



Yoga Therapy

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Abstract

A Comprehensive, and brief summary on the Yoga Therapy for prevention and cure of physical & mental disorders / deceases based on the extensive research (literature review) authentic publications by experts / institutions is given in this paper. The paper articulates the extensive research based conclusions on the positive impact of practice of Yoga for physical and mental fitness for all including the young children and the old senior citizens. An exhaustive list of references is included for the inquisitive readers.

Introduction

Yoga was introduced in India more than a millennium earlier than the Current Era began. It is referred in great Epics like Maha Bharatha and in Bhagavad Gita, and is recognized as practiced by sages and kings and the ruling class. Sage Patanjali collated the various methods/practices, analyzed and codified them as a text as Ashtanga Yoga (eight steps) in his book 'Yoga Sutra' in Yoga Darshan. The word "Yoga" means union and its interpretation is that yoga is a method of uniting mind, body and the spirit, leading to union with the Devine. Yoga since then was being practiced as per the eight steps (Ashtanga Yoga) as a method for joining the ordinary and imperfect human being with the Divine (God).

In the ancient book by Patanjali 'Yoga Darshan' text there was no intent to use Yoga as a curative practice. It was a step by step practice of controlling the mind through regulated breathing (Pranayama) and exercises / physical postures (asanas) and subsequent steps to achieve the final spiritual goal. Regular practice of Yoga did have positive impact on health of body and mind and this was also realized. Over the years, intensive research along with modern medical practitioners revealed the curative powers of practice of Yoga. Gradually and steadily with the support of research finding the possibility of using Yoga as a therapeutic instrument was revealed more clearly. Learning and practicing is focused on enhancing health, immunity to diseases, specific treatment for curing various

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types of illness without having the side effects of medicine, allergies associated with medicines led to medical Yoga, as a practice of Yoga for medical treatment

Medical Yoga

Medical Yoga is defined as the use of yoga practices for the prevention and treatment of medical conditions. In addition to the physical aspects of yoga like Asanas, medical yoga also incorporates proper breathing techniques and meditation. Medical Yoga Therapy is an individualized, personalized and holistic approach that takes into account the patient's mind, body and spirit.

The ideal medical yoga prescription includes the yogic practices of breathing techniques, bodily postures, meditation, a healthy nourishing diet, healthy sleep and family support. The best practice is to consider yoga therapy as a complement to the prescribed medical treatments. Yoga therapy is not always a substitute for all diseases.

Yoga is helpful for controlling and sometimes even curing many chronic illnesses -that is those illnesses of which the conditions last for a long time. Studies have shown that yoga can positively impact the body in many ways like regulating glucose levels, improving musculoskeletal ailments, and keeping the cardiovascular system in tune. Besides the physical aspects yoga has many psychological benefits too like helping to increase mental energy, and positive feelings while decreasing feelings of depression and anxiety. We now live in a more stressful society and we face many forms of stress each day. Although medical treatments have vastly improved in application and effectiveness, they also happen to have ill side effects and sometimes do not have the desired results. In

such cases yoga practices for certain ailments seem to be the best course of action for a long term remedy.

Slow controlled breathing in Pranayama helps in adjusting and creating emotional stability. Stress can produce a whole lot of complaints including headache, backpain, hypertension, fatigue depression, migraine, anxiety and so on. Sometimes a combination of "Asanas" (postures) and Pranayama (slow rhythmic breathing) helps to relieve stress to a large extent.

Meditation is known to diminish anxiety and depression leading to more peace of mind and relaxation of the mind. Patanjali in "Yoga Sutra" explained eight steps of yoga in ascending order from physical, mental, spiritual and divine states. Even practice of one or more of these steps have shown to increase levels of "feel good" hormones like Serotonin and Dopamine thereby helping to improve sleep quality as well as sleep regulation. Some of the chronic as well as short term ailments which can be controlled or cured by yoga will now be mentioned briefly.

Inflammation is a body's natural response to infection, injury, and stress. However inflammation can have serious health implications when it becomes prolonged and chronic. Systemic inflammation may not be as apparent as acute inflammation and can persist undetected at low levels for years. This can slowly damage the body, lead to the development of chronic diseases and increase one's risk for type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disease and age-related diseases. Medical Yoga Therapy by Ina Stephens Dept of Pediatrics, University of Virginia Medical Center explain these in detail.

Swami Kuvalayanda is one of the early proponents of yogic practice as a cure for many diseases. He along with Dr.S.L.Vinekar coauthored the book “Yogic Therapy- its basic Principle and Methods” published in 1963, gives in detail the Yoga therapy and its applications. A more recent book ‘Yoga Therapy by Dr Vishwas Mandlik’ explains in detail Yoga therapy for various types of diseases.

Yoga practices include breath control and techniques (pranayama), specific body postures (asanas) and meditation. Asanas are physical postures that steady the entire body through different positions without extra strain. These helps build proper tone in the muscles and vital organs for perfect functioning. (Dr Ananda Balayogi, Bhavani, and Dr Meera Ramanathan). The asanas provide beneficial results on the functioning of muscular and respiratory systems. These help cardiovascular system and gastrointestinal system. These in turn lead to a more relaxed mental state (B K Anand -Yoga and medical science).

Yoga practice has benefitted those suffering from osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. They experience less joint pain, less cramps while sleeping and hence more vitality, better sleep, reduced morning joint stiffness and improved daily living functions. In case of some illnesses like spondylitis or certain psychosomatic illnesses yoga is often the best treatment. In other cases like diabetes, hypertension and asthma yoga acts in parallel to conventional medical treatment. Yoga by itself may not be a cure for all the above mentioned conditions but it acts as a supporting agent and reduces the dependance on medical treatment. Yoga could be the best method of preventing the onset of many chronic illnesses.

Cardiovascular diseases which include many conditions like atherosclerosis, stroke, hypertension, heart failure and vascular diseases are generally cured by advanced medical techniques. Alongside these treatments, yoga therapy can be significant and cost effective Yoga therapy for hypertension is very common. In spite of the increasing evidence that yoga practice may reduce blood pressure, studies have shown that yoga diet is equally important. In other words “yogic life style” is of immense value for therapeutic practices.

Yoga for Senior Citizens

Yoga for seniors is a very important aspect as a person ages. The practice of yoga is a powerful agent for promoting physical fitness, mental well-being, and overall quality of life for seniors. Physical fitness is a crucial aspect of healthy aging, and yoga offers a gentle yet effective way to improve strength, flexibility, and balance. Regular practice can alleviate joint pain, increase muscle tone, and improve overall physical stability, reducing the chance of falls and fractures. Pranayama focuses on improving mental health and emotional well-being. One of the advantages of yoga is that it can be adapted to individual needs and abilities. It can be tailored for older individuals or even for children.

Yoga for Children

Children too are no exceptions as to the advantages yoga can provide them with . In today’s world of advanced technologies and distractions they are vulnerable to peer pressures and academic stresses The current generation of young adults is the most “stressed -out” generation compared with the older generation. The stress can lead to insomnia, chronic pain, eating disorders anxiety. Yoga

can help them cope better and when practiced early in life it could teach them self-regulation skills to control emotions and stress. Studies have shown that children who practice yoga have increased sense of self-awareness and self-confidence. There have been a lot of studies demonstrating the use of mind-body techniques and therapies for young adults and children to increase focusing, concentration and attentiveness. These are helpful for those children with challenging attention disorders.

Conclusion

The practice of yoga is not easy or as quick as taking medicines, but it certainly is worth the efforts. Research has shown that yoga and mindfulness-based practices continue to reveal and uncover health benefits and wellness of mind and body. The results and cure for chronic ailments are not immediately observed through yoga but it surely benefits majority of those suffering from specific ailments in the long run. Besides physical benefits, mental benefits are very significant for those who practice asanas, pranayama and meditation tailored according to the individual needs.

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