

## **Yoga: A Transformative Approach to Enhancing Human Health**

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### **Abstract**

Yoga has the power to transform people's lives. Over the past few decades, it has been the focus of research aimed at curing contemporary epidemic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, coronary heart disease, mental stress, hypertension, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Certain studies found that yoga was effective in these situations. This implies that yoga can be used to treat certain symptoms or instances as a nonpharmaceutical intervention or as a substitute for medication therapy. This article reviews research on yoga's potential to transform people's lives. The limbs, asana, and pranayama are also properly covered. Additionally, this article discusses how that aids in resolving health issues.

**Keywords:** Asana, yoga, lifestyle, health, hypertension, and meditation, CAD, heart health, anxiety, depression

### **Introduction**

The word Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word "Yuj" meaning to yoke, join or unite. This implies joining or integrating all aspects of the individual – body with mind and mind with soul – to achieve a happy, balanced and useful life, and spiritually, uniting the individual with the supreme. In India, Yoga is considered one of the six branches of classical philosophy and is referred to throughout the Vedas – ancient Indian scriptures and amongst the oldest texts in existence. The Upanishads are also broadly philosophical treatises which postdate the Vedas and deal with the nature of the "soul" and universe. The true meaning of the term "yoga," which is "controlling mental changes" and "communion with the

universal," shows how much value it places on mental and spiritual well-being, which goes beyond bodily well-being<sup>1</sup>. However, yoga has been practiced since before the Vedic era. Before 2500–3000 years ago, the renowned Sage Patanjali organized the practical and theoretical aspects of yoga into a systematic framework. The majority of these concepts came from Vedic and Samkhya philosophy<sup>2</sup>.

During Sage Patanjali's time, physical postures, or asanas, were practiced, but they were not given much weight because meditation was the main focus. As a result, just a few postures that were suitable for meditation alone were incorporated into their spiritual practices. There isn't even a single named asana in any of the Patanjali yoga sutras. Since it is somewhat easier to concentrate on motions rather than simply the thoughts, Patanjali's followers tried to modify yoga techniques by adding more physical components. The objective of "controlling mental alterations" remained the same as one of the scaffolds with physical postures, even though the term "asanas" added more physical elements. This is clear from the way the asanas are performed (slow with synchronized breathing and mindful knowledge of motions), in contrast to other physical activities. From a conceptual standpoint, the eight limbs of Patanjali Yoga clearly represent a hierarchical (albeit not necessarily sequential) pattern of methodically growing consciousness from the gross to the subtle level<sup>3</sup>. The primary goal of yoga is self-realization, which is achieved via intense practice of the eight rungs. Yoga is a holistic method of living that leads to a state of complete bodily, social, mental, and spiritual well-being as well as harmony with nature, according to an analytical analysis of its rungs and goal. This is in contrast to modern civilization's sole focus on

material and financial progress. Environmental damage and social discontent have resulted from this.

## Method

The method employed in this study was a methodical examination of the literature on yoga as a treatment for anxiety. The reviews that followed were as follows: (a) published in English; (b) published within the previous 20 years; (c) incorporate yoga in its entirety or in part; (d) employ any design for quantitative research; and (e) assess the impact of anxiety. Yoga has been used to treat a variety of conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, depression, hypertension, and overweight. For the current study, these articles were reviewed.

## Search strategy Databases

An online database search includes the Cochrane Library, PubMed, and Scopus databases. Additionally, looking for websites, conferences, yoga schools, and references from found publications. Online search terms and limitations: The free-text conditions "yoga," "effect/pathway," "clinical effect," and "review: yoga" are used in a brief, methodical search.

## Results

### What is Yoga

"Yoga" refers to the merging of our personal consciousness with the Universal Divine Consciousness in a super conscious condition called Samadhi. Yoga is a traditional Eastern practice that includes both breathing techniques (pranayamas) and physical postures (asanas). Additionally, there is a cognitive component that emphasizes focus and meditation as a means of achieving the goal of spiritual and self-union. Numerous empirical research have found that yoga significantly affects a variety of characteristics of both physical and psychological functioning. The methods outlined in the yoga sutras were employed as early as 3000 BCE,

according to archeological evidence and other writings. The date may be even earlier, according to oral tradition. Yoga sutras have traditionally been taught verbally to students by knowledgeable instructors. According to scholarly estimates, Patanjali, who flourished between 400 BCE and 200 AD, systematized and composed these sutras.<sup>4</sup> According to Patanjali, yoga consists of eight steps or limbs, each of which is equally vital and interconnected as a component of the total. Self-realization or discriminative enlightenment are the goals of these eight limbs<sup>5</sup>. However, the focus here will be on health benefits. The eight yoga limbs or steps are as follows<sup>4,5</sup>

1. Yama: Codes of restraint, abstinences, self-regulations
2. Niyama: self-training, Observances, practices,
3. Asana: Posture of meditation
4. Pranayama: breath and prana expansion, regulation, control
5. Pratyahara: Withdrawal of the senses, bringing inward
6. Dharana: Concentration
7. Dhyana: Meditation
8. Samadhi: Deep absorption, meditation in its higher state, the state of perfected concentration

### **The 5 Yamas**

The Yamas are primarily concerned with the world around us and our interaction with it. By considering these aspects in our daily practice on and off the yoga mat, all of our decisions and actions come from a more considered, aware and 'higher' place, and this enables us to become more authentic towards ourselves and others.

#### **1. Ahimsa (non-violence)**

Ahimsa can be interpreted as: not physically harming others, ourselves, or nature; not thinking negative

thoughts about others or ourselves; and making sure that what we do and how we do it is done in harmony, rather than causing harm.

#### **2. Satya (truthfulness)**

Satya is truthfulness, but it's more than just telling the truth. The word 'sat' literally translates as 'true essence' or 'unchangeable'. Our thoughts, emotions and moods are interchangeable, yet these are the things that create our own truth. In yoga we work on creating a little space so that we can realise that we are not just our thoughts.

#### **3. Asteya (non-stealing)**

Asteya means 'non-stealing', but like the other Yamas and Niyamas, it means so much more than. It arises from the Vritti (thoughts/fluctuations of the mind) - 'I'm not good enough' or 'I don't have enough'. It arises from the lack of faith in ourselves. The word yoga means 'to yoke', 'unite', 'connect', or essentially to become 'whole', so by practicing each aspect of yoga on and off the mat, we can move further towards feeling as though we already have enough, and we already are enough within ourselves.

#### **4. Brahmacharya (moderation of the senses/right use of energy)**

Brahmacharya is often translated as 'celibacy' - and is often considered irrelevant in our modern culture. The word Brahmacharya actually translates as 'behaviour which leads to Brahman'. Brahman is thought of as 'the creator' in Hinduism and yogic terms. So Brahmacharya can be seen as 'right use of energy'. It refers to directing our energy away from external desires and instead, towards finding peace and happiness within ourselves.

#### **5. Aparigraha (non-greed)**

Aparigraha - 'non-greed', 'non-possessiveness', and 'non-attachment'. This important Yama teaches us to

take only what we need, keep only what serves us in the moment and to let go when the time is right.

### **The five niyamas**

The five niyamas deal with our hidden inner world and are self-training techniques. These are methods of self-training for the body, senses, and mind. The five niyamas are as follows:

**Shaucha:** Purity and cleanliness of the body and psyche. It results in self-realization potential, pleasure, mastery of the senses, and cleansing of the subtle mental essence.

**Santosha:** Satisfied or at ease with your current situation. It offers satisfaction and delight from within.

**Tapah:** Ascesis, or training of the senses, results in the eradication of mental impurities and the consequent mastery of the body and the mental organs of senses and deeds.

**Svadhyaya:** scriptural study, introspection, and self-study. This leads to a state of communion with the underlying natural truth.

**Ishvarapranidhana:** Give yourself over to the ultimate source. That aids in achieving the state of samadhi, or intense focus. (Asana) Spend a lot of time meditating in body-fitting positions. Every posture, including the face, neck, and chest, needs to be aligned. Additionally, one can meditate while in a solid, comfortable, and immobile posture. It is achieved by letting focus blend with the infinite and relaxing attention or effort to sit in such a specific posture. Pranayama Pranayama can be practiced calmly by practicing breath control and being conscious of breathing (raising/decreasing) optimization strategies. As said earlier, the primary goal of the eight yoga techniques is self-realization. However, Yamas practice would help to boost social health by strengthening internal links. Instead of relying on outside oversight, which is undoubtedly not always possible, it helps to

establish a community where there is self-regulation in avoiding harm to others and maintaining honesty. Natural resource conservation is motivated by asteya and aparigraha. Their strategy will ensure that everyone has access to these instruments. Through self-training techniques, the five niyamas assist us cope with our unique inner worlds and promote mental wellness.

The primary goal of meditation is "self-realization or association of self-consciousness with the ultimate awareness," which is an ideal suggested to humanity in contrast to sheer financial and social expansion as an aim of modern civilization.

Yama, Niyama: Asana Behavioral Level; Pranayama: Physical Level Dharana, Prathyahara: Mental Level Samadhi-Spiritual Level, Dhyana Therefore, unlike exercise, the goal of yoga was to achieve happiness (peace) rather than just wellbeing (health).

### **Effects of yogic practices on various health problems- Depression, Stress and Anxiety**

Both prevention and the treatment of symptoms brought on by stress benefit from yoga. According to the systematic research, patients who regularly use yoga as a life-changing technique report excellent outcomes. Positive outcomes are seen in the case of obsessive-compulsive disorder.<sup>6</sup> In their assessment of "Yoga for anxiety," Kirkwood G. et al. showed that following the introduction of yoga into patients' lives, positive effects on depression disorder were also noted. It ends with five randomized controlled trials that ranged in severity from mild to series and used different kinds of yoga techniques. Every study produced positive outcomes<sup>7,8</sup>. Another study demonstrated significant reductions in depression, anger and frustration, anxiety, and neurotic symptoms in patients using antidepressants but only in partial remission. The study supports yoga's potential as

an additional treatment for depression. In this particular study, 27 women and 10 men participated; 17 of them finished the intervention and provided pre- and post-intervention assessment data. The findings show that moods improved from before to after the yoga classes. Given its affordability and ease of adoption, yoga appears to be a promising treatment for depression. It produces numerous beneficial mental, psychological, and bodily effects, as supported by the results of this study<sup>9</sup>. In another study, a supervised potential non-randomized investigation was conducted on 24 self-referred women (average age of 30 to 38 years) who believed they were mentally ill. One of two following three-month yoga programs was offered. It has been demonstrated that yoga reduces stress, anxiety, and salivary cortisol<sup>10,11</sup>. In a different study conducted by Smith C. et al., 131 individuals with mild to moderate stress levels were chosen from South Australian society. They saw that following the 10-week intervention tension, anxiety and live performance improved with time. Yoga has been found to be equally effective in reducing stress, anxiety, and improving health<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, a study was carried out to determine the direct cardiovascular effects of sukha pranayama in hypertensive individuals. For the study, twenty-three hypertensive subjects undergoing Yoga OPD at JIPMER were selected and instructed to perform sukha pranayama for five minutes at a pace of six breaths per minute. In this pranayama, mindful, deep, and smooth breaths of comparable duration are inhaled and exhaled. Heart rate (HR) and blood pressure were measured both prior to and immediately following the procedure. The statistical post-intervention assessment revealed a significant ( $p < .05$ ) reduction in heart rate and a highly significant ( $p < .001$ ) reduction in blood pressure,

systolic pressure, average arterial pressure, and rate-pressure product. It has been discovered that performing sukha pranayama for five minutes at a tempo of six breaths per minute helps lower blood pressure and heart rate in hypertensive patients. Therefore, yoga also helps people recover from depression.<sup>13</sup> 39 cohort studies, 30 non-randomized, monitored tests (NRCTs), 48 randomized, controlled trials (RCTs), and 3 case reports involving a maximum of 6693 patients, ranging from 1 week to 4 years, were found in all documented yoga and HPT research, according to a systematic review by Jain S.C. et al. The majority of studies showed that yoga effectively reduced blood pressure in both normotensive and hypertensive groups. Clinical guidelines should incorporate yoga as an effective alternative treatment for HPT, according to these studies<sup>14</sup>. Changes in brain waves and lower cortisol levels observed during yoga poses may be linked to the decreased depression. In one study, regular yoga practice led to decreased cortisol and increased alpha waves, a sign of improved calm.<sup>15</sup>

### **Overweight and Obesity**

Overweight and obesity are high risk factors for diabetes, hypertension, and ischemic heart disease. Yoga was found to be helpful in controlling obesity. Body weight, body mass index (BMI), and waist-to-hip ratio decreased after three months of asanas and pranayama instruction with a yoga instructor for one hour each day in the morning. In one study, 44 patients with simple type 2 diabetes who were between the ages of 40 and 55 and had had the disease for one to ten years were chosen by Balaji P.A. et al. Each team consisted of 22 patients, who were divided into test and control groups. For three consecutive months, the test group (T1 and T2) received one hour of morning instruction from the yoga instructor. The findings indicated a significant decline in

metabolic parameters, with  $p < 0.001$  in FBS of both the T1 and T2 sub groups<sup>16</sup>.

### Hypertension

Medical personnel treated 33 hypertension patients from the Government General Hospital in Pondicherry, ages 35 to 65. Systolic and diastolic blood pressure, pulse rate, and body weight were the four variables that were looked at. Three groups were formed from the participants. The physician of the aforementioned hospital received medical therapy from exp. group-II, the control group did not participate in any of the stimuli for treatment, and exp. Group-I practiced yoga. For a total of eleven weeks, yoga was practiced for one hour every day, both in the morning and the evening. It has been found that regular yoga practice helps hypertensive people control their blood pressure<sup>17</sup>. Hypertension is the most common non-communicable disease that causes important morbidity / mortality due to problems of the cardiac, cerebrovascular and renal system. Yoga has been discovered to have a significant antihypertensive influence, along with biofeedback, relaxation, psychotherapy and transcendental meditation<sup>18</sup>. A total of twenty-five patients with vital hypertension were examined. Twenty of them received no antihypertensive medication therapy (Group A); five additional antihypertensive medications were to be taken prior to their inclusion in the study (Group B). These patients have been shown how to do "Shavasana" correctly and given instructions. Shavasana treatment continued for six months. There was a statistically significant decrease in both groups' mean diastolic and systolic blood pressure. Additionally, the amount of antihypertensive medication given to group B patients has significantly decreased. Shavasana alone was able to lower blood pressure in 65% of Group A patients without the need

for medication. Patients' blood pressure rose significantly to pre-Shavasana level after quitting yoga. As a result, the use of yoga (Shavasana) in the treatment of hypertension may significantly lower the need for antihypertensive medications and, in certain cases, eliminate them entirely<sup>19</sup>. Hence, Yoga has been useful to patients with mild to moderate hypertension<sup>20</sup>. For the past three months, yoga has been regularly practiced for an hour. By the end of the trial, participants' personal well-being and quality of life had improved, and their blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol, and triglycerides had decreased. who, after practicing yoga for 20 weeks, had lower resting systolic and diastolic blood pressure<sup>21</sup>.

### Conclusion

In addition to giving therapeutic advantages as a stand-alone or supplemental treatment for a variety of physical and neuropsychiatric illnesses, yoga has significant positive effects on people's mental health. Permanent enjoyment is likely to follow, followed by more desires and, finally, satisfaction. It restores health from stressful lives brought on by excessive competitiveness and pressure to meet extremely high goals. It also offers adequate sleep and social justice. Therefore, it can be said that practicing yoga is a crucial instrument for all aspects of health, including spiritual, physical, social, and mental. It also promotes harmony with nature and aids in environmental preservation.

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