becomes problematic when it persists beyond the necessary timeframe. When individuals experience intense pressure, rapid heartbeat, and tense muscles, it is crucial to intervene and break the cycle of stress before it leads to further harm. Recognizing the issue is already a significant step towards resolving it. Understanding the nature of stress and its impact is essential in effectively managing and mitigating its effects.

The concept of stress originates from the Latin word *Stringere*, which means "to be drawn tight". Stress is an intricate and dynamic interaction between an individual and their life. It can impact a person's health, work performance, social life, and relationships with family members. The stress response is a complex emotion that triggers physiological changes in order to prepare us for fight-or-flight, enabling us to defend ourselves from threats or escape from them. Stress management generally involves techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of anxiety, pressure, tension, and depression, particularly in cases of chronic stress, with the goal of improving daily functioning. In this context, the term 'stress' specifically refers to stress that has significant negative consequences, as advocated by Hans Selye, rather than what he refers to as eustress, which is stress that has beneficial or neutral consequences. Traditionally, stress was seen as a result of external factors beyond the control of those experiencing it. The process of stress management is considered one of the keys to a happy and successful life in modern society, as it can alleviate numerous physical and mental symptoms.

3. CAUSES OF STRESS:

The factors contributing to stress can be varied and multifaceted. Numerous elements in our daily lives can act as triggers for stress, leading to its onset and exacerbation. These causes can range from personal and professional pressures to financial difficulties, relationship issues, and health concerns such as follows-

- I. Indian society is currently experiencing a rapid transition, which has resulted in a significant change for its people. They are now faced with the challenge of adapting from a culture of fellow feeling and cooperation to one of competition and rivalry.
- II. The materialistic desires and needs of this society often leave individuals feeling inadequate, leading to stress. This stress is rooted in the tension between what one has and what one wants.
- III. When different forces pull the mind in different directions, it becomes confused and ultimately leads to disappointment and sorrow.
- IV. Indulgence in unfulfilled desires also contributes to stress, as does attachment to certain actions. It is important to remember that the cause of stress lies in one's attitude towards work, rather than the work itself.
- V. A result-oriented outlook naturally creates tension, as individuals strive to control the outcomes of their actions.
- VI. Dwelling on past negative events and repeatedly processing them can also invite stress and eventually lead to a complete nervous breakdown.
- VII. Educational factors, such as a rigid examination system and materialistic course content, contribute to stress among learners.
- VIII. Emotional turmoil, environmental pollution, financial tensions, and a sense of being overwhelmed by events further increase stress in daily life. These factors create nervous tension and negatively impact the mind.
- IX. Feelings of loneliness and separation exacerbate the situation. In order to cope with the pressures of daily life, people often turn to immediate but false solutions. This may involve participating in eating disorders, talking excessively, watching excessive television, or entering harmful relationships. However, these measures only provide temporary distraction or oblivion, and the root cause of stress and unhappiness remains unresolved.

4. TYPES OF STRESS:

The different types of stress encompass:

- **Everyday Stress:** This pertains to the ongoing pressures of school, work, relationships, and other obligations.
- **Abrupt Negative Stress:** Instances of this stress type include illness, job loss, financial hardships, or divorce.



- **Traumatic Stress:** This is triggered by a significant event such as an accident, assault, natural calamity, or any situation where an individual fears severe harm or death.

Stress can manifest in various forms, each with its own unique characteristics and effects.

- I. **Acute stress** is a short-term form of stress that is typically caused by immediate pressures or demands. It often occurs in response to specific events or situations and can be beneficial in certain situations, as it can help individuals respond effectively to challenges.
- II. **Episodic acute stress**, on the other hand, is when individuals frequently experience acute stress. This type of stress is often associated with individuals who are constantly overwhelmed, juggling multiple responsibilities, or have a tendency to worry excessively.
- III. **Chronic stress** is a long-term form of stress that persists over an extended period. It can be caused by ongoing issues such as financial problems, relationship difficulties, or work-related stress. Chronic stress can have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health if not effectively managed.

Understanding the different types of stress can help individuals identify and address their stressors, develop coping mechanisms, and seek appropriate support when needed. By recognizing the specific type of stress, they are experiencing, individuals can take steps towards managing and reducing its impact on their overall well-being.

5. PROCEDURES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT:

There are several efficient techniques that can be employed to effectively manage stress. Some of these techniques are designed for use by healthcare professionals, while others are intended for self-help purposes. These techniques can help individuals reduce their stress levels, gain a sense of control over their lives, and enhance their overall well-being. Additional stress-reducing methods include incorporating a daily exercise routine, pursuing a hobby, journaling one's thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and seeking support from a trusted individual to discuss one's concerns. It is important to remember that not all techniques will yield the same results for everyone. Therefore, it is crucial to explore and experiment with different stress management techniques to determine which ones work best for each individual.

6. YOGIC PRACTICES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT:

It is essential to become acquainted with the fact that the recommendations for asana, pranayama, and other aspects of yoga to alleviate stress vary across different traditions. A yogic practice that solely focuses on physical remedies is limited as it only addresses the physiological aspect and not the psychological aspect. Similarly, a practice centred around moral principles for behaviour modification also has its limitations. Therefore, the most effective approach to meet the demands of society is a combined practice that includes physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and other elements in a specific sequence. The benefits of these combined practices can be maximized by adhering to all the recommended observances in daily life. These observances refer to the *yamas* and *niyamas* of classical yoga, which lay the foundation for a moderate and compassionate way of living. Some teachers prefer a simple and diverse asana practice with specific pranayama techniques for stress relief. In his book, *Yoga for Stress Relief*, Swami Shivapremananda suggests a three-month program that begins with gentle chest opening in a seated, cross-legged position. He then introduces *Nadi-Sodhana* (alternate nostril breathing) and *Ujjayi* (breathing with a slight contraction in the glottis). The program progresses to include forward-bending postures to open the dynamic hips, followed by *Sarvangasana* (shoulder stand) and variations, *Setu Bandhasana* (bridge pose), and a dynamic *Paschimottasana* (seated forward bend). *Sitali* (inhaling through a curled tongue) and *Shitakari* (placing the tip of the tongue to the palate) *pranayamas* are recommended. After eight weeks, *Half-Sirasana* (headstand with feet on the ground), *Salabhasana* (locust), *Vyghrasana* (cat), *Dhanurasana* (bow), and *Ardha-matsyendrasana* (simple twist) are to be practiced. Towards the end of the program, *Sun Salutation*, *Kapalbhati* (cleansing breath), meditation, and deep relaxation are introduced. Therefore, a comprehensive yoga practice is necessary to alleviate stress.

7. ADVANTAGES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT THROUGH YOGA:

- I. The practice of Yoga can positively impact the parasympathetic nervous system, leading to a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure.



- II. Additionally, Yoga has the potential to enhance digestion, boost immunity, facilitate the elimination of toxins, and improve lung capacity.
- III. By incorporating Yoga into one's routine, the likelihood of stress escalating into anxiety and depression can be significantly reduced.
- IV. Pranayama, a breathing technique in Yoga, offers a unique approach to managing stress. It involves slow and steady breaths, alternating between nostrils. This method ensures proper oxygen flow through the blood vessels, resulting in a sense of lightness.
- V. Meditation, another aspect of Yoga, serves as an effective method for stress control. By finding a comfortable position and visualizing a peaceful place, individuals can enhance their mental well-being. Deep and slow breathing during this practice provides an additional supply of oxygen, enhancing cognitive function.
- VI. Ultimately, Yoga has established itself as a valuable tool for stress management, even gaining recognition in the Western world as a prominent alternative to conventional pharmaceutical interventions.

8. CONCLUSION:

Yoga does not possess the power to completely eradicate stress from an individual's life, but it does play a significant role in reducing its impact. According to the principles of yoga, the nervous system governs the subconscious mind, and when it is strengthened, a person becomes more capable of handling stressful situations in a positive manner. The practice of asanas enhances blood circulation throughout the body's cells, thereby fortifying the nervous system and its ability to endure stress. The essence of yoga lies in self-awareness, making it an appropriate tool for modifying our behaviour. Consequently, yoga can serve as a framework for addressing chronic stress responses. It is not merely a daily exercise routine, but rather a transformative practice that encompasses contemplation. Through yoga, we acquire techniques to analyse our own thought processes and ultimately uncover our true human identity. The various traditional techniques emphasize the importance of controlling our inherent tendencies and realizing our higher selves in order to effectively manage stress. It is imperative that we incorporate these techniques into our educational system and integrate them into our lives from a young age, enabling us to lead a happy, healthy, and stress-free existence.

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