

# **Yoga: An Alternative Therapy for Stress And Anxiety**

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## **Abstract**

*Yoga has been a keyword for the wellness of the human being since few thousand years. The word 'Yoga' was used and originated in an ancient Indian literature such as PatanjaliYogsutra, Smreemadbhagwadgeeta, Vedshastra etc. These literature gives systematic evidences of perfect use of yoga for the mankind. योगःकर्मसुकौशलम्, योगक्षेमंवहान्यहम् are the few vision statements are taken from Shreemadbhagwadgeeta and both depicts the importance of Yoga in karma (deed-action) as well as kshemam (Wellness/ free from worries and diseases). In recent years, the research on yoga explored some facts in physiology based on the cognitive behavioural therapy. The research into the role of yoga in certain disorders and improving overall mental and physical health has coined a new word 'Yoga Therapy'. Considering its popularity based on the experiences by the people has gain a billion dollar industry all over the world. The traditional medicinal tranquilizers are slowly vanishing from market and new Yoga Therapy is followed all over the world.*

*This paper is an attempt to review the success of Yoga therapy over the traditional medicinal tranquilizers as well as it also discusses the role of psychologist in administration of Yoga therapy.*

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**Keyword: Yoga, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Medicinal Tranquilizers, Yoga Therapy.**

## **Introduction**

Yoga as a concept in Indian classical literature is rooted into the philosophical and spiritual texts of Patanjali Yogasutra, Shreemad bhagwadgeeta and many more like these. Stress and Anxiety have been implicated as contributors to many chronic diseases and to decreased quality of life, even with pharmacologic treatment. Efforts are underway to find no pharmacologic therapies to relieve stress and anxiety and yoga are one of the great options for which the results are amazing. Many approaches are under practice to relieve stress and anxiety, such as enhancing cognitive awareness of stressors and coping ; relaxation techniques such as biofeedback, progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, yoga, meditation, visual imagery, self-hypnosis, etc. One of the techniques with which some research has been done is yoga. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word meaning union. It is an ancient system of physical and psychic practice that originated during the Indus Valley civilization in South Asia. The first written records of this methodology appeared around 200 BC in Yogasutra of Patanjali. Yoga is one form of physical activity that is increasingly being introduced in workplace settings to improve health and well-being [1]. Yoga is an ancient form of health promotion, involving physical activity, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques and meditation practices to enhance mindfulness and mind-body awareness [2]. Recent research suggests that yoga is effective for dealing with many chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease [3], diabetes [4], cancer [5], anxiety/stress [6], migraine headaches [7] and chronic low back pain [8]. Recent research suggests that yoga can be effective for reducing stress and back pain [7,8],

This research article is an attempt to review the research on practice of Yoga. Yoga or Suryanamaskar that is relevant to the discipline of psychology and related areas. Through this review, it will be clear as to how Yoga and Suryanamaskar have helped many populations to either recover or improve on the variables under and related to this study.

## **Yoga and Physical Exercise**

In contemporary literature, yoga has been described in several ways. In a more modern context, yoga has been defined as “a systematic practice and implementation of mind and body in the living process of human beings to keep harmony within self, within society, and with nature.”[9-10]. Physical exercise and the use of body to attain health and many other benefits is done by many practitioners and institutions across India. These schools of thought are also into training and research across the globe. Bihar school of Yoga, Munger; Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Pune; Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari; Kaivalyadham, Lonavala, and many other institutions are established by eminent Yoga gurus and are now spreading the importance and practice of Yoga across the world. Research in the field of Yoga is not new but the methods used for research in yoga are being updated to match the present methodologies in various disciplines like Physiology, Medicine, Health Sciences, Neurosciences, Psychology, Physical Education, Sports Medicine and many more fields like these. Apart from the curative approaches of the Yoga and Hatha Yoga, many practitioners are also promoting the preventive approach of Yoga and Asanas to help attain and maintain balance in one’s own life. The traditional practice

of yoga was quite rigorous, arduous, entailed lifelong devoted practice, and adherence to strict austerities. Today, many schools of yoga have simplified the techniques making these more suitable for users in different walks of life. The 8 conventional steps of Asthangayoga consist of Yama (rules for living in society), Niyama (self-restraining rules), Asana (low physical impact postures), Pranayama (breathing techniques), Pratihara (detachment of the mind from senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (complete union with super consciousness).<sup>2</sup> Today, various schools of yoga use one or more of these techniques. Yoga has an effective role in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression that can be considered as complementary medicine and reduce the medical cost per treatment by reducing the use of drugs.

A comparison between two groups (age group between 18 and 65) that performed hatha yoga and progressive muscle relaxation on the parameters of stress and anxiety revealed some interesting findings. A research review [11] states that researchers found that Yoga provides a comparable improvement in stress and anxiety, and health status, compared to relaxation. However, the relaxation group scored significantly higher on social functioning, mental health and vitality compared to those in the yoga group. The Yoga group went through the practice of 12 postures in each class focusing on balance, breathing, stretching, and strengthening using standing, seated, supine and semi-inversion positions. The protocol of progressive muscle relaxation included a guided sequence of tensing and relaxing muscle group's fi-om head to toe. The limitations include a suggestion that the Yoga programme, if tailored to treat anxiety and stress, for example, a programme that includes forward bends, may have produced different results. Other results in the same study also indicate that Yoga appears to be superior to no treatment and progressive relaxation for both depression and anxiety and may benefit mood and anxiety symptoms associated with medical illness [12].

The latest studies revealed the clinical practice guidelines for yoga and alternative therapies for patients with mental disorders [13]. Yoga therapy has also been proved to effective in the treatment of mood and anxiety disorders [14]. Few studies reviewed which state the role of Yoga in academic performance. An abstract reviewed about a study conducted in Mumbai for medical students states that Yoga reduced the basal anxiety and also helped attenuating the increase in exam related anxiety [15]. Other parameters that were positively affected due to Yoga were better sense of well being, feeling of relaxation, improved concentration, self confidence, improved efficiency, good interpersonal relationships, increased attentiveness, lowered irritability, and an optimistic outlook towards life. The studies on the effect of yoga on academic performance with relation to stress [16] showed that those students who practiced yoga performed better in academics. Academic performance was better in the case of students with low stress. This study has an implication in terms of yoga and relaxation techniques being used for various populations like sportspersons. The thread of stress and anxiety being dealt with the help of Yoga has implications of healing as well as improving efficiency and performance in different spheres like sports [17].

When Iyengar Yoga was used for distressed women, improvement was seen on perceived stress, state-trait anxiety, depression, psychological quality of life, and mood states. Along with these findings on psychological level, physiological variables like physical complaints also reduced in the experimental group. An interesting secondary finding of the study reveals that twice a weekly participation in the yoga programme was not found to be superior to once a week class. This finding is an important one in the line of compliance of any programme similar to yoga. Iyengar yoga is an established and well studied methodology that is particular about physical movements with isometric muscle strengthening, stretching, flexibility combined with a mental focus and an emphasis on mindfulness of body movements and consideration of breathing patterns [18].

Yoga has been widely used across various populations as an effective complimentary therapy. Two studies in the Indian context elaborate its use for the patients with neck pain and back pain. In one of the studies, complimentary effect of yogic sound resonance relaxation technique was studied among the patients with common neck pain. It was found that there are significant positive changes on the physiological variables like pain analog scale, spinal flexibility, neck disability score and state anxiety score [19]. The sound resonance technique included certain mantras selected from traditional Indian texts. This technique was called as Mind Sound Resonance Technique (MSRT). In another study that used intensive Yoga programme for patients of back pain, it was found that Yoga improves quality of life and spinal flexibility better than physical therapy exercise [20]. This programme included asanas, pranayam, relaxation techniques, meditation and lectures on yogic lifestyle. Another study which used Iyengar Yoga therapy for chronic lower back pain indicates that majority of self referred persons with mild chronic low back pain comply to and report improvement on medical and functional pain related outcomes [21]. In this study functional disability was the primary outcome variable and other variables included clinical pain, fear of movements, pain attitudes, coping strategies, self efficacy, range of motion, pain medication usage and adherence. An educational intervention was used for comparison and significant results were found across disability and pain related outcomes. Yoga programmes also have been used for some of the curative approaches towards changing lifestyles. In a study where Yoga programme was studied as a complimentary treatment for smoking cessation, Vinyasa Yoga was used [22]. Results of a research study also state that long term yoga practice is associated with significant psycho-biological differences, including better sleep quality as well as a modulatory action on the levels of cortisol [23].

## **Yoga and Suryanamaskar**

Many studies on Yoga and Suryanamaskar, as a part of Yoga training programme have suggested that there are multiple benefits of Yoga and Suryanamaskar. Yoga training is used by many investigators and researchers to study their variables of interest and there is a strong body of research available on this area. A research report submitted to the Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Government of Pondicherry [24] has studied the effects of Yoga training on cardio respiratory functions of school children of Pondicherry. The results and the

findings suggest that Yoga and Suryanamaskar, both produced improvement in hand grip strength, endurance and pulmonary functions. It was also concluded that Yoga training of six months improves body weight and Body Mass Index and also the cardiovascular system to withstand stressful stimuli. When Suryanamaskar was used as a part of Hath Yoga practice for ten healthy untrained volunteers positive effects were seen on (physical) health related aspects like isokinetic muscular strength and isometric muscular endurance. Along with these variables absolute and relative maximal oxygen uptake also increased. Thus it can be concluded that health related aspects of fitness improved [25]. Effects of Suryanamaskar on cardiovascular and respiratory parameters were also studied and it was found that systolic blood pressure, peak expiratory flow rate, and forced vital capacity increased significantly [26]. A regular practice of Suryanamaskar may maintain or improve cardiorespiratory fitness as well as promote weight management. [27].

## **Yoga and Stress**

Stress is anything that brings mental and emotional pressure that leads to fear, anxiety, worry, apprehensions, anger and even excitement and the body responds in a prompt, speedy and inefficient way. According to medical professionals, 90-95% of illnesses in modern era can be blamed on psychological forces; 98% headaches originate due to stress and stress also manifests itself into many other physical ailments like indigestion, acidity and life-killers like heart attacks. Stress comes in all shapes and sizes, and has become so pervasive, that it seems to permeate everything and everybody. Stress and Tension occur because of the uncontrolled flow of thoughts relating to our future or past that keep our mind in constant turbulence. These thoughts deviate us from working in the present - which only is the reality. It is usually these thoughts related to our excessive thinking of future and past which makes us tired and not the hard work. Stress causes real "wear and tear" on our bodies as we adjust to our continually changing environment and so it has numerous physical and emotional effects on us. Change of facial expression and bodily postures, Withdrawal from social relationships, Low task performance (sometimes its opposite also manifests -i.e high productivity but which is highly detrimental for our physical and mental health, Impediment of speech, Sighs & continuous fidgeting, Nervous laughter, etc. All the above symptoms originate because of stress but their causes are also described by their sufferers & medical experts as: Anxiety, Worry, Sleeplessness, Emotional Disturbance Aggression, Tension, Phobic Disorders, etc. The eventual result of all the symptoms or their causes (as defined by our modern-day terms) leads to many physical problems like: Stomach ulcers, Bad heart conditions, Loss of appetite or overeating, Obsessive behavior such as heavy smoking and drinking and many other problems. Medical science has nothing to offer to combat the dreadful effects of stress except tranquilizers, habit forming toxic drugs, etc. Thus stress is an inner reaction rather than an outer phenomenon. To be really stress free we have to develop SELF-AWARENESS – The knowledge of our self: Its likes and dislikes, its harmony and conflicts. The key for gaining self-awareness lies in a process of shifting one's focus from the external environment to internal makeup, including physical, emotional and spiritual system.

Meditation – is the best relaxation technique and the accepted solution all over the world to combat stress effectively. Sahaja Yoga a highly developed and unique system of meditation that enables the person to reach onto a level of complete self-awareness.

Sahaja-Yoga works on awakening of primordial energy within us called Kundalini. When the Kundalini rises and crosses the sixth energy centre, it brings us into a state of thoughtless-awareness - no distracting thoughts from future or past are bombarding the mind. All conflicts residing in the mind that create stress, evaporate. We enter into a state of peace within, remaining completely in the present and aware of everything around us. As mentioned about the human subtle system, we have a subtle body within us that consists of seven energy centres and three channels. In our daily life, either one of these channels can be more active leading to a certain state of our behavior. If we move to the right channel, we become overactive, restless, stressed and tense. If we move to the left channel, we become depressed and lethargic. But if we remain in the centre channel, we become dynamic, energetic, moral – all leading to an integrated personality. The regular practice of Sahaja-Yoga helps us to activate the centre channel.

Finally, Sahaja-Yoga connects us to the All Pervading power. We become one with the energy source, which creates, manages and nourishes the nature and is the primal spring of the energy that is called Kundalini. As we are always connected to the source of the energy, our energy centres are constantly nourished by this All Pervading power. So we always remain fresh and cheerful and do not get fatigued, tired and stressed out and completely enjoy every activity we are involved in.

## Conclusion

Yoga asana practice is intensely physical. Concentrating so intently on what your body is doing has the effect of bringing calmness to the mind. Yoga also introduces you to meditation techniques, such as watching how you breathe and disengagement from your thoughts, which help calm the mind. Stress reduction Physical activity is good for relieving stress, and this is particularly true of yoga. Because of the concentration required, your daily troubles, both large and small, seem to melt away during the time you are doing yoga. This provides a much-needed break from your stressors, as well as helping put things into perspective. So in conclusion yoga can be a great remedy for stress and can offer some stress relief. Yoga has combined set of principles and exercises that can greatly benefit you and help you to deal with stress.

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