



YOGASANA IS BENEFICIAL DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

During this pandemic time yoga play a significant role in our lives. Yoga, is a word that became popular all over the world in the last few years. Yoga is beneficial for the body and the mind. It helps to improve blood circulation and helps in building mind clarity. For ages, yoga was known to be beneficial for our physical & mental health. Now a day's, it is important to understand that mental health is very important for survival. To help with this growing level of anxiety and depression, we must lead a healthy lifestyle, stay connected to our loved ones, and practice yoga at home. This chapter will set background knowledge yoga and its concept. It will highlight the benefits of yoga during this time. Moreover, it will talk about the importance and elements of yoga. Lastly the chapter will conclude by elaborating the benefits of yoga and its importance during COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Yogasana & COVID-19

1. INTRODUCTION

Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. It means the experience of oneness on unity with inner being. This unity comes after dissolving the duality of mind and matter into the supreme reality. Yoga is a science by which the individual approaches truth. The aim of all yoga practice is to achieve truth where the individual soul identifies itself with the supreme soul or God.

Man has made tremendous progress in almost every walk of life. Modern scientists and researchers have absolutely changed the life-style. However, air, water pollution, mind and body are also the result of science. Longing for material wealth has hardened the hearts of human beings. human values are declining. Stress and strain are the causes of physical and mental distraction as well. Yoga has the surest remedies for man's physical as well as psychological ailments. It makes the organs of the body active in their functioning and has good effect on internal functioning of the human body.

Yoga leads to a perfect harmony between mind and body, man and nature, individual consciousness and universal consciousness. It helps to build up psycho-physiological health, emotional harmony, and manage daily stress and its consequences. It is also useful in condition where stress is believed to play a role.

1.1 MEANING OF YOGASANA

The term of *Yoga* is derived from a Sanskrit word “Yuj” which means to join, to bind, and to concentrate on one’s attention. It also means union. Yoga is the true union of our will with the will of God. In other words, joining the individual self with the divine or universal spirit is called yoga. It is a science of development of man’s consciousness.

Yoga is a way to join God, i.e. merging of soul with God and experience of oneness with Him. Practically speaking yoga is life science which deals with the health of body and harmony of mind. The main purpose of yoga is to provide a sound body and sound mind. The ultimate aim of yoga is self-identification and half perfection, which comes through self-purification and self-realization. Thus, it can be said that yoga is a way of life, means to enjoy complete happiness, healthy and peaceful living.

Yoga tries to help us understand our inner world through various techniques that include meditation, asanas, breathing, focused awareness and certain rules of behaviour and conduct.

The word *Asana* is derived from Sanskrit which means “posture” or “pose”. It is a way of sitting on something or sitting in any form. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali states that asana as a position that is steady and comfortable. Asana is holding the body in a particular posture to bring stability to the body and poise to the mind.

Yogasanas are simple action for keeping the internal and external parts of the body in good health, no activity can be performed well so long as the internal and external parts of the body are not in good health. The body and the mind are closely related. By practising asanas one frees himself from physical disabilities and mental distractions. It is a state of complete equilibrium of body, mind, and spirit.

2. IMPORTANCE OF YOGA

Importance of yoga are based on following points which are given below:

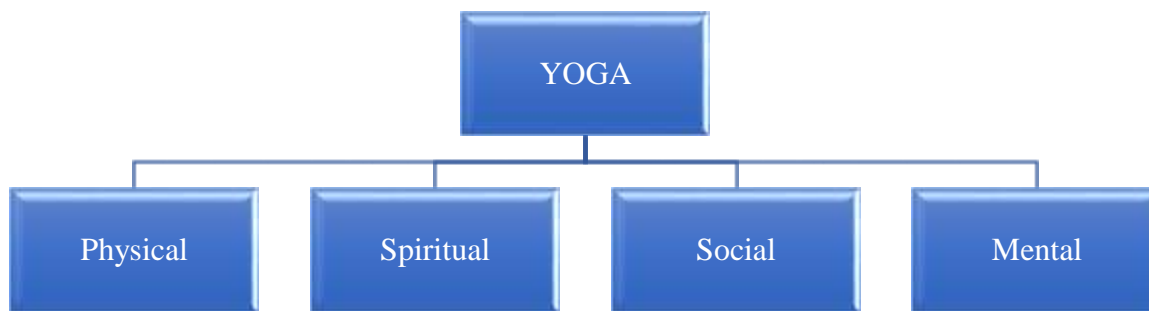


Figure 1: Importance of Yoga

1. **Physical:** Improves cardiovascular system, prevent from disease, beautification of body, correct posture of body, development of muscles, increase the efficiency of hearts & lungs, and increase flexibility.
2. **Spiritual:** Spiritual development through asanas, increase meditation power and moral values.
3. **Social:** Develop social disease qualities and its relation.
4. **Mental:** Reduce mental tension, provide relaxation, develop concentration power, increase memory power and willpower.

3. ELEMENTS OF YOGA

The main aim of yoga is control over the mind. This is possible only when you follow eight-fold paths or steps also known as “*Ashtang Yoga*”. These steps developed by Maharashi Patanjali.

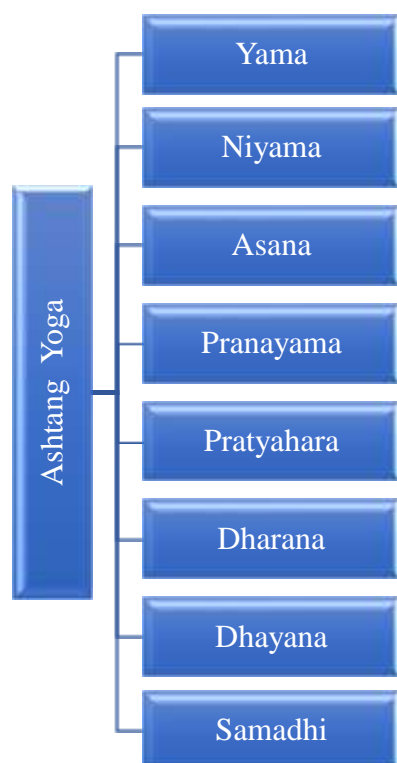


Figure 2: Elements of Yoga

1. **Yama:** there universal commandments or morality guidelines for good behaviour in society, in other words these are the basic principles for benefit of society. Yamas included five elements such as:
 - i) **Ahinsa (Non-Violence):** It means providing no harm to any living being including one self, in thought, word or deed.
 - ii) **Satya (Truth):** Satya means not only abstaining from falsehood, but also seeing the inherent goodness in everyone.
 - iii) **Asetya (Non-stealing):** Asteya means releasing the desire to possess that which belongs to others.
 - iv) **Aparigraha (Non-Possessiveness):** Every person is in need of possessions. But most of the people even after accumulate needful, up to a great extent desire even further luxury. The simpler we live; the more energy can be devoted to our spiritual practice.
 - v) **Brahmacharya (Celibacy):** This practice is imperative for those wishing to embark upon the path of higher sadhana. Through Bramhacharya in all areas of life, a seeker saves, and thus accumulates, great energy that can be channelled into his or her spiritual unfoldment.
2. **Niyama:** These are personal observance attained by discipline. The five Niyamas or observance are.
 - i) **Saucha (Purity):** Any kind of impurity in our body provides an obstruction to our optimal functioning. It is the impurities of our body that stands between us and the highest realization. Practice of yoga helps to remove impurities from body.
 - ii) **Santosha (Contentment):** It is the way of being happy with whatever life brings you. It is learning not to expect or desire more than what you need.

- iii) **Tapa (Transformative Spiritual Practices):** To burn off the dross and produce pure Gold. One needs to heat the gold. TAPA also creates the heat that purifies and lengthens our bodies and minds to make them fit vehicles for self-realization.
 - iv) **Swadhyaya (Spiritual Study):** It refers to an intensity of contemplation in which this deeper knowledge is revealed to the person observing swadhyaya from within the self.
 - v) **Inhwara Pranidhan (Dedication of Thoughts and Actions to God):** This practice can include any type of devotional worship, singing devotional songs, repetitions of mantras (names of God) etc. This practice helps to purify one's mind. Both yamas and niyamas forbid any kind of misuse of body or mind. Through their practice, an aspirant cultivates unselfish behaviour, health, genuine happiness, one want oneness of mind and strong willpower. These move as aspirant towards the goal of perfection and self-s realization, the ultimate goal of yoga.
3. **Asana:** These are slow stretching activities performed to improve the whole-body fitness.
 4. **Pranayamas:** This is a systematic and rhythmic control of breathing performed to improve the internal functioning of the whole body. There are many techniques of pranayama which are known as.
 - (a) Brahmari (This is also known as the Free Breath)
 - (b) Sitali and Sitkari (use to cool breaths)
 - (c) Anuloma vilome (meaning with a natural manner and going against)
 - (d) Uggayi Breath
 5. **Pratyahara:** The meaning of this is a sense of withdrawal. It develops inner mental strength by controlling sense organs or withdrawal of serve organs from wordily pains.
 6. **Dharna:** Dharana means concentration. It is the fixation of the mind on one point with high concentration without getting disturbed. It is an integral or internal religion, the generic heart of all religions, as expressed through ethical and moral behaviour. It includes wilful spiritual practices such as prayer, energy control, exercises, wilful practice of Asanas and pranayama, fasting, Chanting Mantras, generosity, study of scriptures etc., all of which have the effect of generating the quality of Sattva Guna within an individual.
 7. **Dhayana:** It is the process of controlling the mind through meditation. It develops a high level of concentration.
 8. **Samadhi:** Samadhi means state of total introversion. Attainment of Samadhi leads to super consciousness which is attained through yogic practice. Samadhi is considered as eighth or the last limb (Anga) of the Ashthanga yoga.

4. YOGA IS BENEFICIAL DURING PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 crisis has had a vastly negative impact on people ranging from physical, mental, psychological, emotional, societal, and not to forget the financial aspect of it. The pandemic has left many with mental health issues, loneliness, constant fear, psychological suffering, depression, and anxiety.

Yoga can come to the help of people dealing with such a crisis, the United Nations explained the message of the practice is to promote both physical and mental health. The experts suggest that Covid-19 affects the lungs directly, it is imperative to strengthen the lungs. The exercises and yoga asanas suggested by the experts help in reaching ideal saturation level, oxygenation, and restore lung function. The breathing exercises also help in blood circulation and making one feel active during this monotonous time. Ministry of AYUSH given the yoga exercise and its benefits which are described in table 1.

Table 1: Yoga Practices for prevention, rehabilitation and to increase immunity.

S.No	Yoga Practices	Do's	Dont's	Benefits
1.	Shodhana Kriya (Yogic, cleansing practices), Jalaneti, Sutra Neti	Use lukewarm water for cleansing. Jalneti must be followed by kapalabhati to remove all water from nasal passage. Neti, is advised to practice weekly once or twice.	Should avoid in case of epistaxis, middle ear infection, and recent ENT surgery.	Neti helps in cleansing sinuses, beneficial in allergic conditions and reduces upper airway reactivity.
2.	Yogic SūkṣmaVyāyāmas / shithilikaranavyayamas/ Pawanamuktasana series (Joint movements): Neck movements Shoulder rotation Trunk movement Knee movement Ankle rotation	Move the joints as far as possible. Do it slowly with breath awareness	Do not over strain. Avoid this practice in case of severe joint pain and illness	Joint movements help to increase blood circulation and reduce stiffness which enhance joint flexibility. Helps to facilitate asana practices.
3.	Yogasana: Standing, Sitting, Prone&Supine lying	Do it with breath awareness. Cardiac patients shall do with care as advised by Yoga experts . Asanas that involve chest expansion preferred Simplified version/s shall be followed be beginners and elderly population	Please avoid this practice in case of cardiac disorders, abdominal hernia,inflammation, ulcers, recent abdominal surgery & vertigo. Hypertensive patients should bend with care. Do not try to bend beyond the limits and do not overdo the lateral stretch	Ushtrasana, Utthana Mandukasana, Tadasana, Trikonasana, Vakrasana, Bhujangasana, Sarala Matsyasaanaetc. Practices improves chest expansion and cardio pulmonary functions.

4.	Kapalabhati	40-60 strokes per minute	Hypertensive, cardiac problems, patients with respiratory distress, slipped disc patients should not do it. Better to practice it early in the morning on an empty stomach	Improves pulmonary functions and reduces secretions. Very useful preparatory practice for pranayama practice Helps to cleanse frontal sinuses.
5.	Breathing & Pranayama: Sectional breathing Nadishodhana Ujjayi Bhramari	Breath should be slow, steady and controlled. It should not be forced or restricted in anyway. Initially start the practice with few repetitions and gradually increase the number of repetitions. If possible, maintain the ratio of 1:2 for inhalation and exhalation	In case of any cardiac disorders start with few repetitions and gradually increase the number of repetitions. Don't practice retention or hold at initial stage.	Nadishodhan pranayama reduces the sympathetic activity and stimulate vagal (parasympathetic) activity and decreases stress and anxiety. Ujjayi increase the oxygen saturation in body. Bhramari pranayama similar to humming may increase Nasal Nitric Oxide (NO), which may improve blood flow to the ciliary epithelium and has anti-inflammatory action.
6.	Yoga Nidra (Pratyaahara)	Follow mentally with awareness as per the instructions given during practices. Keep the eyes closed during the practice and avoid body movements.	Don't open the eyes until asked. Don't sleep Don't ask any questions during the practice even if any questions arise in the mind. Gradually increase the duration of the practice	Reduction in sympathetic arousal and reduced emotional distress and improves quality of sleep. Rejuvenate the body and helps to keep the mind calm

7.	Meditative practices Breath awareness, Dharana&Dhyan a)	For beginners, soothing music may be played in the background during meditation or to observe the breath. Practice it as long as you can.	Don't open your eyes Don't shake your body. Don't be judgemental with thoughts	Meditation helps to reduces anxiety and stress by reduce the cortisol level and enhance the alpha brain wave. Makes the body stable and calm the mind Balance the functions of neuroendocrine system thereby enhance the immune system.
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(Ministry of AYUSH, 2021)

Preparatory asanas (5-10 minutes)

Doing some loosening exercises like joint rotations is an excellent way to begin the practice. During the convalescence period, these can be done lying down or sitting on a chair. Moving all critical joints like the ankles, knees, hips, spine, wrist, elbow, shoulder, and neck will help improve circulation and reduce body ache. Afterward, non-standing posture like Thunderbolt Pose (Vajrasana), Child Pose (Balasana), Side Bends in Easy Pose (Sukhasana variation), Crocodile Pose (Makarasana), Half-Camel Pose (Ardha Ushtrasana), Seated Spinal Twist (Half Lord of the fishes pose), Supine Spinal Twist (Jataraparivartan asana), Pavanmuktasana (Wind releasing pose), etc. can be practiced as per individual capacity.

Choose asanas that are not too intense but help you move the body gently in different directions. These will help open up the airways and get the circulation going throughout the body, which will help you feel energized.

Cleansing breathing kriyas (2-3 minutes)

Cleansing kriyas like Kapalabhati help improve lung function and cleanse the sinuses, preparing us for pranayama practices. These should be done gently at about 40 strokes a minute. Three rounds of 30 seconds each are sufficient. Those with heart issues, acidity, hernia, slip disc should avoid it. It's essential to be on an empty stomach before practicing it. It is best done early in the morning. Those who are unable to do Kapalabhati can do 2-3 minutes of deep breathing in a sitting or supine position as an alternative cleansing practice.

Pranayama (5-15 minutes)

The best time to practice Pranayama is after asanas and breathing kriyas. It is because the blood circulation improves, allowing oxygen to be carried more efficiently, and your nasal passages, as well as sinuses, would be clearer. Essentially, you get the maximum benefit out of your practice. Sectional breathing, Nadi Shuddhi, and Bhramari are three fundamental breathing practices that you should include in your post-Covid routine. Sectional breathing helps you access maximum lung capacity, Bhramari helps improve oxygen absorption,

and Nadi Shuddhi is excellent for the nervous system. You can also do Pranayama before sleeping as long as there's enough gap after dinner. It will help you have a good night's rest. In all breathing practices try to make your exhalation longer than your inhalation — a good ratio is 1:2. The length of exhalation can be double the length of inhalation.

If you're feeling short of breath and are not yet ready for Pranayama, then doing deep breathing in the prone position (lying on the belly) is also very helpful.

Meditation (10-20 minutes)

Meditation will be pivotal in your recovery process as it helps the body achieve a relaxed, sleep-like state which promotes healing, recovery, and regeneration. The more stress-free, positive, and relaxed we are, the faster our recovery will be. Covid-19 is tiring physically, but it can also exhaust us mentally because of all the attention and awareness around it. Setting positive affirmations, mentally chanting a *mantra*, praying to a deity, creating a healthy and happy vision of yourself, or visualizing walking through a beautiful garden and taking deep breaths are some ways to find a calm and relaxed state of mind.

5. CONCLUSION

Yogasana have emerged as the much required in the present scenario. It is very helpful for reducing the stress and anxiety as well as respiratory system. Everyone needs to perform yoga for enhancing the immunity system and for better mental health. Pranayama, which is breathing and meditation yoga exercise, it helps to overcome anxiety, stress and breathing problems. Yoga in daily routine is beneficial for physical and mental health, and evaluating lifestyle of Yoga practitioners that may be instrumental in coping with stress associated with this time. In this time, there is a need to provide psychological support to the peoples so that they can come out of this pandemic challenge successfully without harming their mental well-being. And that is the most important for everyone to fit physically and mentally as well in the pandemic time.

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