

Health Impacts of Yoga and Pranayama: A State-of-the-Art Review

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of years ago yoga originated in India, and in present day and age, an alarming awareness was observed in health and natural remedies among people by yoga and pranayama which has been proven an effective method for improving health in addition to prevention and management of diseases. With increasing scientific research in yoga, its therapeutic aspects are also being explored. Yoga is reported to reduce stress and anxiety, improves autonomic functions by triggering neurohormonal mechanisms by the suppression of sympathetic activity, and even, now-a-days, several reports suggested yoga is beneficial for physical health of cancer patients. Such global recognition of yoga also testifies to India's growing cultural influence.

Key words: Anxiety, cancer, hypertension, pranayama, stress, yoga

INTRODUCTION

All the orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy have one goal in view, the liberation of the soul through perfection. The method is by Yoga. - Swami Vivekananda.^[1] Yoga is an ancient discipline designed to bring balance and health to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the individual. It is long popular practice in India that has become increasingly more common in Western society. "Yoga" means union of our individual consciousness with the Universal Divine Consciousness in a super-conscious state known as *Samadhi*.^[1,2] The first book of humankind, *Rigveda*, mentions about yogic meditation by the wise, while *Yajurveda* exhorts us to practice yoga for enhancing mental health, physical strength, and prosperity. Upanishads are replete with yogic concepts. In addition, yoga-related terms like *pranayama* and *samadhi* occur repeatedly in *Bhagavad-Gita*. Ancient Indian *rishis* understood that performing *Raja-yoga* (procedure of concentration to liberate soul or *atma* from the bondage of *maya* into *paramatma*) always need a healthy body – "*Sharirmadyam, khalu dharma sadhanam.*" So they developed "*Hatha yoga,*" which includes *asana, mudra, pranayama,* etc. "*Gharanda samhita*" said there were 84 lakh asanas from which 16 000 were best and only about 300 are popular. "*Hathayoga-pradipika*" again differentiates all asanas into four basic classes – *sidhyasana, padmasana, sinhasana,* and *vadrasana.* Besides, asana may be of

