



## The Need of Practicing Yoga for Healthy Today and Tomorrow

During the recent decades technological advancements have enabled man to scale greater heights, be it physical comforts, ability to manage infections or handling emergencies. Alongside with these, however, undesirable factors such as psychosomatic, lifestyle and chronic illnesses also have risen unchecked. Numerous attempts to explore the reasons behind this pointed out unhealthy lifestyle as the major contributor among a host of other factors. In addition, increased globalization played a vital role in change of lifestyle with components like diet, sedentary lifestyle, bad habits and stress.

Multidimensional approach is the need of hour to overcome the challenging situations that modern man finds himself in. These various pursuits have resulted in rediscovering of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) by pioneers; *Yoga* is one such platform with its roots in India.

The 2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), on comprehensive survey on the use of complementary health approaches by Americans revealed *Yoga* as the sixth most commonly used complementary health practice among adults. More than 13 million adults practiced *Yoga* in the previous year, and between the 2002 and 2007 NHIS, use of *Yoga* among adults increased by 1 percent (or approximately 3 million people). The 2007 survey also found that more than 1.5 million children practiced *Yoga* in the previous year. Many people practice *Yoga* in order to maintain their health and well-being, improve physical fitness, relieve stress, and enhance quality of life<sup>[1]</sup>. Recent advancements in the field of *Yoga* research endorsed its role as evidence based CAM in handling the non-communicable diseases as a preventive, supportive and curative tool<sup>[2]</sup>.

*Yoga* is one of six traditional systems of Indian philosophy and is thought to date back more than 5000 years. The word '*Yoga*' came from the Sanskrit word "*Yuj*" that has various connotations, including bending, joining, attaching, yoking, harnessing and focusing the mind.

Patanjali, the great Indian sage, systematized and codified *Yoga* in his classic work the '*Yoga Sutra*'. He states *Yoga* as,

*"Yogah Chitta Vrtti Nirodah"*

Meaning *Yoga* is the cessation of movement in the consciousness. In other words, the goal of *Yoga* is to restrain the fluctuations of the consciousness<sup>[3]</sup>. *Yoga* is manual of human being and it is a way of life which effectively addresses most aspects of unhealthy lifestyle and improves quality of life<sup>[4]</sup>.

Popularity of *Yoga* lead to development of several different schools, but the basic principle of these schools remained the same<sup>[5]</sup>. *Yoga* experts have formulated specific modules by using permutation and combination of different components of *Yoga* viz. *Asana*, *Pranayama*, Mediation, Cleansing Techniques, Diet, Yogic counseling etc. during therapy.

Several lines of evidences suggest that, *Yoga* has positive impact on all the age groups from fetus to geriatric population. *Yoga* is found to be beneficial in pregnancy which helps both mother and fetus<sup>[6]</sup>. It also showed positive impact among school going students, adolescents<sup>[7]</sup>, women and as well as in elderly population<sup>[8]</sup>. In addition literature suggests, *Yoga* is cost effective, feasible and has negligible side effects.

### Stress and Yoga

The economic and material developmental goal of modern civilization has brought social unrest and ecological devastation. Lifestyle diseases, chronic illness and other psychosomatic diseases are on the rise. Mental stress, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are some of the fast growing epidemics that are consequent to changing lifestyles accompanying globalization and modernization. Work has significant effect on stress levels in today's life and more than 30% feel overwhelmed a great deal of the time. Stress expresses many psychosomatic ailments. *Yoga* helps to reduce

stress by becoming a ray of hope in controlling raising epidemics. It is a holistic way of life leading to a state of complete physical, social, mental, and spiritual well-being and harmony with nature<sup>[9]</sup>.

#### **Proposed mechanisms of beneficial effects of Yoga:**

Recent systematic reviews have revealed several mechanisms behind the beneficial effects of *Yoga*. There are three psychological mechanisms (positive affect, mindfulness and self-compassion) and four biological mechanisms (posterior hypothalamus, interleukin-6, C-reactive protein and cortisol). Positive affect, self-compassion, inhibition of the posterior hypothalamus and salivary cortisol were all shown to mediate the stress relieving effect of *Yoga*<sup>[10,11]</sup>.

The popularity of *Yoga* has got quantum jump after receiving official International recognition in the 69<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly by endorsing 21<sup>st</sup> June as the International Day of *Yoga* (IDY) in response to the strong urge by the honorable Prime Minister of India, Shri. Narendra Modi.

To summarize, ***Yoga is the need of today and the culture of tomorrow.*** *Yoga* is economically feasible, having negligible side effects and can be adopted by all age groups. Research in the field of *Yoga* has shown its positive effect in promotion of health and prevention of certain diseases. There is adequate evidence to endorse *Yoga* as Complementary Medicine for several lifestyles, psychosomatic as well as chronic diseases. But future research ought to include more rigorous methodology, including sufficient power, multi-centric randomized controlled trials and appropriate control groups to endorse it as Alternative Therapy/Medicine.

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