

The Healing Power of Yoga

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Abstract:

Yoga is a powerful and helpful practice for people. For the past few decades, researchers have been studying yoga to see how it can help with modern health problems like high blood pressure, stress, being overweight, heart disease, diabetes and breathing issues. Many studies have shown that yoga gives good results in these health problems. This means yoga can be used as a natural method or along with medicines to treat these conditions. This article looks at how yoga can bring positive changes in a person's life. It also explains the different parts of yoga like poses (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama) and other limbs of yoga in a clear and simple way. It also shows how these practices can help solve many health problems.

Keywords: Healing, Hypertension, Mental stress, Obesity.

Introduction:

Yoga means controlling thoughts in the mind and joining with the universal spirit, which shows its focus on mental and spiritual health along with physical health. Yoga has been practiced since before the Vedic period. Sage Patanjali brought together the practical and theoretical parts of yoga into an organized form about 2500 to 3000 years ago, mainly using ideas from Samkhya and Vedic philosophy. During Patanjali's time, physical postures (asanas) were used, but they were not the main focus. The main aim was meditation, so only a few postures helpful for meditation were included. In fact, none of the asanas are named in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras. Later, other sages added more physical practices to yoga because it is often easier to focus on the body than the mind. Still, the aim remained to control mental changes using the body as a support. Asanas are different from normal exercises—they are done slowly, with controlled breathing and awareness. Patanjali's eight steps of yoga show a

clear path to grow awareness from the outer level to the inner level. Practicing all eight steps deeply leads to self-realization, which is the true goal of yoga.

The Five Yamas:

The five yamas are moral rules, self-controls, and ways to manage our behavior with others and the world around us. They apply to our thoughts, words, and actions. The five yamas are:

1. **Ahimsa**- Not hurting others in any way, staying peaceful and kind.
2. **Satya**– Being truthful and speaking honestly.
3. **Asteya** – Not stealing or even wishing for things that don't belong to you. It also means using only what you truly need from nature, because taking more than necessary can affect others who also need those resources.
4. **Brahmacharya** – Living with full awareness of truth and the divine. It means focusing on spiritual life and often leads to celibacy.
5. **Aparigraha** – Not being greedy or overly attached to things. It means letting go of desires and not clinging to possessions or sense pleasures.

The Five Niyamas:

The five niyamas are personal practices for self-discipline that deal with the inner world—body, senses, and mind. These help in training oneself. The five niyamas are:

1. **Shaucha** – Cleanliness and purity of the body and mind. It leads to mental clarity, joy, control over the senses, and the ability to realize the self.
2. **Santosha** – Being content with what is available in the present moment. It brings inner happiness and peace.
3. **Tapah** – Removal of mental impurities and gaining control over the body and senses through discipline.
4. **Svadyaya** – Study of the self and sacred texts. This leads to a deeper connection with the true nature of reality.

5. **Ishvara Pranidhana** – Surrender to the highest power, which helps in reaching deep concentration (samadhi).

→ **Asana**

Practice of steady and comfortable body postures for meditation. The face, neck, and chest should be in a straight line. The posture should be still, easy to hold, and reached by relaxing effort, allowing the mind to settle.

→ **Pranayama**

Practice of controlling the breath. With awareness of the rise and fall of breathing, it is done calmly to improve inner peace and focus.

Compared to the focus on financial and social growth in modern civilization, the main goal of meditation is "self-realization" or connecting self-awareness with higher consciousness. Yama and Niyama – Behavioral Level, Asana – Physical Level, Pranayama – Physical Level, Pratyahara and Dharana – Mental Level, Dhyana and Samadhi – Spiritual Level. Thus, the purpose of yoga is to achieve happiness (peace) rather than just wellness (health), unlike regular physical exercise.

Impact of Yoga on Mental and Cardiovascular Health:

Yoga is effective in preventing and treating stress-related symptoms. Studies show positive outcomes when yoga is practiced regularly, including for conditions like obsessive-compulsive disorder. Kirkwood G. et al., in a review on yoga for anxiety, found improvements in both anxiety and depression across five randomized trials using different yoga methods. Another study showed that patients on antidepressants experienced reduced depression, anger, anxiety, and neurotic symptoms after adding yoga. Out of 37 participants, 17 completed full assessments and showed mood improvement post-intervention. In a study on 24 women (aged 30–38) who felt mentally unwell, a 3-month yoga program led to decreased anxiety, stress, and salivary cortisol. Smith C. et al. studied 131 individuals with mild to moderate stress in South Australia and found reduced anxiety and improved daily function after a 10-week yoga program. A separate study at JIPMER evaluated *Sukha Pranayama* (slow breathing) in 23 hypertensive patients. Practicing for 5 minutes at 6 breaths per minute led to significant reductions in heart rate and blood pressure. A systematic review by Jain S.C. included 120

studies (cohort, NRCTs, RCTs, case reports) with over 6,600 subjects, showing consistent reductions in blood pressure in both normal and hypertensive individuals. Yoga's effect on depression is also linked to increased alpha brain waves (relaxation) and decreased cortisol levels observed during practice.

Impact of Yoga on overweight and obesity:

Being overweight or obese increases the chances of developing conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Research suggests that yoga can be an effective way to manage body weight. A regular routine of yoga postures and breathing exercises, practiced daily for one hour over a three-month period, has been linked to reductions in weight, body mass index (BMI), and waist-to-hip ratio. In a study conducted by Balaji P.A. and colleagues, 44 individuals with type 2 diabetes (ages 40–55) were divided into two groups: one received yoga training, and the other served as a control. The yoga group followed a daily one-hour morning session for three months. Results showed a significant drop in fasting blood sugar levels and other metabolic indicators, highlighting yoga's potential as a supportive practice in managing diabetes and obesity.

Effect of Yoga on Hypertension:

A study involving 33 individuals with hypertension (ages 35–65) at a government hospital in Pondicherry assessed the impact of yoga on blood pressure, pulse rate, and body weight. Participants were divided into three groups: Group I received yoga training, Group II was treated with medication, and the control group received no intervention. The yoga group practiced for one hour twice daily over an 11-week period. Results showed that regular yoga practice helped lower both systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Hypertension, a leading non-communicable disease-causing serious heart, brain and kidney issues, has been shown to improve through yoga techniques. These practices, alongside methods like biofeedback, relaxation therapy, and meditation, have a notable antihypertensive effect. A study observed 25 patients with essential hypertension. Twenty of them (Group A) were not on any blood pressure medication, while the remaining five (Group B) were already taking antihypertensive drugs. All participants were taught and guided to practice *Shavasana* regularly over a six-month period.

Results showed a significant reduction in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure in both groups. Notably, 65% of the participants in Group A were able to control their blood pressure through *Shavasana* alone, without the need for medication. In Group B, the dosage of antihypertensive drugs was significantly reduced. However, when patients stopped practicing yoga, their blood pressure returned to previous levels. Other studies also support these findings. Individuals with mild to moderate hypertension who practiced yoga for one hour daily over three months showed lowered blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels, along with improvements in overall well-being. In another study, people at risk of high systolic and diastolic pressure saw reductions after a 20-week yoga program. This suggests that yoga, especially *Shavasana*, can play a valuable role in managing hypertension and may reduce the need for medication in some cases.

Conclusion:

Yoga offers significant benefits for improving mental well-being and serves as an effective therapy, either alone or alongside medical treatment, for various physical and psychological conditions. It helps individuals recover from stress caused by competitive and demanding lifestyles, promotes lasting inner peace, and encourages emotional balance. Yoga also supports social harmony and adequate rest. Overall, it plays a vital role in enhancing all aspects of health—spiritual, physical, mental, and social—while also fostering a sense of connection with nature and promoting environmental awareness.

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