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YOGA AND ITS ROLE IN STRESS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT:

"Stress'' is a commonly used term, and it is often used with different meanings. The standard definition for stress that will be used in this article is the disruption of the body's homeostasis or a state of disharmony in response to a real or perceived threat or challenge. Yoga methods provide a comparable improvement in stress, anxiety and health status. Stress is a constant factor in today's fast paced life that can jeopardize our health if left unchecked. Stress is a significant individual and public health problem that is associated with numerous physical and mental health concerns. It is estimated that between 75% and 90% of primary care physician visits are caused by stress-related illnesses like cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, depression, anxiety, immune system suppression, headaches, back and neck pain, and sleep problems are some of the health problems associated with stress.

Keywords: *Stress, Asnas, Hypothalamo-pituitary Adrenal axis, Yoga, Patanjali.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is the body's automatic response to any physical or mental demand placed on it. It is subjective and unpleasant felling of distress. The term *stress* is derived from the Latin word *Stringere*, which means "to be drawn tight." Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life. Stress can affect one's health, work performance, social life, and the relationship with family members. The stress response is a complex emotion that produces physiological changes to prepare us for fight-or-flight, to defend ourselves from the threat or flee from it. As a part of the adaptive response to stress, various body systems such as the autonomic, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and immune systems may be affected.

Behavioral scientist Stephen Robbins defines stress as that which arises from an opportunity, demand, constraint, threat, or challenge, when the outcomes of the event are important and uncertain. Stress can also be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and

even injury. Hence we can say that stress is a silent killer, and prolonged exposure to stress may exert harmful effects on physical, psychological, and behavioral well-being of an individual

Every one of us irrespective of our age, sex, education, occupation, socio-economic status, whether lives in rural or urban area face stress. Stress effects body, mind, behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently. It adversely affects a wide range of health condition and yoga is the most comprehensive approach to fighting stress.

Stress is a constant factor in today's fast paced life that can jeopardize our health if left unchecked. It is only in the last half century that the role of stress in every ailment from the common cold to AIDS has been emphasized, and the mechanisms involved in this process have been studied. Stress influences the immune response presumably through the activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal axis, hypothalamic pituitary-gonadal axis, and the sympathetic-adrenal-medullary system.

When we are in stress our nervous system respond by releasing a flood of stress hormone. This hormone stimulates the body for emergency action by "fight-flight or freeze" reaction also known as stress response. All these changes occur because of excess secretion of adrenaline as hypothalamus-pituitary adrenal glands become hyper active under stress. Prolong stress leads to increased 'wear and tear' of the body and mind, which in turn lead to:

The agent which causes stress is known as 'stressors'. Stress causes many harmful effect on the body such as:

- **Physical impact** - Weight gain/loss, Unexpected hair loss, Heart palpitations, High blood pressure, Digestive symptoms (such as dryness of mouth, flatulence, nausea, butterfly stomach) etc.
- **Emotional negative effects** includes Mood swing, Anxiety, can lead to depression & unhealthy coping strategies (i.e. alcohol, drugs). Stress is a common condition response to a physical threat or psychological distress that generates a host of chemical and hormonal reactions in the body. In mammals, these responses include changes that increase the delivery of oxygen and glucose to the heart and large skeletal muscles. The result of such a response to stress is physiological support for adaptive behaviors such as fight or flight.

As a part of the adaptive response to stress, various body systems such as the autonomic, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and immune systems may be affected. There are a number of ways that people respond to stressful situations in their lives, depending on their personalities, their cognitive style (characteristic thinking patterns), their background and prior experiences, their gender and ethnicity, and a host of other factors.

These responses may be grouped according to physiological reactions, emotional reactions, cognitive reactions and systemic reactions. Stress responses occur on multiple levels, and within many systems, in the body and mind. Responses to Stress may be Physiological, Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral such as Heart palpitations, Impaired memory, Fear, Crying, Sweating, Disorientation, Worry, Rage, Dry

mouth. Unrealistic demands, Panic, Fatigue, Disasterizing Guilt, Substance abuse, Illogical thinking, Anger. Self-medication, Nausea, Externalized blame, Denial, Impulsiveness, Dizziness, Obsessiveness, Hopelessness, Phobias, Loss of appetite, Loss of humor, Numbness, Hyperactivity, High blood pressure, Suicidal ideation, Depression, Lethargy, Personality traits, Surrender, Despair, Aggression, Weight loss or gain, Excessive fantasies, Impatience, Rambling.

2. STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1 **Breathing meditation techniques.**

2 **Physical exercise like yoga & workout routine.**

3 **Meditation**

Pranadharana (fixation of mind on breath). Pran means breath and dharana means fixation of mind. The practice of prandharna is done in 3 graded steps i.e.:

1. Counting of breath-count exhalation and inhalation together as 1 breath.
2. Feel the touch of the incoming and outgoing breath at the wall of the nose.
3. Feel the thermal sensation on the soft palate.

Benefits:

1. The mind becomes more sharp and controllable.
2. It impoves the concentration.
3. It prepares the person for meditation.

b**) Deep Breathing Meditation**

1. The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.
2. Sit comfortably with your back straight.
3. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise.
4. Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale.
5. Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

3. INFLUENCE OF YOGA ON STRESS RELATED CHANGES

Viewed as a holistic stress management technique, yoga is a form of CAM that produces a physiological sequence of events in the body reducing the stress response. Yoga is an ancient discipline designed to bring balance and health to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the individual. The scientific study of yoga has increased substantially in recent years and many clinical trials have been designed to assess its therapeutic effects and benefits. The word yoga is translated from the Sanskrit word yug or yuj, which means “to yoke.” Many yoga practitioners and teachers believe this

describes the union between mind and body, a concept that is central to this multifaceted practice. Yoga is recognized as a form of mind-body medicine that integrates an individual's physical, mental and spiritual components to improve aspects of health, particularly stress related illnesses. Evidence shows that stress contributes to the etiology of heart disease, cancer, and stroke as well as other chronic conditions and diseases. Due to the fact that stress is implicated in numerous diseases, it is a priority to include a focus on stress management.

Yoga philosophy and practice were first described by Patanjali in the classic text, *Yoga Sutras*, which is widely acknowledged as the authoritative text on yoga. Today, many people identify yoga only with asana, the physical practice of yoga, but asana is just one of the many tools used for healing the individual; only three of the 196 sutras mention asana and the remainder of the text discusses the other components of yoga including conscious breathing, meditation, lifestyle and diet changes, visualization and the use of sound, among many others

In *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali outlines an eightfold path to awareness and enlightenment called *ashtanga*, which literally means "eight limbs". The eight limbs are comprised of ethical principles for living a meaningful and purposeful life; serving as a prescription for moral and ethical conduct and self-discipline, they direct attention towards one's health while acknowledging the spiritual aspects of one's nature. Any of the eight limbs may be used separately, but within yoga philosophy the physical postures and breathing exercises prepare the mind and body for meditation and spiritual development. Based on Patanjali's eight limbs, many different yogic disciplines have been developed. Yoga is often depicted metaphorically as a tree and comprises eight aspects, or limbs: yama (universal ethics), niyama (individual ethics), asana (physical postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (control of the senses), dharana (concentration), dyana (meditation), and samadhi (bliss). Each has its own technique for preventing and treating disease.

A growing body of research evidence supports the belief that certain yoga techniques may improve physical and mental health through down-regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The HPA axis and SNS are triggered as a response to a physical or psychological demand (stressor), leading to a cascade of physiologic, behavioral, and psychological effects, primarily as a result of the release of cortisol and catecholamines (epinephrine and norepinephrine). This response leads to the mobilization of energy needed to combat the stressor through the classic fight-or-flight response.Yoga significantly decreases heart rate and systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Studies suggest that yoga reverses the negative impact of stress on the immune system by increasing levels of immunoglobulin A as well as natural killer cells. Yoga has recently been found to have beneficial effects on blood glucose levels in individuals with diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Yoga has been shown to be effective in relieving symptoms of mental illness including depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and schizophrenia. Overall, the studies comparing yoga and exercise seem to indicate that, in both healthy and diseased populations, yoga may be as effective

as, or better than exercise at improving a variety of health-related outcome measures, including HRV, blood glucose, blood lipids, salivary cortisol, and oxidative stress. Furthermore, yoga appears to improve subjective measures of fatigue, pain, and sleep in healthy and ill populations.

Hatha yoga enhances the capacity of the physical body through the use of a series of body postures, movements (asanas), and breathing techniques (pranayama). The breathing techniques of Hatha yoga focus on conscious prolongation of inhalation, breath retention, and exhalation. It is through the unification of the physical body, breath, and concentration, while performing the postures and movements that blockages in the energy channels of the body are cleared and the body energy system becomes more balanced. *Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice to the treatment of health conditions. Yoga therapy involves instruction in yogic practices and teachings to prevent reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional and spiritual pain, suffering or limitations*. Yogic practices enhance muscular strength and body flexibility, improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, promote recovery from and treatment of addiction, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life.

Yoga is a form of mind-body fitness that involves a combination of muscular activity and an internally directed mindful focus on awareness of the self, the breath, and energy.

Yoga is used for the treatment of cancer patients to decrease depression, insomnia, pain, and fatigue and increase anxiety control. Yoga's ability to improve cognitive functions and reduce stress makes it appealing in the treatment of schizophrenia, because of its association with cognitive deficits and stress related relapse. In one study, at the end of 4 months those patients treated with yoga were better in their social and occupational functions and quality of life.

Hatha yoga was chosen as the style of yoga for the study based on a literature review and consultation with key leaders in the yoga community. Hatha yoga includes breath awareness and internal centering to remove external concerns, achieve focus and become sensitive towards internal feelings; as well as relaxation and meditation to further enhance ridding the body of 'toxins' and enable release from mental and emotional blockages. Accompanying this are bodily postures that address mind—body—breath coordination, strength, flexibility and balance. Hatha is distinct from other branches of yoga, which include, Iyengar where there is use of props such as straps, bolsters and blocks with an emphasis on precision and balance; Ashtanga which is a rigorous style involving a fast flow of aerobic like postures aimed at gaining stamina and strength; Satyananda which combines elements of other yoga branches to form a gentler style with more emphasis on longer guided relaxation and meditation.

4. SOME YOGA ASNAS TO REDUCE STRESS AND ANXIETY

1. Savasana or Tadasana (breath awareness——lying or standing) Shoulder, arm, head and wrist rotation Tiryaka Tadasana (swaying palm tree pose)
2. Kati Chakrasana (waist rotating pose)
3. Uttanasana (standing forward bend)

4 Majariasana (cat stretch pose)

5 Ardho Mukha Svanasana (downward facing dog pose)

6 Virabhadrasana II (warrior pose)

7 Surya Namaskara (salute to the sun——modified)

SPINAL TWIST

8 Utthita Trikonasana (triangle pose)

9 Badha Konasana (bound angle pose)

10 Utkatasana (fierce posture)

POSE OF THE CHILD

11 Navasana (knees bent supported with hands)

12 Vrksasana (tree pose)

13 Nauka Sanchalanasana (rowing the boat pose)

14 Utthita Lolasana (swaying while standing pose)

15 Advasana—Makarasana—Matsya Kridasana—Savasana (relaxation postures)

Yoga poses that twist and compress organs, help massage and rejuvenate immune organs and channels. The practice of Yoga also generates balanced energy.vital energy required by the immune system. Other key poses can create specific benefits to improve immune function:

1. ***Kurmasana* (tortoise pose)** supports the thymus gland.
2. Inversions and forward bends, ***e.g., Adho Mukha Svanasana*** (Downward Facing Dog pose) improve the flow of the sinuses and help flush mucus from the lungs.
3. Chest and lung openers, ***e.g., Ustrasana*** (Camel pose), ***Yoga Mudra,*** and ***Bhujangasana*** (Camel pose) also increase lung mobility and flush out the lungs.
4. Restorative Yoga poses (supported and gravity-based) energy.

Yoga leads to an inhibition of the posterior or sympathetic area of the hypothalamus, thus, optimizing the body sympathetic responses to stressful stimuli, and restores autonomic regulatory reflex mechanisms associated with stress. Activity of the parasympathetic system may increase or remain unaffected. It is also well known that the hypothalamus and the limbic system are intimately concerned with emotional expressions. Yogic practices inhibit the areas responsible for fear, aggressiveness, and rage, and stimulate the rewarding centers in the median forebrain and other areas, leading to a state of bliss and pleasure. This results in lower anxiety, heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, and cardiac output. It is observed that yoga improves attention and emotional control as well as affects the nervous system, making the parasympathetic nervous system more dominant and stabilizing the autonomic nervous system to enhance resistance to the effect of stress. Yoga practices including asana's, slow breathing, meditation, increases activation of P.N.S. & lead to mental relaxation. Yoga is a way of improving our self and understanding our internal state.

Yogic practices probably inhibit the activity of the paraventricular nuclei of the hypothalamus, which in turn affects the anterior pituitary gland to produce less ACTH. The decrease in ACTH decreases the synthesis of cortisol from the adrenal glands.

5. FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES UNDERLIE THE TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES OF YOGA'S HEALING SYSTEM.

1. The first principle is the human body is a holistic entity comprised of various interrelated dimensions inseparable from one another and the health or illness of any one dimension affects the other dimensions.
2. The second principle is individuals and their needs are unique and therefore must be approached in a way that acknowledges this individuality and their practice must be tailored accordingly.
3. The third principle is yoga is self-empowering the individual is his or her own healer. Yoga engages the individual in the healing process; by playing an active role in their journey toward health, the healing comes from within, instead of from an outside source and a greater sense of autonomy is achieved.
4. The fourth principle is that the quality and state of an individual's mind is crucial to healing. When the individual has a positive mind-state healing happens more quickly, whereas if the mind-state is negative, healing may be prolonged.

6. BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES NEEDED

a) **Fight Stress Response:** You may respond best to relaxation techniques that quiet you down, such as meditation, deep breathing.

b) **Flight Stress Respones:** You may respond best to relaxation techniques that are stimulating and that energize your nervous system, such as rhythmic exercise.

c) **Freeze Stress Response:** Your challenge is to identify relaxation techniques that provide both safety and stimulation to help you "reboot" your system. Techniques such as mindfulness walking. When we are in a constant state of stress, ourminds are tense, our bodies are tense and our sympathetic nervous system is heightened. For effective yoga practices and to restore balance of mind and body, we can adopt four A'S i.e.

Change the situation

1. Avoid the stressor
2. Alter the stressor

Change your reaction

1. Adapt to the stressor
2. Accept the stressor

Avoid unnecessary stress. Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. Learn how to say "no" – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your

personal or professional life. & avoid people who stress you out. Alter the situation if you can't avoid a stressful situation; try to alter it by following points -

1. **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up:** If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
2. **Be willing to compromise**: When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same.
3. **Manage your time better**: Poor time management can cause a lot of stress.
4. **Adapt to the stressor**: If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.
5. **Reframe problems:** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective.
6. **Focus on the positive**: When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts.
7. **Accept the things you can't change**: Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession.

In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change. In all these cases, the yogic calmness attained by deep breathing practices, meditation and pranayama can restore one's faith in the life and he or she can come back from the

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to dealing with it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Yoga is said to be a complete science, as it fulfills the WHO's definition of health by addressing the individual at all physical, psychological, and social levels. Stress affects individuals of all age groups, and people of all sectors and occupations, including doctors. Though many modalities of treatments are available for reducing stress, people are trying to find an alternative to be relieved from stress without medications. Yogic science, having persisted for 5000 years and known to be spiritual for many years, is now being proven through scientific studies to have significant benefits on health.

Yogic science includes yogasanas (postures), pranayama (breathing practices), dhyana (meditation), and relaxation techniques which benefit human beings at every level. Through research studies, yoga has proven effective in many physical and psychological ailments. Apart from the management of diseased condition, it also has been proven to improve the positive health and quality of life of the healthy. Most importantly, yoga is also a strong practice for the prevention against painful ailments. Learning the skill of yoga could be considered to be more challenging initially than relaxation and therefore an underestimation of the therapeutic effect of yoga cannot be excluded. The research has indicated that yoga may have a beneficial effect in reducing stress and anxiety. Stress is a growing and significant public

health problem that results in important physiological, emotional, social and economic consequences to individuals, their family and the community at large. For individuals looking for self-help interventions to assist with the management of their stress and anxiety, yoga and meditation may provide viable treatment modalities for relieving these symptoms.

Regular yoga practice increases brain GABA levels and is shown to improve mood and anxiety more than other metabolically matched exercises, such as jogging or walking. Finally, we should also be giving a thought to the real yoga master's advice. It is advised that, only the physicality of yoga is known to all of us, and less than 1% of yoga practitioners actually concentrate on the mental and transforming, reprogramming properties of yoga. It is a way of life; beyond asanas and pranayama. It is not a process of dhyana which one sits for half an hour, and expects to get all the benefits of yoga. Yoga is ''chitta-vritti-nirodha'' or regulation of impulses and the deconditioning of the mind.

Specific yoga poses can induce the relaxation response in the body. Calming and restorativeposes along with controlled breathing activatethe parasympathetic nervous system, bringing the mind and body to a calm and relaxed state.

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