

YOGA: FIGHT STRESS AND FIND SERENITY

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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. It can disturb any one's physical, mental, emotional and behavioral balance. Yoga, developed thousands of years ago, is recognized as a form of mind-body medicine. Physical postures and breathing exercises improve muscle strength, flexibility, blood circulation and oxygen uptake as well as hormone function. Yoga will help man to perform all of his duties in harmony with the laws of nature and the sentiments and conventions of society. It is necessary to do exercises regularly to balance the body functions, strengthen the body parts and to regularize the functioning of all 'systems'.

Keywords: Stress, Symptoms of stress, Yoga, Benefits of yoga

INTRODUCTION

Stress is the “wear and tear” our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment. It has physical and emotional effects on us and can create positive or negative feelings. As a positive influence, stress can compel us to action. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of disruption, rejection, anger, and depression which in turn can lead to health problems such as headache, upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Stress is the body's automatic response to any physical or mental demand placed on it. It is subjective and unpleasant feeling of distress. Every one of us irrespective of our age, sex, education, occupation, socio-economic status, whether live in rural or urban area face stress. Stress effect body, mind, behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently.

When we are in stress our nervous system respond by releasing a flood of stress hormone. This hormone stimulates the body for emergency action by “fight-flight or freeze” reaction also known as stress response. The agent which causes stress is known as ‘stressors’. Stress causes many harmful effect on the body such as, Physical impact - Weight gain/loss, Unexpected hair loss, Heart palpitations, High blood pressure, Digestive symptoms (such as dryness of mouth,

flatulence, nausea, butterfly stomach)etc. Emotional negative effect includes Mood swing, Anxiety, Can lead to depression & unhealthy coping strategies (i.e. alcohol, drugs).

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.

The symptoms of stress include:

1. Change of facial expression and bodily postures
2. Withdrawal from social relationships
3. Low task performance (sometimes its opposite also manifests i.e. high productivity but which is highly detrimental for our physical and mental health)
4. Impediment of speech
5. Sighs & continuous fidgeting Nervous laughter

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

Yoga improves attention and emotional control as well as affects the nervous system, making the parasympathetic nervous system more dominant and stabilizing the autonomic nervous system to enhance resistance to the effect of stress. Yoga practices including asan's, slow breathing, meditation, increases activation of P.N.S. & leads to mental relaxation. Yoga is a way of improving our self & understanding our internal state.

Asanas

When we are in a constant state of stress, our minds are tense, our bodies are tense and our sympathetic nervous system is heightened. Specific yoga poses can induce the relaxation response in the body. Calming and restorative poses along with controlled breathing activate the parasympathetic nervous system, bringing the mind and body to a calm and relaxed state.

Some Asanas that help in stress management:

1. Tadasana (Mountain Pose):

It helps you improve your concentration levels by increasing your focus level.

- Stand straight with your feet flat on the mat with the heels slightly spaced out and big toes touching each other. Keep your spine straight while hands straight on either side, with palms facing the thighs.
- Slowly stretch your hands and bring your palms together.
- Inhale deeply and stretch your spine while taking the folded hands up above your head. Stretch as much as possible.
- Slowly lift your ankle and stand on your toes, with eyes facing the ceiling.
- Hold the position for a minimum of 30 seconds, while breathing normally.
- Slowly relax your body and bring your feet back to the floor.

2. Balasana (Child Pose):

This helps you to relax completely, like a child. In this pose, you curl up like a foetus.

- Sit on your knees with your palms facing the floor on either side of the body.
- As you inhale, bring your whole body forward in such a way that only the forehead touches the floor.
- Stay in the position for a minimum of 30 seconds, while breathing normally. The longer you stay, the more relaxed you will feel.
- Slowly lift your forehead and stretch your body back to Vajrasana (Diamond pose).

3. Padmasana (Lotus Pose):

This pose is commonly used during meditation and helps to increase the self-awareness levels. The pose helps you to calm down and soothes your mind.

- Sit cross legged. The left feet should be on right thigh and vice versa, while the soles face up.
- Keep the spine erect.
- Keep the hands in Gyan mudra.
- Close your eyes and while inhaling and exhaling deeply, maintain the pose for a minimum of 30 seconds.

4. Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose):

This is one of the 12 phases of Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation). Along with energizing the body and offering relief from indigestion problems, the pose is known to relax your body. Thus, it is an ideal asana for obtaining relief from stress.

- Stand straight with your feet flat on the mat. Keep your spine straight while hands straight on either side, with palms facing the thighs.
- While breathing normally, bend forward, and place the palms in front of you on the mat. The head should face down.

- Slowly stretch your legs backwards, one at a time, while maintaining the balance, in such a way that the feet and hands are in line with each other.
- Make sure that the elbows are straight and fingers are spread out.
- Inhale deeply and tuck in your stomach completely.
- Hold the position, while breathing normally, with tummy tucked in for about 30 seconds to 60 seconds.
- Exhaling slowly, come back to the standing pose.

5. **Savasana (Corpse Pose):**

Relax yourself completely with this pose. If you do not have time for any other yoga asanas, you can practice this. It brings your breathing to normal levels, and thus, helps to soothe down stress levels.

- Lie down in supine position.
- Close your eyes.
- Slump your body in such a way that it looks lifeless.
- Let go of everything and experience the serenity as your body weight shifts away from you completely.
- Maintain the position until you feel light and relaxed.

This pose helps you do away with fatigue and fills your mind with an amazingly intense calmness.

Pranayam

Pranayama encourages slow and rhythmic breathing practices that help us take sufficient amount of oxygen that re-energizes our body. In the process, we tend to let go of our negative emotions, thus, making ourselves free from negative emotions.

Yoga offers a number of breathing techniques for stress relief. These breathing techniques are called pranayama. Pranayama comprises of various ways of inhaling, exhaling and breath retention. This breath is inter-linked with consciousness, both at the cosmic and individual levels. Pranayama creates a synergy between the self-energizing life force and individual mind-body-spirit by scientific regulation of prana.

Some Pranayamas that help in stress management :

1. Anulom Vilom Pranayama

To practice the Anuloma viloma pranayama just follow these simple *steps*:

1. Sit in a position, close the eyes and settle down.
2. With the right thumb close the right nostril.
3. Inhale slowly through the left nostril until the maximum capacity.
4. Hold your breath (Not for beginners, hypertension and asthma people).
5. With the right hand's middle and ring fingers close the left nostril.
6. Release the right thumb and exhale slowly.
7. Now inhale through right nostril.
8. Hold the breath.
9. Exhale through left nostril.

Sheetali Pranayama (cooling breath)

To practice Sheetali Pranayama just follow these simple *steps*:

0. Sit in any comfortable meditation posture.
1. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

2. Extend the tongue outside the mouth as far as possible without strain. Roll the sides of the tongue up so that it forms a tube. Practise a long, smooth and controlled inhalation through the rolled tongue.
3. At the end of inhalation, draw the tongue in, close the mouth and exhale through the nose.
4. Practise yogic breathing throughout.
5. The breath should produce a sucking sound.
6. A feeling of icy coldness will be experienced on the tongue and the roof of the mouth. This is one round.

Bhramari Pranayama (humming bee breath)

To practice the Bhramari Pranayama just follow these simple *steps*:

- Sit in a comfortable meditation asana, preferably padmasana or siddha/siddha yoni asana with hands resting on the knees in joana or chin mudra.
- Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
- The lips should remain gently closed with the teeth slightly separated throughout the practice. This allows the sound vibration to be heard and felt more distinctly.
- Raise the arms sideways and bend the elbows, bringing the hands to the ears. Use the index or middle finger to plug the ears or the flaps of the ears may be pressed without inserting the fingers.
- Bring awareness to the centre of the head, where ajna chakra is located, and keep the body absolutely still. Inhale through the nose.
- Exhale slowly and in a controlled manner while making a deep, steady humming sound like that of the black bee. The humming should be smooth, even and continuous for the duration of the exhalation. The sound should be soft and mellow, making the front of the skull reverberate. At the end of exhalation, the

hands can be kept steady or returned to the knee and then raised again for the next round.

- The inhalation and exhalation should be smooth and controlled. This is one round.

Benefits of Yoga

Mental calmness

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. The emphasis yoga places on being in the moment can also help relieve stress, as you learn not to dwell on past events or anticipate the future. You will leave a yoga class feeling less stressed than when you started. Read more about yoga for stress management [here](#).

Body awareness

Doing yoga will give you an increased awareness of your own body. You are often called upon to make small, subtle movements to improve your alignment. Over time, this will increase your level of comfort in your own body. This can lead to improved posture and greater self-confidence.

Conclusion

Stress is an integral part of the natural fabric of life. Some of it occurs because we try to do too much in the time available and some of difficulties with interpersonal relationships either at home or at work. Stress is currently defined in at least two different ways. It refers to

the dangerous, potentially harmful or unpleasant external situations and, secondly to the internal thoughts, judgements, emotional states and physiological processes that are evoked by stressful stimuli. Stress can be either temporary or long lasting. Due to heavy stress that affects the physical and psychological aspects of the human being, one should think positively and adopt the right ways of resolving the stress-related problems. Yoga, pranayama, physical exercises, physical relaxations etc. are the important techniques that are to be followed to manage stress. Yoga will help man to perform all of his duties in harmony with the laws of nature and the sentiments and conventions of society. It is necessary to do exercises regularly to balance the body functions, strengthen the body parts and to regularize the functioning of all 'systems'. Exercises strengthen the muscles and normalize the activities of the endocrine glands. Rest and relaxation helps to prevent heart trouble and brings down blood-pressure. It also reduces mental stress and tension and body becomes energized.

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