

Yoga's Effect on Mental Health and Quality of Life

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Abstract

Yoga's greatest aim is to create compassion within and a deep sense of unity and oneness with all forms of life. Yoga has been shown to enhance quality of life in people who are healthy and ill. Mental health refers to the overall well-being of an individual. It is about the balance of the social, physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of life. Psychologists have long known that moderate exercise is good for depression and anxiety. Such exercise can easily be found in Yoga practice. Yoga postures are designed to promote physical strength, flexibility and balance. Yoga is a very effective stress reduction and relaxation tool. Performance of various postures requires the tensing and stretching and then relaxing of muscle groups and joints, which effectively produces relaxation in much the same way that a message or Progressive Muscle Relaxation (a technique used by behavioral psychologists) does. From a yogic perspective, the breath is a bridge between mind and body. Slow diaphragmatic breathing is common to almost all forms of yoga.

KEYWORDS: Yoga, Yogasanas, Mental health, Mood disorders, Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety Disorders, Schizophrenia, etc

INTRODUCTION

By 2020, the World Health Organization predicts that depression will be the second largest contributor to the global disease burden, after ischemic heart disease. Anxiety is also being diagnosed at a greater rate than it was in the past. Despite these increases in diagnosis, treatment regimens typically include pharmaceutical therapies that are not sufficient to prevent further illness or promote mental well-being. Effectively addressing mental health concerns entails a comprehensive approach that addresses the root of the problem(s).

The eight limbed path of yoga includes: Yama (moral codes), niyama (self-discipline), asana (postures), pranyama (breath practices promoting life force), pratyahara (sensory transcendence), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), samadhi (state of bliss). The word roots of yoga mean "to join" in Sanskrit. Joining mind and body, and individual and collective selves is the essence of this ancient South Asian practice [4]. Yogic philosophy posits that every life form is interconnected and united. "Yoga exists in the world because everything is linked".

Yoga's greatest aim is to create compassion within and a deep sense of unity and oneness with all forms of life. Yoga is an individual activity that has social implications. Those who regularly participate in yoga typically interact with the world in calmer and more reasonable ways. More positive social interactions and relationships are one of the ripple effects of individual yoga practice. Accessible or complementary yoga classes offer low income people the opportunity to experience the benefits of inner peace and healthier body. When practices such as yoga are

accessible to all, larger effects are possible. Without overstating the impacts, potential consequences of large scale population mental well-being initiatives such as this are less violence in society, less addiction, greater ability to be authentic with one and others.

Yoga: Quality of Life and Mental Health

Yoga has been shown to enhance quality of life in people who are healthy and ill. A review study found that yoga is as effective or better than exercise at improving a variety of mental and physical health measures such as stress, quality of life, mood states, heart rate variability, pulmonary function and so on. A meta-analysis concluded that because weight gain and toxicity are side effects of various pharmacotherapies, yoga may be an effective and less toxic auxiliary treatment for severe mental illness. In one study yoga improved subjective wellbeing, mental health and executive functioning within prison populations. Yoga improved the quality of life of pregnant women in various studies and enhanced their interpersonal relationships]. Studies over the past 15 years have shown that yoga can improve psychological health during breast cancer treatment, as well as health-related quality of life in antipsychotic-stabilized patients

Mental health refers to the overall well-being of an individual. It is about the balance of the social, physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of life. Our Mental Health is characterized by our personal growth, sense of purpose, self acceptance and positive relationship with other people. It is also highly affected by environmental factors like our family life, social life and our life at work. Our general well-being is decreased by any negative experiences in any of these areas. Among the most common Mental Illness or Mental Disorders are Anxiety and Depression.

These can be classified into six categories:

Mood disorders: - These are characterized by feeling of hopelessness, changes in eating pattern, troubled sleep, chronic fatigue and even thoughts of suicide and death. There are two major types of Mood Disorders:

Depression-a state of extreme sadness or melancholy that affects a person's social functions

Bipolar Disorder- a mood disorder where a person alternates between state of depression and mania (very elevated mood). These symptoms or states are usually temporary, lasting for about a maximum of two weeks. If experiences them for more than two weeks, see a doctor immediately.

Anxiety Disorders: - This includes abnormal anxiety, phobias and panic disorders that come unpredictably and disrupt our normal daily routines. Anxiety disorders are developed over a period of time.

Schizophrenia: - This is characterized by distortions in a person's perception of reality.

A person with Schizophrenia manifests disordered thinking and usually experiences hallucinations. Of all other Mental Illness, this is considered as the most serious. Eating Disorders – These are conditions that involve an obsession with food which ultimately leads to negative effects towards a person's social life and daily activities. Eating disorders are caused by a lot of different factors ranging from genetics to media exposure. Personality Disorder – These are characterized by abnormal and destructive thoughts, behavior and emotional responses. People who suffer from personality disorders have a tendency to struggle in dealing with other people, mainly because of rigidity or narrow-mindedness it brings about. Organic Brain Disorders- These are often the result of physical brain injury or brain damage due to

accidents. People with organic brain disorder often suffer from confusion and memory loss.

The role of Asanas

Yoga is best known its poses or Asanas. These reach deep into the yogi's body massaging important internal organs. Asanas help cleanse and maintain the nervous and circulatory systems, which automatically result in a healthier body and mind. *Breathing Exercises* or Pranayama can also help in keeping a person healthy by supplying a fixed amount of oxygen to the muscles and internal organs.

However, Yoga should not be treated as the role of remedy for mental illness. You should first seek assistance from a professional if you experience any of the symptoms mentioned above. Yoga can only help facilitate the recovery from some dangerous side effects of these mental illnesses.

These practices of Yoga Exercises mean practicing both your body and your mind. It takes willpower and perseverance to accomplish each Yoga Pose and to practice it daily. But the price for your perseverance is really worth all the hard work. The practice of Yoga Exercises or Yoga Asanas with your yoga blocks can improve your health, increase your resistance and develop your mental awareness.

The Health Benefits

Psychologists have long known that moderate exercise is good for depression and anxiety. Such exercise can easily be found in Yoga practice. Yoga postures are designed to promote physical strength, flexibility and balance. Anyone who has ever taken a Yoga class will attest that there are cardio/heart benefits to be had; your heart rate is frequently up while performing postures much as it would be if you were performing more conventional exercise. Though Yoga gets your heart rate up and your endorphins pumping, it also provides for many rest periods. These rest periods lend a gentle quality to the conditioning that makes it easier to endure than 'marathon' style exercise. You seldom feel as though you can't go on.

By emphasizing gentle stretching of the joints and spine, Yoga promotes increased range of motion, and joint the health. It helps work out muscular kinks and minor problems that might otherwise lead to back pain or stiffness. In promoting joint and spinal flexibility, Yoga also seems to promote a certain freedom; there is a definitive feeling of mental ease and comfort that experience at the end of a Yoga class that is linked to being free to move muscles that were tight before the class started. It doesn't always last long, but it is very real and very soothing while it lasts.

As with any physical workout, Yoga practices concentrate your mind on the physical sensations and on the perfection of the postures. The immersive concentration factor Yoga provides works as a helpful tonic for anxious and obsessive people. The practice of Yoga (or most any other demanding physical exercise) can be great distraction from worry as it forces the mind to attend to the body and the breathing; the moment.

As much as us mental health types like to emphasize language and verbal expression (or the blunt hammer of Valium) as the best ways of dealing with emotional problems, body-based therapeutic interventions have a role to play too. After all, the stress response that so many anxious and depressed people have problems with begins with the fight or flight reflex- the physical preparation of the body to defend, or flee. Chronic stress has an impact on the body in the form of chronic muscle tension and stiffness, and this very stiffness and tension seems to produce some of the worry and agony that anxious and stressed out persons report.

Yoga is a very effective stress reduction and relaxation tool. Performance of various postures requires the tensing and stretching and then relaxing of muscle groups and joints, which effectively produces relaxation in much the same way that a message or Progressive Muscle Relaxation (a technique used by behavioral psychologists) does. Yoga practice also draws attention towards breathing, which produces a meditative and soothing state of mind. Yoga method for stress reduction and self-soothing are generally cheaper than other professional interventions (Yoga can be done for free if you know what you're doing, and classes are no more expensive than group psychotherapy prices), pretty much safe, free of side effects and empowering in comparison to medication alternatives.

Tackling Anxiety

Anxiety has become any omnipresent mental problem in today's world. Severe anxiety could lead to health-related problems like palpitations, fatigue, nausea, difficulty in breathing, restlessness and even head and chest pains. Yoga asanas aid in healing the problem after treatments like psychotherapy and some anti-anxiety medication. Yoga helps one develop a stronger state of mind, thus overcoming fears and preventing the dangers of anxiety. Asanas assisting nervous system should be practiced in this stage. Thanks to Yoga, one can gain better self-awareness and cultivate focus of the mind.

Tackling Depression

Depression is continuous stage of mental sadness. Though simple depression can be treated easily, major depression lasts for a longer time, and is dangerous. It could have serious symptoms like being fatigued physically and mentally, change appetite, feeling of intense fear or melancholy, irritability, loss of interest in usual activities, change in sleeping patterns, feeling of guilt and hopelessness, hallucination and recurring thoughts of suicide or death. Yoga is handy in curing one of these problems. You can practice Yoga as a supplement to the treatment. It helps reduce stress and creates a peaceful state of mind.

Yoga Exercise

Psychologists recognize that moderate exercise is good for depression and anxiety. Yoga practice provides one with such exercise. Yoga postures are developed to promote physical strength, flexibility and balance. Any yoga postures have cardio/heart benefits associated with it. Heart is frequently up while performing these postures. Between various yoga postures, you also get rest periods. So practicing Yoga postures becomes much easier than doing conventional.

Conclusion

From a yogic perspective, the breath is a bridge between mind and body. Slow diaphragmatic breathing is common to almost all forms of yoga. The key to quieting the mind is slowing and deepening the breath. Practicing yoga helps to regain mental stability, calmness, and tranquility, primarily because of this kind of breathing. Practitioners are able to connect internally through this stillness and silence. Virtually all yogic practices, including asana (postures), pranyam (life force practices), dhyana (meditation), encourage quietness and listening within. Being kinder and gentler to oneself and others is part of the practice on and off the mat. A yogic saying states that through a flexible body we gain a flexible mind. This helps people become more patient, forgiving, less prone to anger and sadness. Additionally, yoga brings practitioners "home" to their natural selves, partially through an imitation of nature. Many of the asanas imitate animals and plants such as tree pose, dog pose, cat pose, snake pose, and others

Mental Health is the balance of all aspects of life- the social, physical, spiritual and emotional. It is the psychological state of well-being. Learn about the different factors that affect your Mental Health and how Yoga can help you keep its balance. Mental Health is a concept that refers to psychological and emotional well-being of a person. Being mentally healthy generally means that you are able to use your emotional capabilities to function well in society and go through everyday life with little or no difficulty. Some factors that can affect your mental health are your family life, social life and life at work. Having negative experiences in any of the said areas can deteriorate the condition of your mental health. Mental illness, on the other hand, refers to health-related conditions where a person's mood or thinking affects his ability to work well or relate to other people.

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