

Yoga as a Remedy for Anxiety and Depression

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Abstract:- In this literature review, main focus has been given on yoga and its impact in treating the problem of depression and anxiety. It can be seen that different poses of yoga are adopted by modern practitioners in order to treat patients' suffering from intense anxiety. However, different guidelines of practising yoga need to be remembered for gaining the desired objectives. In this review, history of yoga is discussed and concept of yoga is described. A brief discussion is done about depression and anxiety. Different factors that cause depression are discussed in this study. On another hand, different asanas of yoga are also briefed in this section of literature review. Different guidelines that need to be considered during performance of yoga are also described in this review. On another hand, related theories with the topic are briefed in detail.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past years, extensive research has been conducted about the credibility of yoga in curing depression and anxiety. It was found that yoga can be considered as one of the best ways for overcoming the problem of depression as well as anxiety. Different problems like a mood disorder, anger and anxiety can be controlled by regular practice of yoga. Regular practice of different 'asanas' of yoga is considered more than treating diseases with medicines. In this literature review, different poses of yoga are discussed that are used as a remedy to cure the problem of depression and anxiety. Moreover, different guidelines of practising yoga have also been discussed in this review. Different related theories are described, which are linked to the topic.

II. CONCEPT AND HISTORY OF YOGA

Yoga is an age-old process that has evolved about 3000 years ago. The word 'yoga' has come from a Sanskrit word 'yuj'. Meaning of this word is joining in union. Modern system of yoga comprises of different practises of yoga like asanas or different poses of movement and pranayama or the exercise of controlled breathing []. These forms of exercises help in curing the problem of depression and anxiety and increases energy level of a person. Yoga does not adhere to a particular region but practiced in different countries in order to achieve inner well-being. It helps to get rid of many problems and diseases like depression, fatigue. Moreover, it helps to enhance the energy level of the body and minimizes cholesterol level.

It is believed that Adiyogi has imparted knowledge about yogic science to 'saptarishi' or seven sages several thousand years ago on the banks of Lake Kantisarovar[]. They further carried this valuable knowledge to different parts of the world and spread among their followers. These sages have carried this knowledge of yogic science to Asian countries, African and American regions. It can be seen that yogic culture was expressed prominently in Indian subcontinent. It is believed that 'Agastya', one of the saptarishis imparted the knowledge of yoga in India and crafted this yogic culture in its people. Existence of yoga was found in different ancient literature of India like Vedas, Smritis and others. It was considered that development of yoga has happened in the time period during 500 BC to 800 AD. On another hand, the period of 1700 AD to 1900 AD is stated as modern period in the development of yogic culture[].

III. DESCRIPTION AND CAUSES OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

In modern day life, the words depression and anxiety are common. Excessive work pressure, huge demand and fast life often give rise to depression and anxiety in a person. Depression occurs when a person is habituated to a system or something and it no longer exists. This creates a gap and depression occurs, which gives rise to several other problems like insomnia. Depression and Anxiety also occur due to regular failure in daily life. Anxiety causes a person to become hypervigilant and increases risk of health diseases in future. The problem of depression can also occur genetically[]. Moreover, fluctuation in the level of hormones can also cause depression. Moreover, hormonal fluctuations in women during the period of childbirth and menstrual cycle also cause depression. Poor nutrition is another cause that gives rise to anxiety and depression. In previous research, it was found that deficiency of essential nutrients and minerals in the diet causes depression. For example, a low concentration of 3 fatty acids increases the rate of depression of a person.

On another hand, health problems like thyroid, liver disease increase the rate of anxiety level of a person. Different side effects of medicines and emotional trauma also cause anxiety in a person. It was found that regular consumption of drugs like cocaine increase the level of anxiety in a person. Level of anxiety also increases during high altitude sickness and pulmonary embolism. Regular practice of yoga can be effective in decreasing the level of depression and anxiety in a person [].

IV. DIFFERENT YOGA POSES THAT HELP TO RELIEVE DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

There are different poses or asanas that can be practiced to get relief from depression and anxiety.

➤ *Balāsana*

This pose of yoga is also called child pose, which gives relief from excessive stress and anxiety. A person needs to be kneeling and sit on heels. Moreover, both toes need to touch each other. Knees and thighs need to be wide apart and torso forward of the body need to be bent forward. Arms of the body need to be placed forward placing on both sides of the head. Palms of the body need to be placed facing down. This pose of yoga is considered as one of the relaxing poses that help to increase peace and calmness in mind [].

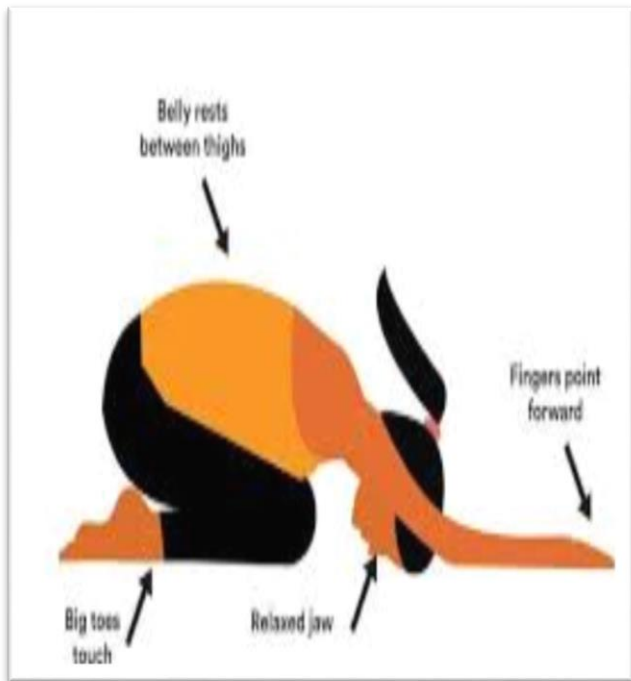


Fig 1:- Balāsana (Source: Sophia.stkate.edu, 2018)

➤ *Setubandhasana*

This pose of yoga helps in stretching the back muscles of the body and tiredness can be relieved. Individuals who are suffering from stress and anxiety due to excessive work pressure can perform this pose for getting relief. This exercise helps a person to feel light and relieved. In order to perform this pose, a person needs to lie down on the floor. Arms need to be placed on either side of the body []. Lower portion of the body up to knees need to be lifted up and thighs must be in parallel position.



Fig 2:- Setubandhasana (Source: Sophia.stkate.edu, 2018)

➤ *Adhomukhasvanāsana*

This pose of yoga increases rate of blood flow in the body. Stretching of cervical spine and neck occurs in this activity, which helps to release stress and level of depression. In this pose of yoga, an individual needs to pose the body like a table by straightening the elbows and needs. Hip needs to be pushed upwards and a shape of inverted-V will be formed. Hands need to be placed on the ground wide apart and pressed firmly on the ground. Moreover, ears need to touch the inner arm []. This pose helps to improve the process of digestion and abdominal muscles can be strengthened.



Fig3:- Adhomukhasvanāsana (Source: Sophia.stkate.edu, 2018)

➤ *UrdhvaMukhasvanasana*

Mild level of depression and fatigues can easily be controlled by this process. Mental depression and stress on back can be relieved by the help of this yoga position. This asana helps in awakening the upper part of the body. For doing this pose, one need to lie down on the floor by facing downwards. Toes need to be faced downward with a few inches apart. Palms need to be placed near the chest of the body facing down. Upward movement of the torso must be done by stretching the arms and legs. Head needs to be kept straight and facing upwards and shoulders need to be kept away from ears. This pose is also called upward facing dog pose []. This pose can be performed in empty stomach in morning and bowels need to be empty. Regular practice of urdhvaMukhasvanasana helps in proper functioning of hormones and thus releases stress level.



Fig 4:- UrdhvaMukhasvanasana (Source: Broughton, 2016)

➤ *Halasana*

This pose of yoga helps in reducing mental and physical strain. Enhancement of posture can also be achieved by this yoga asana. Halasana helps in increasing calmness of brain and give relief from insomnia and depression. For performing halasana, one need to lie flat and legs must be lifted off at 90-degree angle. Placement of hand needs to be done besides the hips and they must be used as a support. Then gradually hips need to be brought towards the chest.

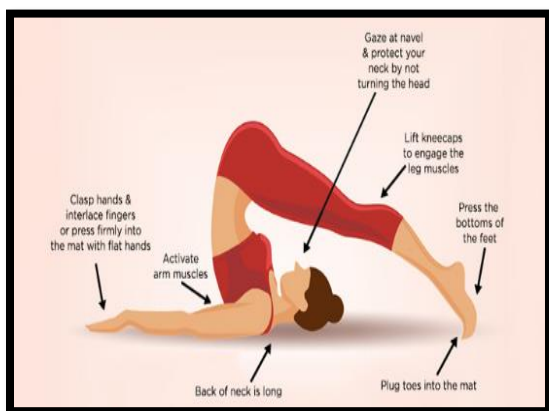


Fig 5:- Halasana (Source: Broughton, 2016)

➤ *Uttanasana*

This asana helps in proper functioning of nervous system and improves energy level of body. It increases calmness in an individual and reduces anxiety. This pose helps in increasing blood circulation and improves condition of heart. One needs to stand straight with arms placed on each side of the body. Now arms need to be placed at hips by bending forward. After this, hand need to be brought down and placed behind the feet by holding the ankles. This pose is also called standing forward bend. An individual must perform this task with an empty stomach and make their bowels empty. Meals need to take before six hours of performing this pose of yoga. This yoga can be performed first in the morning but at it can also be done in evening. However, a person must not do this yoga pose if any injury is there at the back[]. Moreover, patients who are suffering from tear in hamstring, affected retina or glaucoma should not do this exercise.

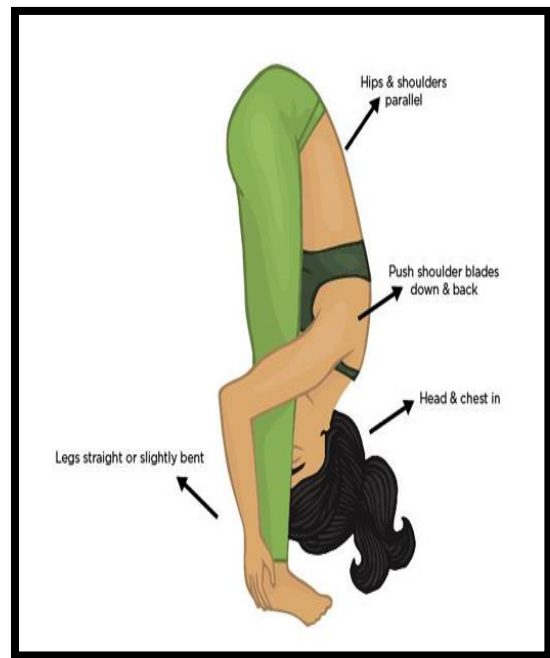


Fig 6:- Uttanasana (Source: Lall&Jauhari, 2018)

➤ *Savasana*

This exercise can be performed for reducing blood pressure. It is recommended that after performing different yoga pose, savasana need to be done. This helps in relaxation of muscles and normalizes blood flow. In order to do savasana, one needs to lie down on the floor on their back. Feet need to be kept apart by few inches and palms must be kept beside the body facing upwards. Eyes must be closed and a deep breath can be taken. This helps to remove emotional scars and used in treatment of trauma.

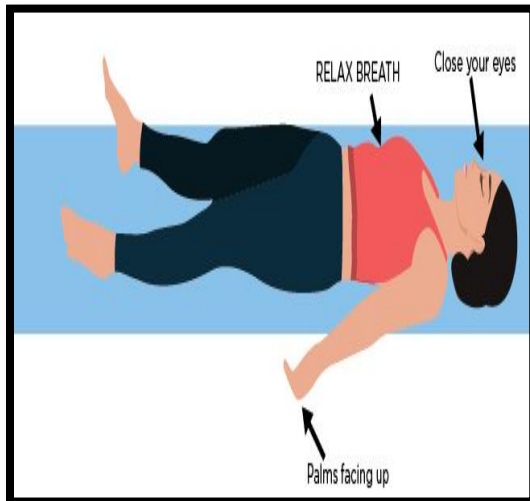


Fig 7:- Savasana (Source: Lall&Jauhari, 2018)

➤ *Pranayama for depression and anxiety*

• *Depression*

Equal ratio breathing can be performed for treating depression. An individual need to count equal length of breathing for inhalation and matching of time length must be done during release of breathing. This fashion of breathing needs to perform for a minute by balancing the length. However, after three or four cycles of breathing another count of breathing can be added []. For a more depressed person, the time of performance needs to be increased. Breathing is a better remedy for betterment of mood and on another hand; it helps to increase blood circulation of the body.

• *Anxiety*

Relief from anxiety can be gained by concentrating more on exhalations. Sufficient breath can be taken inside and exhalations must be done gradually by taking adequate time. For example, exhalations can be done for 6 seconds in first few breathing cycles. After that, it needs to be increased to seven seconds and gradually to eight. After attainment of a suitable time of exhalations, an individual need to focus on sound of exhalations. Sound of exhalations needs to be soft and low from beginning to end. This will help to increase the level of concentration in a person and anxiety is minimized.

V. GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING YOGA FOR RELIEVING DEPRESSION

There are different general guidelines, which needs to be followed by every individual in order to perform yoga poses. Maintenance of cleanliness is an initial criterion that needs to be fulfilled by every person. Maintaining cleanliness of the place of yoga conductance, body and mind is a compulsory requirement of yoga practice. Another basic requirement of yoga practice is calmness of surroundings. The place where yoga will be performed needs to be calm and quiet. This will help to increase the chance of success in getting relieved from

anxiety. On another hand, quietness of a place helps to achieve relaxation of mind and body.

On another hand, different poses of yoga must be done with an empty or light stomach. Consumption of heavy food needs to be avoided. For weak persons, it is recommended to take food like honey and fruits. Moreover, many side effects like vomiting can occur if yoga is performed with a full stomach. In addition, bowels need to be kept empty before starting of exercises [].

For performing yoga poses and pranayama, one must use a yoga mat or blanket. This will help to avoid physical injuries. In addition, comfortable, stretchable and light clothes are preferred for performing yoga. Different yoga practices like uttanasana, halasana must not be done during pregnancy or menstrual cycle. Help of yoga can also be taken for novice performers. Individuals, who will perform yoga for achieving relief from depression, need to start the session by a prayer. This helps to create a good environment and relaxation of mind occurs. During performance of pranayama for addressing depression and anxiety, holding of breath can be done in a controlled way. Moreover, it is recommended that every individual must practice yoga poses and pranayama on the basis of their capacity.

VI. THEORY

Hridaya Hatha Yoga Theory

The theory of hridaya hatha yoga provides spiritual traditional principles in a well-presented manner that can be accessed easily by modern practitioners. According to this theory, body of an individual is like an instrument, which can be functioned easily by performing asanas. On another hand, hridaya yoga gives freedom in expression of energies. This means every, asanas are done by heart in order to push energy to a new level. This helps to improve the condition of heart and mind. This theory states that level of relaxation, joy and openness of mind increased by regular practice of asana. This theory also states that a balance between effort and relaxation need to be maintained by eliminating egoistic behavior []. Different poses of yoga must be performed with happiness and not by obsession.

➤ Yoga planning theory

This theory is focusing on proper planning of yoga therapies. An individual need to determine the time place of starting the yoga practises. It is an initial step of planning theory, as appropriate place and time is an essential requirement of achieving success in yoga therapy. It is recommended that morning hours and an isolated place between natures can be chosen for performing yoga asanas. However, evening hours can also be chosen but the place needs to be calm. Moreover, this theory states that yoga practices can be done as a process. The process of yoga therapy can be determined on the basis of goals[]. For individuals who are suffering from depression need to start the

practice with chanting or prayer, then different tools of yoga-like breathing, asanas can be done on the basis of requirement. Content of practice needs to be selected by consulting with an expert [].

VII. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that yoga can be used for treating depression and anxiety. This is because yoga has no side effects. Yoga is an old treatment process that can be practised regularly to keep the body and mind fit. Moreover, it also helps to increase energy levels of the body. In modern day life, it is essential for every individual to perform different yoga poses for treating depression and anxiety. Moreover, different poses like *urdhvaMukhasvanasana* and *adhomukhasyanasanacan* also be performed for maintaining correct posture of the body. Regular prayer, chanting and pranayama help to increase blood circulation and acts as stress busters. However, different guidelines need to be followed for performing yoga practices. According to yoga planning theory, selection of place and time is essential and initial step before performance of yoga. This helps to increase effectiveness of yoga poses and relief from anxiety and depression can be achieved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It's an immense pleasure for me that I have been successfully completed the literature review on Yoga as a best remedies for anxiety and depression. For achieving desired goals of this review, I have taken help from many persons. I am thankful to my supervisors and teachers, whose guidance has helped me to complete this literature review. Moreover, I would like to thanks to all those persons, who have supplied essential resources regarding this topic. I would also like to show my gratitude to all my family members and friends who have helped me constantly.

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