

Yoga: Right Path to Health and Wellness

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Yogic principles of lifestyle help to strengthen and develop positive health enabling us to withstand stress better. This Yogic health insurance has achieved by normalizing the perception of stress, optimizing the reaction to it and by releasing the pent-up stress effectively through the practice of various Yogic steps

YOGA IS a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. The holistic approach of *Yoga* is well established and it brings harmony in all walks of life and thus, known for disease prevention, health promotion and management of many lifestyle –related disorders. The term ‘*Yoga*’ is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘*Yuj*’, meaning ‘to join’ or ‘to yoke’ or ‘to unite’. As per Yogic scriptures, the practice of *Yoga* leads to the union of individual consciousness with that of the Universal Consciousness, indicating a perfect harmony between the mind and body, man and nature. The aim of *yoga* is self-realization, to overcome all kinds of sufferings leading to ‘the state of liberation’ (*Moksha*) or ‘freedom’ (*Kaivalya*). Living with freedom in all walks of life, health and harmony are the main objectives of *yoga* practice. The practice of *yoga* is believed to have started with the very dawn of civilization. *Yoga*, being widely considered as an ‘immortal cultural outcome’ of Indus Saraswati Valley civilization – dating back to 2700 B.C– has proved itself catering to both material and spiritual upliftment of humanity.

Origin and Development of Yoga

The science of *yoga* has its origin

thousands of years ago, long before the first religion or belief systems were born. According to yogic lore, Shiva is seen as the first Yogi or *Adiyogi*, and the first Guru or *Adi Guru*. Several thousand years ago, on the banks of the lake Kantisarovar in the Himalayas, *Adiyogi* poured his profound knowledge into the legendary *Saptarishis* or “seven sages”. The sages carried this powerful yogic science to different parts of the world, including Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa and South America. Interestingly, modern scholars have noted and marvelled at the close parallels found between ancient cultures across the globe. However, it was in India that the yogic system found its fullest expression. *Agastya*, the *Saptarishi* who travelled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core yogic way of life.

The number of seals and fossil remains of Indus Saraswati Valley civilization with yogic motives and figures performing *Yoga Sadhana* suggest the presence of *yoga* in ancient India. The phallic symbols, seals of idols of mother Goddess are suggestive of *Tantra Yoga*. Presence of *yoga* is available in folk traditions, Indus Saraswati valley civilization, Vedic and *Upanishadic* heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions, *Darshanas*, epics of Mahabharat including *Bhagavadgeeta* and

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Ramayana, theistic traditions of *Shaivas*, *Vaishnavas*, and *Tantric* traditions. Though yoga was being practiced in the pre-Vedic period, the great Sage *Maharshi Patanjali* systematized and codified the then existing practices of Yoga, its meaning and its related knowledge through his *Yoga Sutras*. After Patanjali, many Sages and Yoga Masters contributed greatly for the preservation and development of the field through their well documented practices and literature. Now-a-days, everybody has conviction about yoga practices towards prevention, maintenance and promotion of health. Yoga has spread all over the world by the teachings of great personalities and yoga masters.

The different philosophies, traditions, lineages and *Guru-shishya paramparas* of Yoga led to the emergence of different Traditional Schools of Yoga e.g. *Jnana-yoga*, *Bhakti-yoga*, *Karma-yoga*, *Dhyana-yoga*, *Patanjala-yoga*, *Kundalini-yoga*, *Hatha-yoga*, *Mantra-yoga*, *Laya-yoga*, *Raja-yoga*, *Jain-yoga*, *Bouddha-yoga* etc. Each school has its own principles and practices leading to ultimate aim and objectives of yoga.

Different social customs and rituals in India, the land of yoga, reflect a love for ecological balance, tolerance towards other systems of thought and a compassionate outlook towards all creations. *Yoga Sadhana* of all hues and colours is considered panacea for a meaningful life and living. Its orientation to a comprehensive health, both individual and social, makes it a worthy practice for the people of all religions, races and nationalities.

Now-a-days, millions and millions of people have benefitted by the practice of yoga which has been preserved and promoted by the great eminent Yoga Masters from ancient time to this date.

Yogic Practices for Health and Wellness: The widely practiced *Yoga Sadhanas* (Practices) are: *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*,

Pratyahara, *Dharana*, *Dhyana* (Meditation), *Samadhi* /*Samyama*, *Bandhas* & *Mudras*, *Shat-karmas*, *Yukta-ahara*, *Yukta karma*, *Mantra japa*, etc.

Yamas are restraints and *Niyamas* are observances. These are considered to be pre-requisites for the *Yoga Sadhanas* (Practices). *Asanas*, capable of bringing about stability of body and mind, consists in adopting various body (psycho-physical) patterns, giving ability to maintain a body position (a stable awareness of one's structural existence) for a considerable length and period of time as well. *Asanas* are widely practiced Yogic practices for healthy living.

The knowledge aspect of Yoga Sadhana is being extensively researched, with advantage to Yoga practitioners. Psychological, Anatomico-physiological, Bio-chemical and philosophical phenomena underlying Yoga Sadhana have been commendably understood by us today. It is a matter of satisfaction for the entire humanity. So also, elaborate and effective means of its transmission, such as internet across the globe, is a great stride for propagation of yogic knowledge. Teaching methodology in Yoga has also ingrained modern educational methodological rigours into it. There is also a worldwide growth of teaching schools of Yoga.

Pranayama consists of developing awareness of one's breathing followed by willful regulation of respiration as the functional or vital basis of one's existence. It helps in developing awareness of one's mind and helps to establish control over the mind. In the initial stages, this is done by developing awareness of the 'flow of in-breath and out-breath' (*svasa-prasvasa*) through nostrils, mouth and other body openings, its internal and

external pathways and destinations. Later, this phenomenon is modified, through regulated, controlled and monitored inhalation (*svasa*) leading to the awareness of the body space/s getting filled (*puraka*), the space/s remaining in a filled state (*kumbhaka*) and it's getting emptied (*rechaka*) during regulated, controlled and monitored exhalation (*prasvasa*).

Pratyahara indicates dissociation of one's consciousness (withdrawal) from the sense organs which help one to remain connected with the external objects. *Dharana* indicates broad based field of attention (inside the body and mind) which is usually understood as concentration. *Dhyana* (Meditation) is contemplation (focussed attention inside the body and mind) and *Samadhi* – integration.

Bandhas and *Mudras* are practices associated with *pranayama*. They are viewed as (the) higher Yogic practices mainly consisting on adopting certain body (psycho-physical) patterns along with (as well as) control over respiration. This further facilitates control over mind and paves the way for higher yogic attainment. *Shat-karmas* are de-toxification procedures, help to remove the toxins accumulated in the body and are clinical in nature.

Yuktahara (Right Food and other inputs) advocates appropriate food and food habits for healthy living. However, practice of *Dhyana* (Meditation) helping in self-realization leading to transcendence is considered as the essence of *Yoga Sadhana*. However, 'a judicious combination of practice of *asana*, *pranayama* and *dhyana* daily, keep individuals healthy and disease free'.

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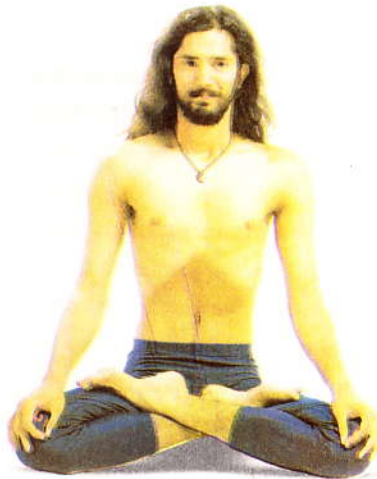
effective means of its transmission, such as internet across the globe, is a great stride for propagation of yogic knowledge. Teaching methodology in Yoga has also ingrained modern educational methodological rigours into it. There is also a worldwide growth of teaching schools of Yoga across the globe. An earnest scientific and philosophico-literary research has also caught up globally and is yet another encouraging sign of evolution of Yoga.

Life Style and Yoga: Lifestyle is the way people live and this has immense influence on the status of health or disease an individual. Since one's lifestyle has developed early in life, it is advisable to cultivate healthy lifestyle in early childhood. Many factors determine one's lifestyle. Economic status determines incidence of under-nutrition in poor and obesity in the rich. Cultural values of the society dictate the dietary preferences in the population. Sedentary life is a major factor for coronary artery disease while personal habits like smoking and alcoholism determine the incidence of heart disease and cirrhosis of liver. Healthy diet, physical activity, good habits, rest and relaxation are important components of healthy lifestyle.

Yoga is the most perfect lifestyle module as it is comprehensive and holistic in its nature. Yogic principles of lifestyle help to strengthen and develop positive health enabling us to withstand stress better. This Yogic health insurance has achieved by normalizing the perception of stress, optimizing the reaction to it and by releasing the pent-up stress effectively through the practice of various Yogic practices. Yoga is popular now a days because of its therapeutic credentials and it is being widely used as complementary medicine by practitioners of different systems of health care across the globe.

Yoga as Therapy: Using Yogic principles and practices for healing is called "Yoga Therapy". Use of Yoga practices for therapeutic purposes is a 'by-product' of Yoga. Yogic Practices

are mind centric and if we examine different references of Yoga, e.g. *Upanishads, Gita, Yoga Sutra*, classical *Hatha Yoga* texts or any other yogic texts, it is clear that Yoga is a discipline aimed for freedom of mind and its different faculties. The Mind, which is an instrument of perception, is used to 'transcend' itself to give the perceiver clarity about its position. Though, there is no reference of yogic tools available directly dealing with illness in the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, the word "Vyadhi" which means illness is given as one of the "antarāya-s" (obstacles) (Chapter 1 Sutra 30). There are of course, direct references available to show how *Kriyas, Asanas, Pranayamas* and *Mudras* can be used to cure illnesses in



Hatha Yoga Texts such as *Hatha-yoga pradipika, GherandaSamhita, Yoga YajnavalkyaSamhita, Yoga Rahasya*, etc. It is over the years, *Yogācārya-s* have developed the systems of Yoga for therapy purposes. They are passed on to their disciple and practiced as 'Traditions of Yoga Therapy'.

The Yoga Therapy: Doctrines and Concepts

- Doctrine of "Chitta-vrittinirodha", "Kriyayoga" and "Astanga" as found in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.
- Doctrine of "Panchakosha" (five sheaths/bodies) as found in *Upanishads*.
- Doctrine of various kinds of "Shuddhi" found in *Patanjali Yoga Sutra* and *Hathayoga*.

- Doctrine of opening blocked channels of vayus and prana (nadishuddhi), opening of lotuses and *chakras, pranayamas, mudras* and *dristis* as found in *Hathayoga* and *Kundalini Yoga*.
- Working with the mind on the lines of *Patanjali Yoga Sutra, Mantra Yoga* and *Hathayoga*.
- Working on the lines of "Karma-Jnana-Bhakti" from *Bhagawadgita*.
- Certain aspects of *Tantra Yoga* also get integrated in various Yoga practices.

Yoga therapy is being practiced now as an alternative healthcare practice in many parts of the world. The number of Yoga practitioners continues to rise tremendously. Of the many benefits ascribed to Yoga practice, blood pressure control is among the most studied. There are several reviews regarding the potential benefits of Yoga for reducing blood pressure and other cardiovascular disease risk factors but the degree to which yoga therapy may decrease blood pressure and its potential modifying effects remain unclear. Yoga therapy has also been found to improve indices of risk in adults with type 2 diabetes, including glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity, lipid profiles, anthropometric characteristics and blood pressure. It also leads to a reduction in oxidative damage; improve coagulation profiles and pulmonary function, and decreases sympathetic activation in adults with diabetes and related chronic disorders. Yoga may also be useful in reducing medication requirements in patients with diabetes and could help prevent and manage cardiovascular complications in this population. Many research papers have been published in indexed peer reviewed journals to prove the efficacy of Yoga therapy in the management of lifestyle related diseases. Medical research in recent years has also uncovered many physical and psychological benefits that Yoga also offers, corroborating the experiences of millions of practitioners.

How Yoga Works:

The following are just a few of the mechanisms through which Yoga works as an integrated mind-body medicine:

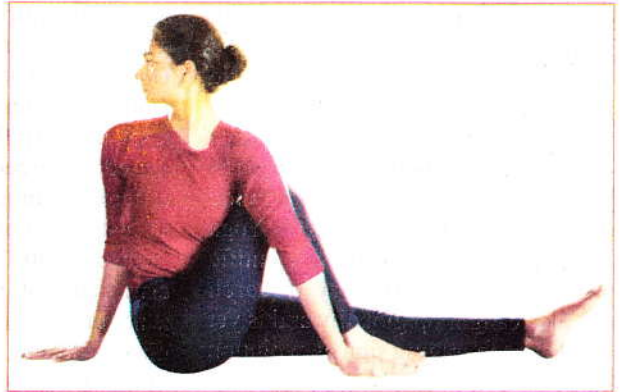
1. Cleanses the accumulated toxins through various *shuddikriyas* and generates a sense of relaxed lightness through Yogic *sukshnavyayama* (simple micro movements for all joints and ligaments of body). Free flow in all bodily passages prevents the many infections that may occur when pathogens stagnate therein.
2. Adoption of a Yogic lifestyle with proper nourishing diet, creates positive antioxidant enhancement thus neutralizing free radicals while enabling a rejuvenative storehouse of nutrients packed with life energy to work on anabolic, reparative and healing processes.
3. Steadies the entire body through different physical postures held in a steady and comfortable manner without strain. Physical balance and a sense of ease with oneself enhance mental / emotional balance and enable all physiological processes to occur in a healthy manner.
4. Improves control over autonomic respiratory mechanisms through breathing patterns that generate energy and enhance emotional stability. The mind and emotions are related to our breathing pattern and rate and hence the slowing down of the breathing process influences autonomic functioning, metabolic processes as well as emotional responses.
5. Integrates body movements with the breath creates psychosomatic harmony. In Yoga, the physical body is related to *annamayakosha* (our anatomical existence) and the mind to *manomayakosha* (our psychological existence). As the *pranayama kosha* (our physiological existence sustained by the energy of the breath) lies in between them, the breath is the key to psychosomatic harmony.
6. Focuses the mind positively on

activities being done, enhances energy flow and results in healthy circulation to the different body parts and internal organs. Where the mind goes, there the *prana* flows!

7. Creates a calm internal environment through contemplative practices that in turn enable normalization of homeostatic mechanisms. Yoga is all about balance or *samatvam* at all levels of being. Mental balance produces physical balance and vice versa too.

Yoga and Ayurveda reveal to us the secret powers of the body, breath, senses, mind and spirit. More importantly, they unfold transformational methods to work on them through proper diet, herbs, panch-karma, yogasana, pranayama and meditation – covering the entire range of our life style. Both recognize that keeping the body and mind healthy is vital for fulfilling the four aims of life (Purushartha Chatusthaya): dharma (duty), artha (wealth), kama (desire), and moksha (liberation)

8. Relaxes the body-emotion-mind complex through physical and mental techniques that enhance our pain threshold and coping ability in responding to external and internal stressors. This enhances the quality of life as seen in so many terminal cases where other therapies are not able to offer any solace.
9. Enhances self confidence and internal healing capacities through the cultivation of right attitudes towards life and moral-ethical living through *yama-niyama* and various Yogic psychological



principles. Faith, self confidence and inner strength are most essential for healing, repair, rejuvenation and re-invigoration.

10. Yoga works towards restoration of normalcy in all systems of the human body with special emphasis on the psycho-neuro-immuno-endocrine axis. In addition to its preventive and restorative capabilities, Yoga also aims at promoting positive health that will help us to tide over health challenges that occur during our lifetime. This concept of positive health is one of Yoga's unique contributions to modern healthcare as Yoga has both a preventive as well as promotive role in healthcare. It is also inexpensive and can be used in tandem with other systems of medicine in an integrated manner to benefit patients.

Yoga and Ayurveda: Yoga and Ayurveda are inseparable sisters. Both originate as part of a great system of Vedic knowledge. Both Yoga and Ayurveda are based upon the principles of *trigunas* (*sattva, rajas and tamas*) and the *panchamahabuthas* (earth, air, fire, water, space). Yoga and Ayurveda also encompass an understanding of how the body works (*Dosha-Dhatu-Mala*/humor-tissue-waste material theory) and the effect that food and medicines have on the body (*Rasa-Veerya-Vipaka*/taste-energy-post digestive effect concept). Yoga and Ayurveda are complimentary to each other and holistic in nature. The two have a common understanding of health of the body being dependent on the health and balance of the mind. They share virtually the same metaphysical anatomy and physiology.

which consists of 72,000 *nadis* (subtle channels), seven main *chakras* (energy centers), *panchakoshas* (five bodily sheaths) and the *kundalinishakti* (the serpent power). Ayurveda make best use of the metaphysics of Yoga, and Yoga practices to treat the patient in totality. In treatment, Ayurveda advocates the regular practice of *asana*, *pranayama* and meditation as well as the use of herbs, body purification procedures, food and chanting of mantras for physical and mental health. Yoga and Ayurveda reveal to us the secret powers of the body, breath, senses, mind and spirit. More importantly, they unfold transformational methods to work on them through proper diet, herbs, *panch-karma*, *yogasana*, *pranayama* and meditation – covering the entire range of our life style. Both recognize that keeping the body and mind healthy is vital for fulfilling the four aims of life (*Purushartha Chatusthaya*): *dharma* (duty), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire), and *moksha* (liberation) Thus, vedic medicine (Ayurveda) and spiritual practice (Yoga) work together in bringing health and harmony to both body and mind leading to self realization.

Conclusion: At present global healthcare is dominated by modern medicine. Cost of such medicine is going beyond the reach of poor and middle class people. On the other hand, communities need safe, effective, affordable and accessible healthcare. The holistic wisdom of Yoga and other ancient health systems offer the necessary wisdom, experience and capabilities that are crucial for such transformational change. The increasing use of alternative medicine not only in developing nations but also in industrialized and presumable advanced Western nations presents itself as something of an enigma. As a social phenomenon, Yoga is not well understood as a therapy or indeed much researched in terms of modern medicine. It is curious that its growth is occurring in countries where Western science and scientific method generally has accepted as the major foundations for healthcare, and “evidence-based” practice is the dominant paradigm. As medicine experiences an explosion in its knowledge base, genomic medicine opens a whole new approach to medical care. There seems to be an insatiable desire for ancient philosophies and approaches to medical care by the general public. One reason for the popularity of complementary and traditional medicine is the spiraling cost of modern allopathic medical care and associated adverse effects. New technologies have been developed at a record pace, producing many medical, surgical and diagnostic innovations, most of which are unquestionable improvements but are also very expensive that have placed them out of reach of a large segment of the population. One consequence appears to be the creation of a strong public desire for a wide range of complementary modalities to prevent and treat the full gamut of human illness, particularly non-communicable diseases. Yoga is proving to be the most desirable complimentary and traditional system of health care in the present scenario. □

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