



INFLUENCE OF YOGA ASANA, PRANAYAMA ON QUALITY OF LIFE AND MENOPAUSAL SYNDROME

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ABSTRACT

Woman should be considered as a most important valuable jewel as the four fold objectives of life, progeny, happiness, all can be attained only through her. Her life is spread into different stages due to some anatomical and physiological changes in body. She responds very differently in different stages of her lives. Menopause is a natural phase which tends to be highly variable in timings, pattern and behavior due to the reduction in reproductive sex hormones. Symptoms associated with menopause are mood changes, hot flushes, emotional changes, sleep disturbance, dry skin and hair, aches and pains in joints known for the negative effects on the quality of life of many women. *Yoga* encourages woman to know her woman hood & express her feminine energy and power and giving her enough knowledge to use them on a day by day basis. While knowing and caring for herself in times of vulnerability she can maintain her individuality, energy, respect, power & health applying the principles of *Yoga* to her own individual situation. *Asana* and *Pranayama* have a far reaching effect upon body and mind. *Pranayama* is the practice of breath control, and *Asana* is the practice of physical postures. Therefore, combining these two elements make for ultimate *Yoga* practice. *Yoga* can be helpful to manage the changes in body from puberty to menopause. It makes the changes less painful and improve immunity and resistance to handle changes naturally.

KEYWORDS: *Yoga, Asana, Pranayama*, Menopausal syndrome, Hormones.

INTRODUCTION

Yoga is one of the most extraordinary spiritual sciences that mankind has ever discovered. It is like a gem of great proportion, containing many facets whose light can illumine the whole of our lives with great meaning. *Yogic* methods covers the entire field of our existence-from the physical, sensory, emotional, mental and spiritual to the highest self-realization. Ultimately, through the practice of *Yoga*, the impurity and imperfection of the human is removed to allow the true self. *Yoga* is regarded as having the potential to help address malfunctions or imbalances that manifest as physical symptoms of disease, in particular those related to the stressful and often sedentary nature of lifestyles. People from all ages and backgrounds are drawn to *Yoga* classes offered in studios, health clubs, gyms and educational institutions. *Yoga* may be of particular importance to mid-life women as a safe, accessible exercise option to those experiencing the effects of aging such as chronic injury, movement limitations, inability to participate in high impact or high intensity activities and also benefits for menopausal symptoms. Menopause is defined as loss of menstrual cycles caused by decline in ovarian follicular activity. This is considered to be permanent after 12 consecutive months of amenorrhea, and thus can only be recognized in retrospect. The period of 2-8 years leading up to, and one year following the last menstrual cycle is considered to be perimenopause. Menopausal symptoms may be experienced at any point within these phases, and can range from negligible to severely problematic. These may include vasomotor

symptoms, mood disturbance, increased stress reactivity, cognitive difficulty, headache and sleep disturbances. These symptoms are presumed to be directly related to hormonal changes occurring at peri-menopause, but the mechanism by which symptoms are elicited is unclear. *Yoga* teacher and *Ayurvedic* doctor G. Iyengar suggests that the hormonal shifts accompanying menopause can be ameliorated through the practice of *Yogaasanas* (postures), due to their effects on the endocrine as well as the nervous system.

Role of *Yoga* On Woman's Health

Yoga influence woman's health at any stage of life. Benefits of particular concern to women include relief from premenstrual syndrome, lower back pain, depression, respiratory disorders, or menopausal symptoms. *Asana* consists of various static postures and physical movements performed to release tension, improve flexibility, muscular strength, cardiovascular health, maximize the flow of energy and remove frictions^[1]. They keep the spinal column subtle, begin a systematic cleansing of the tissues^[2]. As like that *Pranayama* is beneficial for treating diseases of respiratory, circulatory, nervous systems. Yet it is excellent for all conditions of debility, low energy, chronic fatigue, weak immunity and convalescence. The psychological benefits include relief from stress, relaxation, an overall feeling of well-being^[3].

Yogaasana (postures) for Health

Yogaasana (postures) are one of the most important systems of physical culture^[4]. Most importantly they begin preparing the body for more advanced *Yogic* practices. *Asana* is mainly meant to help for reduction of *Rajas* or the turbulence that disturbs the mind. Without proper *Asana* to settle senses (*Indriyas*), mind (*Mana*), concentration and meditation are very difficult. That's why it is helpful in stress, insomnia etc.. *Asana* helps in treatment of all diseases. Its action is mainly indirect, except in the case of musculoskeletal or structural problems. It works to improve circulation to disease affected area in order to release toxins and improving the healing and growth of tissues. This catalyzes the body's healing processes on several levels^[5]. It is the most important lifestyle recommendation for exercise.

Our physical posture affects our health, vitality and awareness. The mind-body complex consists of various interrelated channels, from those some channels carry food to those channels which carry thoughts. These channels are held together on a physical level by the musculoskeletal system, the shape of which is determined by our postures.

Benefits of Yogaasana (postures)^[6]

- Better growth and physical development.
- Stronger and flexible muscle and bones.
- Prevent stress injuries from other sports, helps loosen tight muscles and joints.
- Boost self-confidence, acceptance of rapid changes during puberty.
- Helps in building self-esteem, concentration, healthy mind.
- Decrease lower back pain, nausea, carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches and shortness of breath.
- Decrease the risk of preterm labor, pregnancy-induced hypertension and intrauterine growth restriction-a condition that slows a baby's growth.
- Helps in balancing the hormones.
- Overall feeling of wellbeing.

Wrong Asana (posture) creates^[7]

- Various stresses causing contractions that impair or block the proper flow through the channels.
- It inhibits the circulation of energy and nutrients.
- Allow toxins and waste materials to accumulate.
- Causes discomforts, resulting pain and disease.
- As body and mind are interconnected, physical blockages intertwine with mental and emotional blockages and hold various addictions and attachments.

Physiology of Yogaasana (postures)

Yoga posture tend to switch on the parasympathetic nervous system, responsible for rest and repair, and turn off the sympathetic nervous system, used for the fight-or-flight stress response. Increased parasympathetic activity has a beneficial effect on many systems in the body, and allows the nervous system to become more balanced, freeing up the body's inherent healing responses.

Pranayama (breath training) for Health^[8]

Prana means the vital force and *Ayama* means expansion. So *Pranayama* means "expansion of vital force". We are all in pursuit of *Prana* as our main activity in life. *Yoga* teaches us how to master *Prana* and unfolds its deeper powers. According to *Vedas*, *Prana* within the human body correspondence to sun in the external world. As like solar energy transforms the external world, the *Pranic* energy is also a key to internal transformation.

Benefits of Pranayama (Breath training)

- It helps to gain the power over the mind and senses.
- *Pranic* force can be used to heal body and mind.
- It calms mind and facilitate meditation.
- Effective in the treating of diseases of respiratory, circulatory and nervous system.
- It is excellent for all conditions of debility, low energy, chronic fatigue, weak immunity, convalescence.
- Effective in the treatment of depression and other emotional disorders, release the grief and attachment.

Physiology of Pranayama (breath training)

It exercises all the organs in the body through the internal massage action of inhalation and exhalation. This massaging action improves circulation to the organs and dispels toxins, bringing the *Doshas* to the digestive tract for elimination. It sets up a deep and powerful organic rhythm to sustain not only health and strength but calmness of mind^[8].

Brimhana (tonification) and *Langhana* (reduction) are the two main well known treatment strategies in *Ayurveda*. Retention after deep inhalation increases the *Brimhana* or tonifying effect of *Pranayama*. It is useful for calming *Vata* and building *Ojas*. It has a stabilizing and grounding effect, giving strength to both body and mind^[10].

Retention after exhalation increases the *Langhana* or reducing aspect of *Pranayama*. This is good for reducing *Kapha* and increasing *Prana* and has a detoxifying effect. But it can aggravate *Vata* if we hold the breath too long^[11].

Influence of Yoga on Menopausal Syndrome

Menopause, defined as a decline in ovarian function leading to cessation of menstrual cycles, is associated with a host of disruptions including vasomotor symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and mood disturbances. Any of these can significantly compromise quality of life^[12]. The decline in estrogen that accompanies menopause is presumed to be a factor in experience of symptoms, and one which may trigger fluctuations in adrenal and ovarian hormones such as dehydroepiandrosterone Sulfate (DHEA-S) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH)^[13]. Higher levels of dehydroepiandrosterone Sulfate (DHEA-S) may protect against vasomotor symptoms^[14] and is inversely associated with psychological distress and musculoskeletal pain^[15]. The elevated levels of follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) associated with fluctuating estrogen, on the other hand, are associated with increased vasomotor symptoms as well as cognitive, psychological and musculoskeletal

symptoms^[16]. *Meditation* and *Asana* have shown potential to relieve hot flushes and improve quality of life^[17]. In popular literature it is suggested that the beneficial effects of *Yoga* may result from changes in hormone levels, such as the adrenal androgen, dehydro-epiandrosterone Sulfate (DHEA-S) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). *Yogaasana*, meditation, and controlled breathing (*Pranayama*) have shown potential for reducing menopausal symptoms^[18] and *Hathayoga* represents a combination of all of these behavioral strategies.

Physiological effects of yoga on menopausal syndrome

The *Yoga* practices recommended for women emphasize the beneficial effects on the neuroendocrine system, particularly the effect on stress responses mediated through the sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis^[19]. Through compression and release from the surrounding tissue, circulation to the glands is believed to be enhanced, and certain poses are said to regulate function of the adrenal glands and thus "quiet" the sympathetic nervous system. Furthermore, *Pranayama* (breath training) and *Savasana* (relaxation) that are intrinsic to *Yoga* practice may mediate hyperarousal of the sympathetic nervous system^[20] and moderate activity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, lowering the release of stress hormones such as cortisol. However, dehydro-epiandrosterone Sulfate (DHEA-S) is also responsive to hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) activity.

It can be hypothesized that changes in menopausal symptoms would be accompanied by changes in circulating hormone levels, mainly with reduction in symptoms associated with decreases in follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and increases in dehydroepiandrosterone Sulfate (DHEA-S).

Latest Research Information

In a world that demands substantive clinical research evidence to support different approaches to health care, yoga is gaining attention. Journals like complementary therapies in clinical practice frequently publish research on yoga. Recent papers have focused on practicing yoga to reduce essential hypertension and anxiety, during pregnancy, its effect on regulating heart rhythm, the connection between yoga and changes in brain wave activity, the improvement of core stability and balance, and relief of postpartum depression^[21]. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his UN Address suggested the date of June 21 as "World Yoga Day", as it is the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere and shares special significance in many parts of the world^[22].

CONCLUSION

Yogic practices like *Asana* and *Pranayama* support the overall health of women from childhood to old age. Many lifestyle issues that lead to lifestyle chronic diseases are also resolved through regular *Yoga* practice. Stress at any age affects the mind body complex negatively and is the root of all health disorders in one way or another. *Yoga* provides a way for us to relieve ourselves of stress. A positive lifestyle with regular practice of *Yoga* can ensure that people can live healthier and happier lives without the

onset of disease and degenerative ailments. With increasing numbers of women experiencing menopause-related issues and decrease in quality of life, there is an increased interest in safe, inexpensive, non-invasive management of symptoms. Many women are interested in the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) to treat symptoms of menopause^[23] and *Yoga* continues to hold appeal as a relatively inexpensive, accessible, and non-invasive therapeutic intervention.

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