



## **Stress reductive mechanisms in yoga practice**

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### **Abstract**

This study is very important as stress is considered to be a severe problem today people are stressed from situations. The aim of this paper is to analyze the various factors causing stress at various situations and the positive impact of yogic practices on coping the stress. This paper explores the role and effectiveness of yogic practices in mitigating the stress level. The most effective yogic practices for the stress management proposed as stress reductive mechanisms in this paper are savasana, pranayama, and meditation. These yogic practices are designed to harmonize the workings of the nervous system and to relax the physical body. Savasana is a guided relaxation practice which includes basic body scans and mental visualization. Breathing is an important component stress reduction and by controlling the breath through the practice of pranayama, one can reduce stress level. Meditation and relaxation response can help combat stress. Meditation that cultivates mindfulness is particularly effective at reducing stress.

**Keywords:** yoga, stress, savasana, pranayama, meditation

### **1. Introduction**

Today the society faces challenge in coping up with the problem of stress in every field. In modern times, we are witnessing a rapid increase in psycho-somatic diseases like diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, heart attack, brain stroke, and post traumatic disorder. Various psychological problems like depression, anxiety, addiction, suicide etc. are on the increase in modern times these happenings can be explained by the facts that in modern times, the life is full of stress. Complexities of modern life are pushing many of us towards intense stress. Each stress leaves its traces on mind and body and causes irreversible wear and tear and pathology in body and mind. If a person remains in stress for long time, our body and mind become weak and give rise to psycho-somatic and psychiatric diseases. Stress is associated with life and wherever there is life, there is stress. Life without stress is not thinkable. The essence is that we cannot avoid stress. But we can definitely manage it there are number of ways by which stress can be managed. Yogic principles are universal in nature and can be adopted by all human beings irrespective of time, place, age, gender, profession or race. The yogic principles bring about harmony between body and mind. Yoga is a mind-body practice that combines physical poses, controlled breathing and meditation and in today's stress prone environment, these techniques will be highly effective for reduction of stress.

### **2. A perspective on stress**

Stress is a normal response of the body towards the situations which difficult to manage. In simple words we can say that stress is the psycho-physiological response of a person to a stressor. In this sense, any object, situation or event which causes stress can be called the stressor. The only thing which underlies stress is that the stressor demands coping. Here one

thing very important is that the stressor demands up on the threat perception about the situation. This implies as situation may act as stressor for one person while the same may not be stressor for another person. For instance, marriage or promotion will be perceived by one person as difficult situation, while the same may be perceived by another person an opportunity to grow. Thus stress is not caused by the situation; rather it is caused by the perception about the situation. Further the degree of stress would depend up on how much threat is being perceived by the individual in the situation. Same situation may create different amount of stress in different persons. Thus we can say that perception plays an important role in stress; and also cause individual differences in the responses.

There are two types of stress eu-stress and distress. Eu-stress is good or pleasant form of stress caused by pleasant stimuli or events. It is related to successful handling of difficult situation. It is a healthy stress as it leads to better performance and better opportunities leading to growth and development. It motivates the person to work better like getting a good score or rank in an examination or performing better in job. Distress is a bad or harmful stress which is caused by undesirable, unpredictable, and uncontrollable factors which are perceived too difficult to be managed. It may also be caused by prolonged and or severe stress like prolonged financial troubles or continuous heavy work load. It is important to understand that eu-stress, if not managed properly can convert into distress.

Prolonged stress get reflected in physiological symptoms like headaches, backache, neck pain, palpitations, pounding heart, breathlessness, etc. The person may have sleeping problems like over sleeping or insomnia and may have digestive problems as constipation, diarrhea, and nausea. Stress shows itself in intellectual or cognitive behavior also, poor

concentration, memory problems, inability to make decisions, loss of sense of humor, lack of logical thinking, are the some of the symptoms which indicate that the person is undergoing stress. Stress is manifested in the emotional behavior too. In stress, the person experiences anxiety and fear and the person becomes restless for no apparent reasons. The behavior of the person may marked by frequent mood swings, sadness, discontentment, hostility, irritability, aggression, impatience and unhappiness. Stress can be identified with the help of behavioral symptoms also. Sometimes the person may indulge in unnecessary increased spending. The physical appearance of the person may be unkempt appearance coupled by poor hygiene. Nail-biting, addictions, substance abuse are some of the behaviors which indicate the presence of stress. A person under stress may commit several mistakes and may not perform well. Social relations also may suffer due to stress. A person under stress may avoid social contacts. We have discussed that stress gives rise to negative emotions. Stress affects physiological and psychological well-being of a person severe and chronic stress makes our body and mind weak. It may induce pathology in organs and systems of our body. Various psycho-somatic diseases like peptic ulcers, migraine, backache, diabetes high blood pressure, heart attack, brain stroke, may be the result of chronic and severe stress. Chronic stress remains a major cause of psychological problems like maladaptive behavior, anxiety disorders, depression, suicide, imbalanced personality and in extreme cases stress may cause death even.

### 3. Selected yogic practices for stress management

Yoga plays an important role in stress management. We can manage stress effectively by stretching our body and also by relaxing our body and mind. A strong body can withstand the effects of stress; while relaxation helps to relieve the symptoms of stress. It refreshes the body and the mind; and helps to replenish the energy which has been consumed by stress. Yoga works both ways. It strengthens as well as relaxes the body and the mind.

#### 3.1 Savasana

Savasana is a method of relaxation. In ordinary sleep, we take rest unconsciously without any control, while in savasana, rest is taken in the state of consciousness. Savasana is an excellent posture that can be used between poses for total relaxation. In the practice of this posture the time is used to mentally separate from our experiences of the past, and from the anticipated happenings of the future. Simply let the muscles relax, feel the circulation of prana or Breath throughout the system and be mindfully attuned. The process of savasana involves body awareness, breath awareness and image visualization. In savasana, the awareness is consciously withdrawn from the external world and then is taken inside. The mind, which is constantly attracted to the outer world, takes a U-turn and moves inwards, thus gradually getting absorbed; as the mind turns Quite and absorbed, the practitioner remains undisturbed by the external environment.



Fig 1

#### Technique

- Lie down on back with arms and legs comfortably apart.
- Palms facing upward; eyes closed.
- Relax the whole body consciously.
- Become aware of natural breath and allow it to become rhythmic and slow.
- Remain in the position till you feel refresh and relax.

#### 3.2 Pranayama

Pranayama is a yogic practice which is very effective for coping with stress. It has a calming effect of on body and mind. It is the breathing technique by which prana, the vital force of life is controlled and regulated. Pranayama is not merely a physiological respiratory process; rather it is psycho-physical in nature. It work on body and mind both. It helps to develop balance between parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system of the body brings emotional control and pacifies the mind.



Fig 2

#### Technique

- Sit in any meditative posture.
- Keep the spine and head straight with eyes closed.
- Relax the body with few deep breaths.
- Keep the left palm on the left knee in Gyan mudra and the right hand should be in Nasagra mudra.
- Place the ring and small fingers on the left nostril and fold the middle and index finger. Place the right thumb on the right nostril.
- Breath in from the left nostril; close the left nostril with the small and the ring fingers and release the thumb from the right nostril; exhale through the right nostril.

- Next inhale through the right nostril.
- At the end of inhalation, close the right nostril; open the left nostril and exhale through it.
- This complete process is one round of the nadi shodhana or anuloma viloma pranayama.
- Repeat ten rounds.

### 3.3 Meditation

Meditation is well known yogic practice and the step towards spiritual evolution. The meditation is practiced in a comfortable and relaxed sitting position. In that position the attention is focused on a particular part of body or on the breathing or on an idea for some time. There are various meditation techniques which have been designed to induce relaxation in body and mind. Meditation is very effective for stress management. It can reverse the stress response by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. During meditation, our heart rate and breathing slow down, blood pressure becomes normal and hormonal secretion gets normalized.

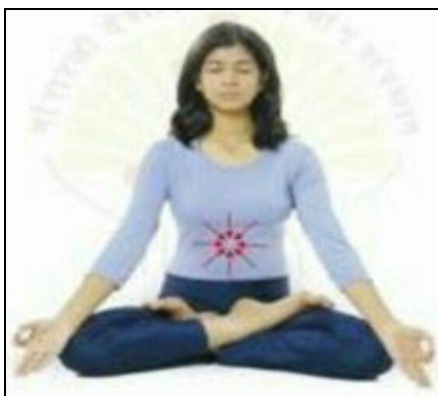


Fig 3

#### Technique

- Sit any meditative posture.
- Keep the spine comfortably erect.
- Hold the hands in Gyan mudra by the touch of the tip of the thumb to the tip of the index finger, forming a circle.
- The other three fingers are straight and relaxed.
- Close the eyes and sit with a slightly upturned face.
- Just maintain a mild focus between the eyebrows and be conscious of the breath.
- Dissolve the thoughts and attain single and pure thought.
- Meditate.

### 4. Materials and methods

The objective of this study is to explore the role and effectiveness of yogic practices in mitigating the stress. In this extent this paper looks for the effectiveness of selected yogic practices in the management of chronic stress. This paper is reliable so that the yogic practices are very effective means for stress management. This is primarily a conceptual study based on the analysis of practical aspects of yoga and the selected yogic practices have been used as stress reductive mechanisms. The secondary sources of data collected mainly from the literature sources and the personal experience also taken into consideration as a primary source.

### 4.1 Methodology

The following methods were taken to study the role and significance of yogic practices in mitigating the stress.

- **Analytical method:** - On the basis of theoretical study conducted analysis would be done to draw the conclusions.
- **Descriptive method:** - Used to describe what stress is and how yogic practices help to reduce stress.
- **Evaluative method:** - Applied to study the effectiveness of yogic practices in stress management.

### 5. Results and discussion

The results of yogic practices proposed as stress reductive mechanisms herein are:-

#### Savasana

- Stimulates blood circulation and exercises inner organs. Helps to relieve all kinds of tensions and gives rest to both body and mind.
- Relaxes the whole psycho-physiological system.
- Alleviates fatigue, nervousness, neurasthenia, asthma, constipation, diabetes, indigestion, and insomnia.
- Teaches mental concentration.
- It is found very beneficial in the management of stress and its consequences.

#### Pranayama

- Purify the channels of carrying energy called nadis hence nourishes the whole body
- Induces tranquility and helps to improve concentration
- Increases vitality and lowers the level of stress and anxiety

#### Meditation

- It helps the practitioner to eliminate negative emotions like fear, depression, anxiety, and to develop positive emotions
- Keeps the calm and quite
- Increases concentration, memory, clarity of thought, and will power

Here is emerging evidence from the evaluation of the study that yoga practice is beneficial for stress reduction. The selected yogic practices described in this paper are most effective means for stress management and it resulting in well-being of an individual. Yogic practices are very powerful to induce complete physical mental and emotional relaxations. Savasana help to combat the stressful influences and rectifying the imbalances created by poor stress management. In savasana practice which activates the parasympathetic system and help to reduce stress level.

### 6. Conclusion

Stress is an emotional state consists of feelings, tension, and nervousness. It can change different parts of human body from muscles from tissues to organs and blood vessels. Stress and tension affect our entire being; our body, mind, and spirit, however, we can overcome the effects of stress and manage them by utilizing the beneficial yogic practices. These mechanisms cannot alleviate the problems we encounter daily, but can revitalize and nourish the mind, body and spirit over a prolonged time. It is not only a way of coping the stress, it provides a means of transforming and positively utilizing tension as a stepping stone to greater awareness, efficiency

and achievement in life. Yoga can be a great remedy for stress relief. Yoga combines several techniques to combat stress and provide a combination of benefits such as breathing exercise, bodily postures and meditation.

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