

Managing Stress with Yoga and Meditation

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ABSTRACT

The state of the mind and that of the body are intimately related. If the mind is relaxed, the muscles in the body will also be relaxed. Stress produces a state of physical and mental tension. Yoga, developed thousands of years ago, is recognized as a form of mind-body medicine. In yoga, physical postures and breathing exercises improve muscle strength, flexibility, blood circulation and oxygen uptake as well as hormone function. In addition, the relaxation induced by meditation helps to stabilize the autonomic nervous system with a tendency towards parasympathetic dominance. Meditation is considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. During meditation the stream of jumbled thoughts are being eliminated, this process results in enhanced physical and emotional well-being. Some of the most common features in meditation include Focused attention, Relaxed breathing, quiet sitting, and acquiring comfortable position.

Keywords: *Stress, Yoga, Asana, Types of stress, Meditation, Benefits.*

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a negative consequence of modern living. In an age of highly dynamic and competitive world, man is exposed to all kinds of stressors that can affect him on all realms of life. Hans Selye (1936) first introduced the term stress into life science. The term stress is derived from the Latin word 'Stringere' which means to be drawn tight. Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life.

Stress management refers to the wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies which aim at controlling a person's level of stress especially chronic stress which is used for improving everyday functioning. In this context, the term 'stress' refers to a stress with significant negative consequences or distress rather than a stress with positive consequences.

Stress produces numerous physical and mental symptoms. They vary according to individual's situational factors which include decline in physical health and

depression. The process of stress management is the key to a happy and successful life in modern society. Although life provides numerous demands that can prove difficult to handle, stress management provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being.

Stress is often being thought of as a subjective experience but levels of stress are readily measurable by using various physiological tests, similar to those used in polygraphs. Many practical stress management techniques are available some of them are used by health professionals and others for self-help which may help an individual to reduce their levels of stress and provide positive feelings of control over one's life and promote general well-being.

Due to limited research it is very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of various stress management techniques. Consequently, the amount and quality of evidence for the various techniques vary widely. Some are accepted for effective treatments are used in psychotherapy, while others with less evidence are considered for alternative therapies. Many professional organizations

- Feeling heroic, invulnerable, euphoric
- Anxiety and fear
- Worry about safety of self and others
- Anger

help to promote and provide training in conventional or alternative therapies.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 80% of workers experience job stress. Keeley and Harcourt in their study, "Occupational Stress: A Study of the New Zealand and Reserve Bank," revealed that stress is caused by heavy work demands in the job itself, which the unskilled employee with little control over how the work is done, cannot adapt to or modify. Kulkarni, in an article "Burnout" published in *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, has said that the rapid change of the modern working life is associated with increasing demands of learning new skills, the need to adapt to new types of work, pressure of higher productivity and quality of work, time pressure, and hectic jobs. These factors are increasing stress among the workforce.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

If stressors continue for a longer period of time, chronic health problems can develop, such as:

Psychological and Emotional Symptoms

- Irritability Restlessness
- Sadness, grief, depression, moodiness
- Distressing dreams
- Guilt or "survivor guilt"

Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless

- Memory problems
- Disorientation
- Confusion
- Slowness of thinking and comprehension

Behavioral Symptoms

- Change in activity
- Decreased efficiency and effectiveness
- Difficulty communicating
- Increased sense of humor
- Change in eating habits
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Change in patterns of intimacy, sexuality

Physical Symptoms

- Increased heartbeat, respiration
- Increased blood pressure
- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea
- Change in appetite, weight loss or gain
- Sweating or chills
- Tremors (hands, lips)
- Muscle twitching
- "Muffled" hearing
- Tunnel vision

YOGA AND MEDITATION

Yoga derived from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj' or union, is a 3000-year-old discipline that was developed as part of traditional Indian medicine. It is not a religious dogma, but is simply a tool for exploring the depth of human nature or examining the mysteries of the body and mind. Yoga is now recognized as a form of mind-body medicine, because

Identification with survivors

Cognitive Symptoms

- Difficulty calculating, setting priorities, making decisions
- Limited attention span
- Unable to stop thinking about the disaster
- Blaming
- Change in job performance
- Periods of crying
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
- Social withdrawal, silence
- Vigilance about safety or environment
- Proneness to accidents

- Feeling uncoordinated
- Headaches
- Soreness in muscles
- Lower back pain
- Feeling a "lump in the throat"
- Exaggerated startle reaction
- Fatigue
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Flare-up of allergies and arthritis
- Hair loss

it promotes the integration of physical, mental and spiritual parts, of one's being, and because there is growing research to support its health benefits.

Yoga practice usually includes the use of physical postures, controlled breathing and meditation to improve overall well-being. Physical postures, known as asanas, provide a gentle workout that improves muscle strength, flexibility and body

alignment and enhances circulation as well as hormone functions. Yogic breathing known as pranayama, is a practice of controlled inhalation, exhalation and retention of breath; it provides an optimal intake of oxygen and an optimal removal of carbon dioxide.

Meditation, known as dhyana, means focusing the mind on the object of meditation. It enhances concentration by controlling the wave of thoughts and thus enables one to control one's mind. Overall, the practice of yoga cultivates emotional stability firstly by bringing involuntary muscles under the control of the mind, secondly, dissociating the mind from sensory fetters by controlling the senses thereby bridging the gap between the body and the mind, and thirdly, by completely merging the subject and the object whereby the mind loses its sense of identity, a necessary prerequisite for the liberation of soul. The Sanskrit word for soul is atman or jiva, the innermost self or spirit and is infinite, and eternal. Yoga is now practised by millions of people in the world for wellness, relaxation, and spiritual growth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pande and Naidu (1986) in their study addressed only one aspect of Yoga philosophy (effort orientation instead of

outcome orientation) and reported positive results on the stress-strain relationship.

Singh & Madhu (1987) proved favorable effects of yogic practices on short term memory and steadiness of the subjects increased after yogic practices and the anxiety and feelings of insecurity decreased.

Nagendra and Nagarathna (1988) have dealt with stress management in their book entitled, *New Perspectives in Stress Management*. According to authors, the ancient Indian science of Yoga holds the key for combating this modern menace. Coping styles or strategies may either be oriented towards avoiding stress or towards dealing with stress. (Pestonjee, 1999)15. This way Yoga helps one deal with stress in better way.

Bhole (1997) in his paper, explained hatha-yoga practices like asanas (i.e. posture), pranayama (i.e. breathing practices intended to influence vital forces), kriyas (i.e., cleaning process), mudras (i.e., certain internal attitudes) and bandhas (i.e., neuro – muscular locks) are mostly taught as physical practices. While various meditation techniques work at the mental level, all these practices are intended to develop a certain type of awareness within oneself. This in turn is expected to bring about a change in the emotional and

visceral functions and through them, a change in the intellectual and somatic functions of the individual.

Joshi, Joshi & Gokhala (1992), who reported that Pranayama leads to increase in breathe holding time and decrease respiration rate. It is also believed that practice of Kumbhaka [Breath retention] in the most of Pranayama enhance concentration & reduce anxiety.

Dr. K.N Udupa (2000) concluded in his research that stress-related disorders evolve gradually through four recognizable stages. Firstly, psychological changes such as anxiety, irritability and insomnia arise due to over stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. In the second stage symptoms such as high blood pressure, elevated heart rate and increased intestinal motility surface. In the third stage, a more profound physical or biochemical imbalance sets in, while in the final fourth stage, irreversible symptoms that often requires surgical or long term management appears.

Yardi (2001) viewed that Yoga alleviates stress, induces relaxation and provides multiple health benefits to practitioners. Commonly practised methods include controlled deep breathing, physical postures, meditation and philosophical ideas in varying proportions. The author

reviews articles related to Yoga and epilepsy, seizures, electroencephalogram (EEG) recordings, autonomic changes, neuropsychology, the limbic system, arousal, sleep, brain plasticity, motor performance, brain imaging studies and rehabilitation.

A study (Broome et al, 2005) conducted to see effect of Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique on Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), showed that meditators maintained the equilibrium under stress more effectively than non- meditators.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To study the application of yoga asana for stress relief.
2. To study the process of meditation and its relation with stress management.
3. To study the benefits of yoga and meditation in releasing stress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data and material has been collected from various books, journals and search engines on yoga and meditation for stress management. Although, the secondary data has been used for the study, the researchers have also used their experiences in yoga and meditation programs conduct in various

companies for stress release of managers and employees.

YOGA FOR STRESS RELIEF

Yoga is most Recognized form of Exercise, Stretching, Aerobic exercise and Meditation. The definition of yoga is “to yoke or joint together” it integrates the mind and body focusing on balance posture, deep breathing, stretching and relaxation. Yoga evolved from of the Hindu, Jaina, and Buddhist religious traditions in India. Yoga alters stress response and person’s attitude, towards stress along with improving self-confidence, increasing one’s sense of well-being, and creating a feeling of relaxation and calmness.

Yoga is an ancient art that is defined as the union of the soul with God. It is “a path of personal spiritual development that utilizes meditation to bring enlightenment, self-realization, and, ultimately, the attainment of God and bliss”. Originally, the ultimate

- Pranayama (breathing)
- Asana (postures)
- Yama (restraint)
- Niyama (healthy observances)

TYPES OF ASANAS(POSTURES)

They work at the chitta (subtle aspect of consciousness) level that eliminates the physical and mental tensions. They are

goal of yoga was called Samadhi, or self-realization.

Patanjali is father of the yoga around the sixth century B.C. appeared in the massive epic The Mahabharata written by sage Vyasa and containing The Bhagavad Gita. Krishna explains to Arjuna about the essence of Yoga as practiced in daily lives (‘Song of the Lord’), uses the term “yoga” extensively in a variety of ways. In addition to an entire chapter dedicated to traditional yoga practice, including meditation, it introduces three prominent types of yoga:

Karma yoga: The yoga of action

Bhakti yoga: The yoga of devotion, note Krishna had also specified devotion itself was action similar to above.

Jnana yoga: The yoga of knowledge.

Patanjali introduced -Ashtanga or Power yoga - a more demanding workout where you constantly move from one posture to another (“flow”).

The dimensions of yoga are:-

- Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal)
- Dharana (concentration)
- Dhyana (meditation)
- Samadhi (higher consciousness)

trained in supine and prone position of the body respectively. Shavasana and Makarasana, Vijrasana, Bhujangasana, Trikonasana, Virabdrasana, Pranayama, Siddhasana with Kumbhaka, Padmasana,

Yoga mudras are important relaxative asanas.

1. Vajrasana

Vajrasana is best asana of Stress & Tension and Anxiety it makes the body exceptionally strong and healthy. Vajra means Diamond in Sanskrit. During this asana, feel the sensations in the body as you move them. Do the Movement slowly and in a relaxed manner? Inhale and exhale slowly. While drawing the abdominal region inwards and expanding the chest, focus the attention on these body parts. The way the muscles move must be felt. Relax before, during and after the yoga posture.

1. With knees, ankles and big toes touching the ground, take a kneeling position.
2. One should sit on the heels and place palms on the knees.
3. The Spine should be erect and breath should be deep.
4. Draw the abdominal region inside and expand the chest.

2. The triangle pose – Trikonasana

The legs are spread apart and the body stretches to the left, moving from the pelvis and extending over the left leg. Both arms are perpendicular to the floor, the left hand on the floor, or resting on the calf or the outer ankle of the left foot, and the right hand reaching up straight. The spine is

straight, chest open, the body facing to the front.

3. The cobra pose - Bhujangasana

The pose starts from a downward facing position with hands flat on the floor below the shoulders. The spine is lengthened and the buttocks firmed as the head and chest is slowly lifted. The elbows stay close to the body and the eyes look up. The neck is kept neutral.

4. The warrior pose – Virabhadrasana

From a standing position, feet are jumped apart approximately 4 feet. Arms are raised parallel to the floor, gaze is forward. Left foot is turned 90 degrees to the left and the knee is bend (keeping the knee above the ankle).

1. Sit on the ground by spreading the legs forward.
2. Place the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh.
3. Place the hands on the knee joints.
4. Keep the body, back and head erect.
5. Eyes should be closed.
6. One can do Pranayama in this asana.

5. Siddhasana

1. Place the left heel at the anus, the terminal opening of the alimentary canal or digestive tube.
2. Keep the right heel on the root of the generative organ.
3. It should be in a way that the knees and the heels, both lie upon the other.

4. The hands must be placed on either sole of the feet. Keep the eyes half closed.

6. Breathing Exercise

Pranayama, the breathing exercise, may rejuvenate you, to carry on your work with extra energy.

1. Put your right thumb on your right nostril
2. Deeply inhale air using your left nostril
3. Close your left nostril with your right index finger and hold breath for few seconds
4. Exhale through left nostril
5. Do it similarly with left nostril closing right nostril
6. Now inhale through left nostril, hold breath and exhale through right nostril and do the other way.

7. Neck roll

Neck-roll exercises can ease tension in the neck region and normalize the situation

1. Turn the head to the right and back to normal. Then turn to the left and back to normal.
 2. Bend the head to the left as if you are pulling the left ears to the left shoulder. Then bend to the right as if pulling the right ears to the right shoulder.
 3. Rotate the neck slowly to the left and then to the right (also known as Brahma mudra)
- Depending upon the ailments, one can practice asanas.

MEDITATION AND ITS PROCESS

Meditation is that which gives you deep rest. Meditation is an activity in which the practitioner just sits and allows the mind to dissolve. In Art of Living, meditation is a simplified activity which can easily be practiced by all. *Meditation is not concentration.* It is de-concentration, says its founder, **Sri Sri Ravi Shankari.**

The rest in meditation is deeper than the deepest sleep that you can ever have. When the mind becomes free from agitation, is calm and serene and at peace, meditation happens.

PROCESS OF MEDITATION

1. Choose a clean, distraction-free spot or room in your home, though you can do it sitting in your chair at the office during lunch-hour, too! If it is at home, it is better not to use this space for any other activity.
2. Ensure the lighting is soothing and the ventilation sufficient – and the noise-levels under control.
3. You can listen to guided meditations, but it is better to start with a group.
4. **Meditate** at the same time every day, so it becomes a sustainable routine. Early morning is an optimal time.
5. Don't overdo it. Start by meditating for 10-15 minutes. Keep a timer.

6. Shut up – the cellphone. Tell your family you are on *Do Not Disturb* mode for a short spell of time, till your meditation is over.
7. And please, wear comfortable clothes, preferably of natural fabric.

IMPORTANCE OF MEDITATION

1. **Meditation** is food for the soul: it nourishes the universal values of compassion, caring and sharing, responsibility, non-violence and peacefulness. It helps us bond with others. These are important values to guide us and make us accept all of mankind as our family: more so in times when the world is being fragmented.
2. Humankind has an innate tendency to look for a joy that does not diminish, and meditation fulfills this important need.
3. Even when everything is going fine for us we often find ourselves being restless. Meditation can relax our **stress** – conscious and unconscious – and give us the **sense of comfort and stability** that every human being craves.
4. It helps us meet life's ups and downs with centeredness, *confidence* and resourcefulness. Importantly, it gives us resilience so that we can not only can we remain unshaken by storms of emotions that come in everyone's lives, but also get back on track sooner.
5. Meditation is the greatest grief-counsellor.

YOGA AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Yoga for stress management is great for work at home mother because it helps with work life balance. Research has shown that you can achieve a lot of positive benefits whenever you practice yoga on a regular basis. Some of the benefits you will gain through yoga include:

1: Unification of Body, Mind, and Spirit

The body, spirit, and mind will be united through a combination of strengthening exercises, deep breathing, and relaxation techniques. This is why yoga has been recommended for people who are suffering from a wide variety of health conditions, as it is believed that many of these conditions are either caused or exacerbated by stress.

2: Better Sleep

As with any form of exercise, there will be able to sleep better by practicing yoga. This will allow to wake up with both body and your mind feeling more refreshed.

3: Healing Powers

Decreasing stress levels, increasing positive blood flow, providing better support for immune system, you are enabling your body to be better equipped to heal itself. The body and mind will be

able to focus on regular maintenance that is necessary for good overall health.

4: Weight Loss

Since most people who work at home spend a lot of time sitting in front of their computer each day, yoga is a great, fun way to burn calories and lose weight. They will also be able to develop and tone the muscles throughout the entire body.

5: More Energy

Practice correct breathing throughout practice. Take slow, deliberate breaths—deep breath in, and a large breath out. This will not only help your lungs, but also remove lingering carbon dioxide which doesn't help your body function as effectively. More oxygen in your blood flow will give you more energy. These breathing techniques will also have a calming effect on your mind so that you can walk away feeling relaxed, at ease, and with more clarity.

6: Better Concentration

Yoga's postures are relaxing for both your body and your mind. Less stress and enhance blood flow (especially to your brain) will help in concentration, focus and clarity.

7: Resilience

In conjunction with healing powers and more energy, the consistent practice of yoga helps build strength and resilience. This will help to better equip your body in times of crisis or extreme stress.

8: Empowerment

Yoga gives the feeling of empowerment because it allows you to decipher the real from the imaginary. Stress is sometimes caused by incorrect perceived scenarios and circumstances. A break will allow to remove from the situation and transition from the panic of "what may be," to simply dealing with "what is."

9: The Relaxation Response

The meditation along with yoga creates the Alpha waves, which in turn leads to the "relaxation response." Whenever this physiological response occurs, it results in breath slower and lower heart rate, and normalize blood pressure.

It is important to understand that while yoga for stress management is very beneficial, you will still experience a low level of stress whenever you work at home. This is simply unavoidable. However, once you have practiced yoga for a while, you will be better equipped for work life balance.

MANAGING STRESS BY MEDITATION

There are **various benefits of meditation**. It is the essence of mental hygiene. Meditation is useful in developing a calm mind which reduces mental stress and brings in good concentration. As meditation clears the distortions of mind, it results in clarity of perception and communication and reduction in stress further blossoms skills and talents. Meditation connects to our inner source of energy which not only releases stress but also brings in relaxation, rejuvenation and good luck.

Meditation is the art of leading a healthy life. The art of healthy living at the level of body, mind, pranas, heart, intellect and consciousness is taught in self-meditation. Meditation will eliminate your false beliefs. The capacity for taking creative and firm decisions will be developed. The meditation will turn your ego to arham.

Meditation is the science of improving our present because meditation is absolute non-lethargy, absolute awareness. Meditation will attach you with yourself. The lamp of awareness is brightly lit within you in the meditation.

Meditation is an instrument of freedom from tensions, desires and diseases. Meditation gives an infinite space for positive thinking. Meditation is the art of becoming a leader.

CONCLUSIONS

Yoga is said to be a complete science, as it fulfills the WHO's definition of health by addressing the individual at all physical, psychological, and social levels. Stress affects individuals of all age groups, and people of all sectors and occupations, including doctors. Though many modalities of treatments are available for reducing stress, people are trying to find an alternative to be relieved from stress without medications. Yogic science, having persisted for 5000 years and known to be spiritual for many years, is now being proven through scientific studies to have significant benefits on health.

Yogic science includes yogasanas (postures), pranayama (breathing practices), dhyana (meditation), and relaxation techniques which benefit human beings at every level. Through research studies, yoga has proven effective in many physical and psychological ailments. Apart from the management of diseased condition, it also has been proven to improve the positive health and quality of life of the healthy. Most importantly, yoga is also a strong practice for the prevention against painful ailments.

Being doctors, we think that we are healthy, though affected by enormous stress, and we

tend to neglect due to our busy schedule. This is occupational stress that does not spare even doctors. As doctors are already aware of the prolonged stress and its physical and mental effects, it is very important that one knows how to manage stress and protect their positive health. In this regard, even doctors can start practicing yoga that has been scientifically proven to reduce stress and improve positive health, and thereby can also advise patients to overcome their problems.

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