Blessings in Disguise: Yoga and Meditation during Corona Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

The word Yoga originates from the Sanskrit word “Yuj” means to attach, join, Yoke or “Yuj” Samadhi. Yoga asanas twist the internal organs, strengthen muscles and increases circulation. Breathing technique and meditation also release stress and improve immunity. Health is our wealth. This difficult time can be utilized for building physical and mental health. The rule of social distancing which has been in action is a great facility that provides natural support to immune system and to build the mental health. It also gives more time to be with your family and keep yourselves occupied with productive activities. The term “meditation” usually refers to a formal practice that can give peace to the mind and increase awareness of our conscious, our mind and our environment. Meditation in its many forms has been practiced over millions of years by diverse groups of people in many different traditions. Previously it was practiced in the East, eventually has spread into Western countries and is increasingly augmenting therapy. These days are very difficult to manage your mind. So, meditation is the only useful activity that helps to overcome such a bad situation (corona lockdown). One should do mindful meditation daily. Encourage kids, but do not force them to do these activities. This study found that due to meditation, there is reduction in oxygen consumption, decreased heart rate, decreased respiration rate, enhanced carbon dioxide elimination, reduced cortisol hormone level, decreased blood lactate levels, and increased parasympathetic activity. An overall effect of meditation is that it provides nutrition to your mind and brain. Meditation is a blessing in disguise in such crucial time. Regular practice of yoga and meditation help us to improve our quality of life. The purpose of this article is to describe what yoga and meditation are, their practices and their effects on physical and mental health.

KEY WORDS

Yoga, Meditation, Corona, Lockdown, Benefits

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Yoga is known to be as old as 8000 years.¹ In the course of time, different yoga asanas have been devised which can restore and maintain health and can increase self-awareness and consciousness. The meaning of yoga is union. The word yoga is mentioned in a Sanskrit epic written in the second half of the 1st Millennium BCE and is associated with the philosophical system presented in the yoga sutras of Patanjali with the chief aim of uniting the human spirit with divine spirit.² Yoga is basically a spiritual discipline based on an extremely divine science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. Yoga brings peace not only to the body in the form of asanas, but to the mind and emotional wellbeing too. Weight loss is one of the beneficial effects of its regular practice. Regular practice of yoga calms down the mind and reduces stress and increases wellness.

This study found that due to meditation there is reduced oxygen consumption, decreased heart rate, decreased respiration rate, enhanced carbon dioxide elimination, reduced cortisol hormone levels, decreased blood lactate levels and increased parasympathetic activity. An overall effect of meditation is that it provides nutrition to your mind and brain. Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment. During the global pandemic, initiating mindfulness and meditation practice is likely to complement therapies and is also a beneficial method to provide support in anxiety attacks.³

Surya namaskar includes 12 steps that makes half the cycle:

1. Pranam asana
2. Hasta uttanasana
3. Padahast asana
4. Ashwa sanchalanasana
5. Santolan asana
6. Padahast asana
7. Ashtanga namaskar asana
8. Bhujangasana
9. Adhomukhasvanasana
10. Ashwa sanchalanasana
11. Padahastasana
12. Hasta uttanasana.

Immunity

Yoga asanas twist the internal organs, strengthen the muscles and increase blood circulation. The breathing technique and meditation also releases stress and improves immunity. A few minutes of yoga everyday makes you feel fresh and energetic for a long period of time. The long deep breathing process makes one feel fresh and energetic and oxygenates the blood and brain. Regular practice of yoga improves your muscle tone and posture. Yoga asanas bring positive state of mind. Regular practice of yoga and meditation can increase integrations between physical and mental health. Some researchers suggested that yoga benefits physical and mental health. However, there is a lack of evidence due to less research work in this area. Yoga has the potential to be implemented as an alternate treatment to bring relative cost effectiveness and increase self-awareness of the body.⁴ Adversities and psychological stress such as depression have divergent effects on the immune system; anti-viral immunity and resistance to infectious diseases. However, markers of inflammation and risk of inflammation associated diseases are increased.^{5,6}

Is Corona Virus Lockdown Making You Anxious and Depressed?

American Heart Association signifies the role of meditation in cardiovascular disease. People living inside their homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown could benefit from yoga to boost immunity. Many people believed that yoga is just a posture, but it is not the truth. In fact, sufficient period of yoga and meditation practice helps to relieve or decrease the stress levels. Indian American cardiologist Ray suggested that when a person is in depression and anxiety, they have adverse effects physically and develop weak immunity towards viral infections. When we forced the students to isolate and stay at home in COVID-19 pandemic, it created anxiety and depression in some cases. Ray said that when the human body is exposed to corona virus, the body will produce direct antibodies which can react to protect the immune system.

Enhanced Blood Circulation with Yoga

Sun salutation or Surya Namaskar is the best set of yoga asana. This will reward you with physical and mental strength, give you command over your body, enhance blood circulation, calm your mind, balance your energy levels and bring peace to your consciousness.

Yoga and Meditation for Mind-body and Health

Many participants have reported that after yoga and meditation, there is positive effect on their physical and mental health. A research article published in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* investigates the effects of yoga and meditation on brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), the activity on the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) effects and inflammatory markers. 38 participants practising 3-months of intense yoga and meditation retreat were assessed before and after the intervention. Researchers found that the practices positively impacted BDNF signalling, the cortisol awakening response (CAR) and immunological markers and in addition improved subjective wellbeing.⁷

Role of Yoga for Healthy Life

Regular practising of pranayama, yoga and meditation gives natural immunity by lowering stress hormones in your body. Apart from this, it conditions the lungs and respiratory tract, stimulates the lymphatic system by removing toxins from the body and ensures optimal functioning of organs. It is the time when you can dive deep in your meditation and pranayama asana. This is the technique that helps to build your physical and mental health.⁸ Health is wealth; this difficult time can be utilized for building physical and mental health.⁹ Regular practice of yoga and meditation helps us to improve the quality of our life.

Role of Yoga in Metabolic Syndrome

Yoga practitioners have increased biological variation compared to non-yoga practitioners and patients with metabolic syndrome—decreased oxygen uptake during the basal conditions; and enjoy quicker recovery from stress. Consumption of oxygen in metabolic syndrome patients shows significantly blunted post-stress recovery and diminished metabolic adaptability.¹⁰

How to Manage Depression and Anxiety

Poor mental health conditions including stress and depression are known to increase the risk of acute respiratory infections.¹¹ Increasing numbers of corona virus infections and mortality triggers stress and anxiety. This is due to isolation and depression because of mandatory social distancing measures. Nonetheless, the rule of social distancing that has been in action nowadays is a great facility that provides natural support to immune system and build mental health. It also gives more time to be with your family and keep yourselves occupied with productive activities, including group activities with your family members such as playing cards, listening to music, singing, cooking and sharing your thoughts etc.

How Meditation is Useful to Cope With COVID-19

Through practicing awareness of your thoughts and feelings, you will be able to know better when to stop and take a moment for yourself.⁹ If you can find a quiet place anywhere, you can start meditating at any time and it does not require any equipment and practicing it is not time bound. When we are practicing meditation regularly, it gets easier and also results in healthier mind and body.¹² Physical isolation and the fear of uncertain future can lead to strange feelings or emotions and high anxiety. We cannot control all situations in life but can change our way of thinking. Yoga helps to balance emotions in difficult times. About 50,000 to 90,000 thoughts are rushing through our mind at any instance. Our brain is drained by overworking and multi-functioning and switches to an auto pilot mode when actions are taken without thinking about them consciously. In the long term, this can lead to superficial focus, increased stress, insomnia and other complications. Meditation helps us to control emotions in bad times. Meditation can be performed in a million ways depending on what suits your personality, goal and preferences.¹³

Different Ways to Practice Yoga and Meditation In Corona Lockdown

As you can see, there are so many yoga asana YouTube videos available on the internet. Various yoga techniques available on YouTube will help individuals to do yoga and meditation during lockdown and self-quarantine.

Private Yoga Teacher Consultation

When you are connected with a yoga teacher through the internet, you can feel the virtual presence of many other students. In private consultation, there is increased teacher to student attention.

Self-Practice

Self-practice is not an easy job it requires time management and discipline. If you find a silent place, you can meditate easily. Beginners have difficulty in controlling their thoughts, but when they meditate regularly it becomes easier and a healthier mind and body is attained.¹³ These are very difficult days to manage your mind, so meditation is the only regime to

overcome such bad situations; you need to do mindful meditation daily. Encourage kids, but do not force them to do these activities. There are various meditation methods that are easily available online. This is an unprecedented situation at least for the new generation, not only for an individual or a nation but for the entire humanity. Besides the fear of infection, people have been confined to their homes. How would spirituality help to overcome from present situation? Protect yourself and support others. Assist others in their time of need to benefit both the person receiving support and giving. Minimize watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that makes you feel anxious or distressed. Take practical steps to prepare your plans, protect yourself and the loved ones. Collect information from WHO website and local health member forums in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours, as facts can help to minimize fears.¹⁴

Physiological Effects of Meditation

- Decreased heart rate
- Decreased cortisol hormone levels
- Effect on blood pressure
- Effect on metabolism and respiration
- Effect on skin

Decreased Heart Rate

Some researchers observed that heart rate slows down during meditation. Meditation has a relaxing response and decreases heart rate.¹⁵

Effect on Hypertension

Those who are regularly practicing meditation show physiological variation like decrease in blood pressure.¹⁶

Effect on Metabolism

Some researchers observe that during meditation there is decreased oxygen utilization, increased carbon dioxide elimination and decreased respiration rate.^{14,17} Some researchers have showed that during regular practice of meditation, there is reduced oxygen consumption, decreased heart rate, decreased respiration rate, enhanced carbon dioxide elimination, reduced cortisol hormone levels, decreased blood lactate levels and increased parasympathetic activity.¹⁸

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF MEDITATION

Increased Memory

Jedrezak et al¹⁹ observed that several months of regular practice of meditation have increased performance in nonverbal intelligence tests. Other researchers also reported that there is improvement in cognitive abilities due to meditation. There are effects of transcendental meditation on the performance of some cognitive psychological tests.²⁰

More Creativity and Self-realization

Mixed type of results has been reported by few researchers regarding creativity and meditation. Some of them observed positive co-relation between meditation and creativity.²¹

Role of Yoga on Mental Health

There is disturbed mental health due to COVID-19 lockdown. Stress and depression increase the risk for respiratory infections too. Pranayama and meditation are measures of mental health. Pranayama improves respiratory system.²² Meditation is effective in reducing inflammation marker and also influences markers of virus specific immune response. Both yoga and meditation are powerful tools for prevention and boosts recovery from corona infections.⁸ Researchers suggest that several measures may be useful to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection and can complement therapy along with treatment.²³

Healing Power of Meditation

With regular practices of meditation, significantly higher levels of positive effects and low levels of anxiety and increased happiness in our body language can be achieved.²⁴ "Medical Yoga Therapy" is referred by physicians. Powerful and effective yoga therapy serves a patient with physical and mental challenges. Yoga therapy is safe and effective as it has healing power in children too.²⁵ A study reported that 42 participants completed stress reduction programme in which they learned yoga techniques and meditation.²⁶ During such a critical moment meditation is a blessing in disguise. Practice meditation every day and enjoy its rich benefits. It can help prevent coronary heart disease, heart attack and re-infarction if practiced regularly.²⁷ Meditation provides nutrition to your mind and brain. We have a lot of stored energy in our body, but we never use it. When we meditate it helps us to utilize the stored energy.

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