

# Yoga, A Strength Based Strategy To Manage Our Own Selves



## 'Yoga' means

To be one with the divine

Yoga from Sanskrit word YUJ- 'to unite', 'to join'

Its origin in the Vedas, one of the oldest records of the Indian culture written around 200 A.D.

*If we go deeply into such ways of life as Buddhism, Taoism, Vedanta and Yoga, we do not find philosophy or religion as those understood in the West. We find something more nearly resembling psychotherapy (Watts, 1961)*

'...asana has two qualities- steadiness and alertness; and ability to remain comfortable in the posture....'

## A simple and natural programme with five main principles

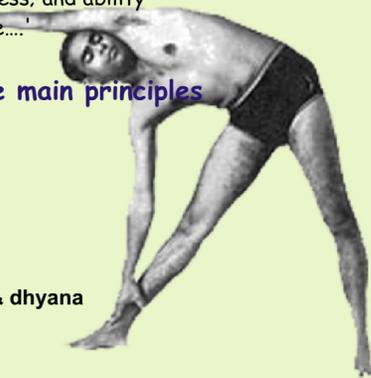
Proper breathing- pranayama

Proper exercise- asanas

Proper relaxation- shavasana

Positive thinking & meditation- vedanta & dhyana

Proper diet- vegetarian



*'The effect of three months of yogic practices on the physiological, psychological wellbeing, psychomotor parameter and modifying cardiovascular risk factors mild to moderate hypertensive patients showed that there was decrease in blood pressure and an overall improvement in subjective wellbeing and quality of life' (Damodaran et al 2002)*

'...regular practice of yoga can help face the turmoil of life with steadiness and stability...'

## Positive thinking

Regular practice along with a healthy diet and lifestyle helps generate enormous amounts of energy in our body stimulating the cells and relaxing tensed muscles.

**Stress** is a reaction of the mind and body to any event that brings about a change

Yoga helps to **calm our mind, to concentrate**- both internally to focus on the 'self' and externally to focus on anything other than the 'self'

Turning the mind's **concentration inward**, upon the self we can deepen that experience of perfect concentration- or the state of meditation

If the posture or **asana can be a metaphor for a stressful moment** learning to stay calm and equanimous through it, could be one aim of yoga

*'Western influences are evident in most methods of coping used for stress, advised by practitioners- as the ultimate solution to the problem. Through a shift in paradigm indigenous methods need to be reconsidered' (Kumar 2002)*



'...an asana involves thought, at the end of which balance is achieved between movement and resistance....'

## Proper Exercise

'Asanas' or steady pose is the physical aspect of yoga

**Endocrine system** (glands, hormones) is rejuvenated helping to balance emotions and improve mental health

Exercises **focus on health of the spine**, its strength and flexibility - circulation increased, nerves supplied with nutrients, oxygen

**Muscle development goes beyond a healthy body**- organs function properly under conscious, intelligent control of mind

'...the brain must be calm, the body active....'

## Proper Breathing

Most of us use a fraction of our breathing. Yoga teaches breathing exercises called 'Pranayama', which means 'control of the prana' or our vital breath.

**Three basic types of breathing**- clavicular breathing; intercostal breathing and abdominal breathing or deep breathing, bringing air to lowest part of our lungs, optimizing use of our diaphragm

**A full yogic breath** combines all three beginning with abdomen, continuing through intercostal and clavicular areas

**Breathing exercises** concentrate on exhalation rather than inhalation - cleanses our lungs of stale air eliminating toxins

**During pranayama**, the cells of our brain and facial muscles remain soft, receptive

**Control of 'prana'** the subtle energy of vital breath leads to control of our mind

*'Conscious training through concentration and meditation teaches the individual how to control thoughts and voluntarily eliminate unwanted ones, just as movements and muscle tensions can be eliminated by relaxation procedures' (Palsane 1981)*

'...the whole body should be symmetrical. Yoga is symmetry...'

## Proper Relaxation

Release of tension through relaxation is vital to keep the body healthy. Begin each session of yoga with relaxation, relaxation between postures- allowing the released energy to flow freely until the final relaxation

'Shavasana' - the pose of a corpse is the final relaxation

Leaves us with a **calmness to absorb energy** released by asanas

**Messages are sent to tired muscles** ordering them to relax

*'After induced stress i.e., treadmill running, 'Shavasana', when compared to 'resting in chair' and 'resting in supine' postures, brought out faster recovery in twenty seven subjects. Recovery was measured in terms of heart rate and blood pressure' (Bera et al 1998)*



'...the food we eat must be conducive to stress - free living, nourishing, calming...'

## Proper Diet

Food that is simple, pure, nourishing, with 'prana', life- force energy made up of natural foods, easily digested keeps body vital and healthy.

## Patanjali's Raja Yoga 'eight - limbed' or ashtanga yoga

**1. Yama or restraint**- Nonviolence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non stealing (asteya), continence (brahmacharya), aparigraha (self- reliance)

**2. Niyama or observance**- involves cleanliness, austerity and practice  
(Steps 1 and 2 have the mechanisms of behaviour control)

**3. Asana**- attaining stability of physique

**4. Pranayama**- respiratory movement for control of the internal mechanisms  
(Steps 3 and 4 have voluntary control of the physiology of the body)

**5. Pratyahara** - or restraining the sense organs  
(Step 5 has behavioral and psycho physiological controls that are integrated spontaneously)

**6. Dharana** - or concentration

**7. Dhyana** -or meditation

(Steps 6 and 7 has self analysis and self reflection occurring restructuring the perceptions about the outer world and oneself)

**8. Samadhi** - or transcendence or enlightenment - to the highest level of awareness or psyche profound, inexplicable

*'The above stages said to bring about cognitive change incomparable to modern cognitive psychotherapies. The 1st to 7th steps have to be practiced repeatedly to bring the mind to a meta-stable state and bring about a disappearance of all the fluctuations of the mind' (Balodhi, 1986)*

## Scientific basis of yoga as therapy

### To promote and maintain health

The passive stretching during the practice improves circulation, effective removal of toxic substances including waste material and by balancing the autonomic nervous system. The cardiovascular endurance, minimum muscular fitness, flexibility, respiratory capacities are improved within 15 to 30 days of practice.

### For prevention of diseases

The resistance power of the individual is improved and the regulatory systems are stimulated for their optimum functions. The homeostasis is maintained and yoga acts as the prophylactic medicine.

### For treatment of the person as a whole

The integrated approach of yoga promotes positive mental health. The social, spiritual, mental and physical as well as environmental aspects of the personality are tackled by the yogic code of conduct, improving relationships within the family.

**Hathayoga** is an empirical system of practices that establishes the homeostasis in the regulatory processes of the body developing muscle tone, mental relaxation, emotional steadiness and autonomic balance. Suitable techniques of asanas, pranayamas, kriyas and meditation are used for therapeutic effects.

**Therapeutic for specific disorders based on scientific research**- Hypertension, Asthma, Diabetes, Obesity, Spondylitis, Arthritis, Rheumatism, Gastro-intestinal disorders, Cardio-vascular disorders, Depression, Sleep disorders, Stress related problems

(Reference: Gore, M.M., (2002) Therapeutic Efficacy of Yoga. NIMHANS Publication, No. 47 pp: 53-55)

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