

RELEVANCE OF YOGA IN HEALTH MANAGEMENT IN 21ST CENTURY

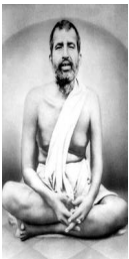
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(1) Yoga in 21st Century

Yoga and spirituality are inseparable. It is an ancient teaching that helps the persistent practitioner to achieve the spiritual enlightenment. By no means has it consisted of a set of exercise routine only. Yoga is comprehensive system, a way of thinking, a way of living one's everyday life. In essence, spirituality deals with one's relationship with that which is beyond individuality.

From the yogic perspective, one experiences the spirituality by cultivating his awareness and taking this awareness deep into the subtle dimensions of his being. Awareness allows one to experience the subtler aspects of life and marks a step on his inner journey toward self-realization. Once one has forged a conscious relationship with that which is beyond the "little" him, then one can bring that connection and understanding into his everyday life. Only then can one truly permeate his life and teachings with depth and meaning.

In this modern era yoga help to achieve the highest goal of spirituality regardless of one's spiritual aim. Yoga has always been an important part of Indian civilization. Though its form have changed or seen with a different outlook in different centuries. Yoga was practiced and looked upon greatly in fifth and sixth century but during eighteenth century as Indian history was going through a turmoil in British rule where the encounter of two different culture occur whose consequences we are still facing, yoga was viewed differently but people kept experiencing it and it was passed on from generation to generation.



Ramkrishna Paramhansa

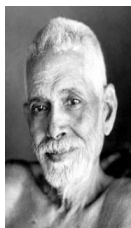


Swami Vivekananda

Many yogis appeared, practiced and spread yoga during these centuries. Some names are written in golden letters in history, some are going vague and some are mixed in ashes. Swami Ramkrishna Paramhansa and his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda belonged to nineteenth century, although their influences can still be felt, prompted by the urging of Ramakrishna and helped by the historical situation of India, which was responsible for his English education.

Vivekananda started a trend for popularity of yoga with

which inevitable ups and downs has stayed with us ever since.



Ramana Maharshi

One of the great yogis of twentieth century was Ramana Maharshi. His instructions, especially the two books "Self Enquiry" and "Who am I" can be classified as follower of the path of 'Janana yoga'. He said that breath control is only an aid for diving deep within oneself. One may as well dive down by controlling the mind. When the mind is controlled, the breath is controlled automatically. One need not attempt breath control, mind control is enough. Breath control is only recommended for those who cannot control their minds straight way.

In the absence of enquiry and devotion, the natural sedative pranayama (breath regulation) may be tried. This is known as yoga marga (the path of yoga). If life is imperiled the whole interest centers round one point, the saving of life. If the breath is held the mind cannot afford to (and does not) jump at its pets - external objects. Thus there is rest for the mind so long as the breath is held. All attention being turned on breath or its regulation, other interests are lost. The source of breath is the same as that of the mind. Therefore the subsidence of either leads effortlessly to the subsidence of the other.



Sri Aurobindo

Another great yogi of twentieth century was Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo was the ever-creative silent bridge between God's will and his fulfilment. In Integral yoga, God-realisation means merely standing at the shore of the vast sea of consciousness. The fire-pure change of the inner and outer life means swimming in that sea. Manifestation of the divine on earth means returning home after having crossed the sea. It is not a dream of God but his decree that heaven and earth must fall supremely in love with each other. He wants their marriage to take place sooner than immediately.

Earth feels that she is inferior to heaven. Heaven feels that he is superior to earth. And because of their mutual hesitation, the day of their marriage is kept in abeyance.

Integral yoga has made a significant choice. It wants not only to see and feel the conscious evolution of life, but also to embody a fully harmonised life of matter and spirit. An Integral yogi is he who sacrifices his life to become a bridge between earth and heaven. He has foregone heaven; he uplifts earth. The aspirant in man is the cross-bearer. The yogi in man is the crown-bearer. To say that yoga is the realisation of God is not to say all. Yoga is the living union.

Even some scientists were attracted to the physiology of human body and psychology of the human personality while practising yoga. Certain investigators Mookerji, Chahal and Giri (1977)¹; Wenger, Bagachi (1961)²; Robson (1972)³ and Gharote (1981)⁴ saw that yoga has a significant effect on the nervous system.

(2) **Benefits of yoga**

Yoga, the sanskrit word for 'union', is a practice that uses posture and breathing techniques to induce relaxation and improve strength, and its health benefits may surpass those of any other activity. Whether one practice yoga to relax, stretch, breathe, meditate, or simply because it's in fashion, he may not realize the numerous health benefits of yoga. And while there are many different kinds of yoga, ranging from the gentler Hatha yoga to the more strenuous, like Bikram yoga (which is performed in a 105°F room) or power yoga, every form of yoga improves health from head to toe. Here are some of yoga's many health benefits.

2.1 Benefits of Yoga to our Bones, Muscles, and Joints

- (i) The physical benefits of yoga are myriad. Yoga keeps our body strong, as it involves all the muscles in our body to hold and balance yoga asanas (poses). The various yoga postures strengthen our feet, legs, hands, abdominals, lower back, legs, and shoulders.
- (ii) Yoga's stretching and breathing exercises improve our flexibility, helping joints, tendons, and muscles stay limber. People suffering from osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis will see a noticeable improvement in their stiffness, pain, and other arthritic symptoms by practicing yoga poses and postures.
- (iii) Yoga improves our endurance, especially the more athletic forms of yoga such as ashtanga yoga, power yoga, vinyasa yoga, and Bikram yoga. These rigorous yoga practices follow a specific sequence of poses (asanas) that become more challenging as one progresses. Unlike the gentler Hatha yoga, the forms of Ashtanga yoga, Power yoga, Vinyasa yoga, and Bikram yoga require one to keep his body in constant motion

between poses, resulting in a strenuous cardiovascular workout and improved core strength.

- (iv) Hatha yoga can relieve chronic back and neck pain, since the poses and postures gently stretch and strengthen our back and neck muscles.
- (v) Yoga is often prescribed to help heal various injuries, including repetitive strain injuries, knee and back injuries, pulled hamstrings, even minor skin burns.
- (vi) Yoga is an excellent weight-bearing exercise that can improve our bone density. This is particularly beneficial for women approaching menopause, since yoga can help ward off osteoporosis, or thinning of the bone.

2.2 *Benefits of Yoga to the Cardiovascular System*

Yoga has tremendous health benefits for our heart. Most notably:

- (i) The gentler forms of yoga lower our blood pressure because the asanas (yoga poses, postures, and yoga positions) keep blood flowing evenly throughout our body while we focus on our breathing.
- (ii) People suffering from hypertension can benefit from yoga tremendously, as Hatha yoga can lower our heart rate and blood pressure.
- (iii) Many practitioners claim that yoga has also lowered their cholesterol.
- (iv) Power yoga is an excellent form of cardio conditioning, which strengthens core muscles while it keeps blood and oxygen circulating throughout your body.

2.3 *Benefits of Yoga on Mental Health*

- (i) Yoga benefits anyone's mental health by helping him or her relax, and it is an effective form of psychological therapy. Yoga reduces anxiety and stress, resulting in better health, better mood, and better concentration throughout the day. Yoga has been used to help treat a wide variety of emotional and mental disorders, including acute anxiety, depression, and mood swings.
- (ii) Even children can benefit from yoga. Those with attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity can learn to relax and get control by using yoga breathing and yoga asanas.
- (iii) Because yoga is a form of meditation, it results in a sense of inner peace and purpose, which has far-reaching health benefits.
- (iv) Yoga has been used to help heal victims of torture or other trauma.

2.4 *Benefits of Yoga on Other Health Conditions*

- (i) Yoga can rid one of tension headaches and migraines because yoga circulates blood and oxygen to our head, which can often, prevent headaches from starting.
- (ii) A regular yoga practice helps boost antioxidants throughout your body, resulting in a stronger immune system and improved ability to heal quickly from disease or injury.
- (iii) Yoga can help lose weight and maintain a healthy weight throughout the life. Power yoga is a vigorous form of yoga that burns calories, resulting in weight loss.
- (iv) Many women going through menopause report an easing of symptoms when they begin practicing yoga.

2.5 *Benefits of Yoga in Everyday Life*

- (i) Yoga can help cure insomnia, as regular yoga practice leads to better and deeper sleep.
- (ii) Yoga can help fight fatigue and maintain your energy throughout the day.
- (iii) Yoga is an effective treatment for a variety of autoimmune diseases because it can reduce the symptoms these diseases often cause, such as stiffness, malaise, fatigue, and weakness.

2.6 *Importance of yoga in sports*

- (i) **Yoga for cure of sports injuries**

Herbert De. Vries (1961)⁵ has reported the utility of stretching procedure of hath Yoga in relieving certain conditions of muscles due to injuries in sports.

(ii) Yoga for the prevention of sports injury

Yoga is the perfect activity for athletes interested in cross training, injury prevention, increasing core strength, and increasing balance. It is not over-stating things to say that yoga can truly be the fountain of youth for athletes and fitness enthusiasts.

Most sports or fitness injuries occur through over-training and repetitive injuries. Performing the same motions over and over again with the same muscles, tendons, and ligaments create muscle imbalance, tight muscles, and inflammation. Yoga can change all that by creating the proper muscle balance through its stretching movements and balancing postures.

(iii) Increased functional range of movement and flexibility

Yoga is not just stretching. It is stretching in functional movements that create increased range of motion, increased flexibility, and increased strength in motion muscles and joints. Yoga reverses all of those repetitive movements that tighten our muscles.

Most athletes give up yoga because they are very bad at it. They are bad because they have become so tight over the years from doing the same movements over and over. For example long-distance runners typically have very tight hamstrings and lower back muscles. Yoga can bend the body in the opposite directions to balance out those tight areas.

(iv) Develop the proper breathing technique

Athletes know that proper breathing is vital for stamina and peak performance. Too much nervousness or anxiety will disrupt breathing and proper performance. Yoga teaches us how to breathe deeply in a relaxed manner, the perfect type of breathing for sports performance. In addition, proper breathing can increase stamina through efficient oxygen use. The best way to focus on a task and be in the moment is to focus on the breath. Yoga focuses on breathing and all athletes can reach their peak performance faster through a proper breathing technique.

(v) Increased core strength

Instead of bulking up to look good, most high-level athletes know that core strength is the most efficient kind of strength. Your core is what helps one to create power in his movements and sporting motions. Every yoga poses uses core strength because our core is how our body maintains its balance. If the body is off balance in a pose, a strong core mid-section can contract to stabilize the body. Also, many yoga movements require isometric mid-section contractions which are a much more natural way to increase core strength as compared to a workout machine.

Padahastana, Paschimottasana, Ugrasana and Halasana should be performed by athletes to avoid any injury during running events.

2.7 Yoga for promotion of sports

Yoga has also a role to play in the promotion of sports. It depends on:

i) Promotion of specific sports skills.

There are several books like ‘Yoga for tennis’ and ‘Yoga and football’ where yoga’s help in the field of sports is described.

ii) Promotion of basic motor fitness factors.

De. Vries (1961)⁶, Gharote (1974)⁷ (1976)⁸, Dhanraj (1974)⁹, Giri (1966)¹⁰ R. Moses (1972)¹¹, Gharote and Ganguly (1976)¹² had done research work which could be quoted. Terrien

(1969)¹³ have given enough evidence for promoting fitness factors through yoga. Gharote has also mentioned a short term yogic training to improve basic fitness factors.

iii) Promotion of psychological factors

Emotional factors are very important in the performance of sports. If rightly used emotions can contribute to the improvement of the performance in sports. Emotions are governed by the working of the autonomic nervous system. Control over the autonomic nervous system brings the emotional disturbances down. Yogic exercises as a group play a significant role in the training of the autonomic nervous system. Stretching exercises like asanas, relaxation techniques, and breathing exercises in the form of pranayama are excellent in conditioning the system.

2.8 Maintenance of physical fitness

The enormous physical benefits are just a “side effect” of this powerful practice. What yoga does is harmonize the mind with the body and this result in real quantum benefits. It is now an open secret that the will of the mind has enabled people to achieve extraordinary physical feats, which proves beyond doubt the mind and body connection.

Yoga through meditation works remarkably to achieve this harmony and helps the mind work in Synchronise with the body. How often do we find that we are unable to perform our activities properly and in a satisfying manner because of the confusions and conflicts in our mind weigh down heavily upon us. Moreover, stress which in reality is the killer affecting all parts of our physical, endocrinal and emotional systems can be corrected through the wonderful yoga practice of meditation.

In fact yoga = meditation, because both work together in achieving the common goal of unity of mind, body and spirit – a state of eternal bliss.

The meditative practices through yoga help in achieving an emotional balance through detachment. What it means is that meditation creates conditions, where you are not affected by the happenings around you. This in turn creates a remarkable calmness and a positive outlook, which also has tremendous benefits on the physical health of the body.

These are just some of the tangible benefits that can be achieved through yoga. Having seen this, it is educative to note why the ancient yogis performed yoga and the interdependence of yoga and meditation. The ultimate goal of the yogis was “self realization” or “enlightenment”.

But what is interesting is that for this they had to meditate for extensive spells of time – days, weeks and much more. This required tremendous physical fitness, energy and the capacity to subsist on next to nothing. Yoga positions or asanas provided them the fullest fitness with the least metabolism or stress and meditation in turn provided them the strength and will to perform these asanas effectively – a virtuous cycle of cause and effect. This mutually symbiotic relationship helped them in their path.

Yoga is a metaphysical doctrine or a philosophy. It provides amazing improvement towards health, personal appearance and youthfulness, which appears to be miraculous. In the 21st Century era health and psychological problems are treated by yoga. It can be said that physical, mental and psychological problems could be treated through yoga. Relevance and importance of Yoga is very much in present 21st Century in comparison to it was there in last two Centuries. It bears solutions of all physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social and family problems of our present hectic life style. So we should adopt Yoga on first priority in our day to day life matters.

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