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HEALING AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES NATURALLY THROUGH YOGA

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Abstract

Yoga is an integral part of Indian culture. Yoga can be simply described as, 'A Journey Back to Health'. Yoga poses and meditation can be extremely helpful to cure many of the autoimmune diseases. The immune system protects the body from disease and infection, but in the condition of autoimmune disorder, the same immune system hits normal healthy cells by mistake. An autoimmune disease is a pathological condition where the body's immune system attacks the normal tissues of the body. There are more than 80 types of autoimmune disorders, some generally found diseases include Rheumatoid Arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis, Lupus, Psoriasis, pernicious anemia, vitiligo, Addison's disease, Hashimoto's disease, and type 1 diabetes, etc.

Stress is found to be one of the main causes of autoimmune diseases. Yoga brings inner peace and a sense of calmness, this helps in reducing the stress hormone thus decrease stress level. Regular Yogic practices shown to increase body immunity enhance oxygenated blood flow into various body parts and release toxins from the body. Pranayama, Dharana, Dhyana and many yogic poses like Kapalabhati, Yoga Nidra Savasana, etc are extremely beneficial for naturally

treating diseases. This study focuses on the restoration of health and fitness through Yoga for dealing with the challenging and stressful modern-day life.

Keywords: Yoga, Autoimmune disorders, Stress, Immunity, Meditation.

Introduction

In India Yoga is practiced since ancient times and has its roots in Hindu religion. The term “yoga” comes from the Sanskrit “yuj,” referred for “yoke” or “union.” It is believed that the aim of “yoga” is uniting the mind, body, and spirit (Meyer et al., 2012). Yoga includes three components namely: *asanas* (postures), *pranayama* (breathing exercises), and *dhyana* (meditation) (Kirkwood et al., 2005).

Awareness of health and fitness has significantly increased the interest in yoga in the western world (McCall, 2007). It is now widely exercised in fitness centers, clubs, schools and colleges throughout the globe.

AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES

Autoimmune diseases can be triggered by a variety of factors, to name a few are the infection, genetic tendency and the emotional status of the patient. In the busy and stressful modern-day life, health maintenance is always at risk. The stress is found to be the root cause of all non-communicative diseases. All the studies suggest that reducing stress is a key component of a successful treatment program. The yogic practices relax the mind and body, calmness impact brain and immunity in a positive way, therefore considered as the most favorable and safe approach to manage stress and stress-related diseases.

HEALTH BENEFITS IN CLINICAL POPULATIONS

Yogic references suggest that yoga enhance positive energy, happiness, social relationships, and manage sleep and weight (Ross et al., 2013). Researches have revealed that yoga is connected with down-regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis as well as the sympathetic nervous system (Ross and Thomas, 2010). The potential benefit of yoga for improvements in mood, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, pain, and a decrease in pain-related disability is evident (Bussing et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2009). The impact of yoga in adults with 13 chronic health conditions has been studied (McCall et al., 2013).

YOGA FOR SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS

The systemic lupus erythematosus is an autoimmune disease mainly found in Africans, Asians, and children of Afro-Americans and prevails more commonly in women (Kiriakidou et al., 2013). In the Lupus disease Inflammation and tissue damage of various body organs viz. skin, joints, lungs, kidneys, and nervous system occur (Frieri, 2013; Gurevitz., et al. 2013). Yogic

practices have shown the improvement of sleep, muscular strength, body flexibility, and decrease stress and depression level (Woodyard, 2011). References have shown that Yoga therapy may help Lupus symptoms including fatigue, pain, and flare and enhance the quality of life (Middleton et al., 2018). Moderate and Deep Breathing, relaxation, and meditation especially *Yoga Nidra* facilitate peace and calmness and dealing the inflammation during different lupus stages (Bell, 2007).

YOGA FOR ARTHRITIS AND OTHER RHEUMATIC DISEASES

Yoga is generally suitable for patients living with rheumatic diseases at any age. Yoga, relaxation and meditation practices in addition to conventional therapy can benefit the persons suffering from arthritis and other rheumatic diseases by improving pain and mood (Astin et al., 2002). Different yogic poses like *One-legged Balance*, *Crescent*, and *Warrior II* are reported to strengthen hip flexors and extensors, knee flexors and extensors and ankle plantar flexors, important for standing and walking (Wang et al., 2013). Initial evidence reported that yoga may benefit a decrease in tender and swollen joints, pain, and disability in Fibromyalgia, Osteoarthritis; and Rheumatoid arthritis and Carpal tunnel syndrome (Cramer et al., 2013).

YOGA FOR MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Yoga is suggested as one of the complementary treatments along with the other traditional medications in Multiple Sclerosis (Cramer et al., 2014). Multiple Sclerosis is a chronic disease affecting the central nervous system. In this disease myelin sheath of nerve fibers of the brain, optic nerves, and spinal cord is damaged due to inflammation. The damaged myelin may form sclerosis and cause an interruption in the flow of nerve impulses connecting the brain. The usual symptoms of the disease include irritation, numbness, muscle weakness or tightness, pain, fatigue, vision impairment, slurred speech, balance and coordination and depression. Yogic practices showed significant improvement in MS symptoms.

YOGA FOR STRESS AND DEPRESSION

“Stress” is a state of the body that causes tension during which adrenaline is released by the adrenal gland and may lead to chronic autoimmune diseases and high blood pressure. The effects of yoga (including *Deep Breathing*, *Bow Asana*, *Raising the legs*, and *Cycling* combined with autosuggestion) examined in patients with and found more effective than the non-yoga groups (Broota & Dhir, 1990). *Savasana yoga* (rhythmic breathing and relaxation) was found significantly effective in patients with severe depression (Khumar et al., 1993). *Sudarshan Kriya yoga* is found overall beneficial for the treatment of depression and anxiety (Janakiramaiah et al., 2000). *Sahaj yoga* meditation was evaluated on neurocognitive functions in patients with major depression and a significant improvement was observed (Sharma et al., 2006). Butler et al., 2008 demonstrated that yoga along with meditation may be a potential way for the management of low-to moderate-level depression.

YOGA FOR DIABETES

Psychological stress, sedentary habits, and unhealthy diet are the major risk factors for the development of diabetes. Yoga lowers blood glucose levels, and generally beneficial for diabetic patients. The yogic practices of *Vaman Dhauti*, *Kapalbhati*, and *Shankhaprakshalana* help to increase the efficiency of β -cells of the pancreas, production of insulin and control blood glucose levels (Jindal & Joshi, 2013; Shalineet et al., 2012; Skoro-Kondza et al., 2009). A brisk *Surya Namaskar* increases insulin production by stimulating brain signaling (Shalineet et al., 2012). Standing postures like *Trikonasana*, *Tadasana*, *Tiryak Tadasana*, *Veerasana*, and Seated poses like *Vakrasana*, *Ardhamatsyendrasana*, *Mandukasana*, *Ushtrasana*, *Paschimottanasana*, *Yoga Mudra*, and *Yoga Nidra* are significantly beneficial for type-2 diabetes (Raveendran et al., 2018).

Some forms of Yoga, for example, *Bikram* (hot yoga) and *Ashtanga* (power yoga) are not generally suited for persons with heart problems or older individuals, and individuals with chronic pain, whereas restorative yoga are appropriate in fatigue condition. Thus, it is always advised that patients should consult a physician before practicing yoga.

CONCLUSION

Studies suggest that yoga has been a safe practice for achieving fitness and health. Living in the present moment, acceptance of the current condition of life, mindfulness, self-recognition, and awareness are core elements of yoga which may benefit persons suffering from diseases. Regular yoga may improve fitness by enhancing flexibility and mobility; enhance muscle strength, endurance, and balance (McCall, 2007). Breathing, relaxation, and meditation practices are found to be extremely beneficial for reducing anxiety, stress, and depression and bring inner peace, calm, and feeling of overall well-being. Thus Yoga may be a useful aid for patients with many types of autoimmune diseases and can be practiced as additional help for comprehensive disease management.

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