YOGA: A NOVEL INTEGRATIVE THERAPY

Modern medical advancements provide the rationale for the integration of various traditional healing techniques including Yoga to promote healing, health, and longevity. It is imperative that advances in medicine include the wholistic approach of Yoga to face the current challenges in health care. The antiquity of Yoga must be united with the innovations of modern medicine to improve quality of life throughout the world. No wonder that Dr. Dean Ornish, the eminent American doctor who has shown that Yogic lifestyle can reverse heart disease says, “Yoga is a system of perfect tools for achieving union as well as healing”

According to Dr B Ramamurthy, eminent neurosurgeon, Yoga practice re-orientates the functional hierarchy of the entire nervous system. He has noted that Yoga not only benefits the nervous system but also the cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, endocrine systems in addition to bringing about general biochemistry changes in the yoga practitioners.

We are today faced with numerous debilitating chronic illnesses related to aging, environment, and hedonistic lifestyle, such as cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular diseases as well as many incurable diseases such as AIDS. Modern medical advancements provide the rationale for the integration of various traditional healing techniques including Yoga to promote healing, health, and longevity. It is imperative that advances in medicine include the wholistic approach of Yoga to face the current challenges in health care. The antiquity of Yoga must be united with the innovations of modern medicine to improve quality of life throughout the world. While modern medicine has a lot to offer humankind in its treatment and management of acute illness, accidents and communicable diseases, Yoga has a lot to offer in terms of preventive, promotive and rehabilitative methods in addition to many management methods to tackle modern illnesses. While modern science looks outward for the cause of all ills, the Yogi searches the depth of his own self. This two way search can lead us to many answers for the troubles that plague modern man.

The Centre for Yoga Therapy, Education and Research (CYTER) in MGMC & RI is conducting a scientifically sound Yoga therapy programme through its Yoga Therapy OPD. This is functioning from 9.30 am to 12 noon daily (Monday-Friday). Consultations are offered by Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, Deputy Director (Yoga) and Mrs Meena Ramanathan, Coordinator and Yoga Therapist and qualified Yoga instructors are imparting the schedules. Individualised and group Yoga therapy sessions are being conducted for various medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, musculoskeletal and psychiatric disorders with excellent feedback from participants. Numerous pilot studies have been completed and major research studies are being planned under guidance of Dr. Madanmohan, Professor and Head, Department of Physiology, MGMC & RI.
Numerous studies have been done in the past few decades on psycho-physiological and biochemical changes occurring following practice of Yoga. A few clinical trials have also been done that have shown promise despite Yoga not being ideally suited for the scientific gold standard of ‘double-blind’ clinical trials. Some of the researched benefits that are quite well proven are given below to facilitate an understanding of how Yoga works at least at the physical level though we are yet to research and understand subtler effects of Yoga.

**SOME PHYSIOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF YOGA:**

- Yoga induces autonomic nervous system equilibrium with a tendency toward parasympathetic dominance rather than stress-induced sympathetic dominance. This is of great potential in psychosomatic stress related illness.
- Heart rate and blood pressure decrease implying better relaxation, reducing load on the heart.
- Respiratory rate decreases and respiratory efficiency improves. Amplitude and smoothness of respiration increases along with all the pulmonary parameters like tidal volume, vital capacity and breath-holding time.
- EEG - alpha waves increase. Theta, delta, and beta waves also increase during various stages of meditation.
- Cardiovascular efficiency increases.
- Gastrointestinal function and endocrine function normalizes.
- Excretory functions improve.
- Musculoskeletal flexibility and joint range of motion increase.
- Posture improves while strength, resiliency endurance and energy level increase.
- Weight normalizes, sleep improves, immunity increases and pain decreases.

**SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF YOGA**

- Somatic and kinesthetic awareness increase.
- Mood improves and subjective well-being increases.
- Self-acceptance and self-actualization increase.
- Social adjustment increases.
- Anxiety, depression and hostility decreases.
- Psychomotor functions such as grip strength, balance, dexterity and fine motor skills, eye hand coordination and reaction time, steadiness and depth perception, and the integrated functioning of body parts improve.
- Cognitive functions such as attention, concentration, memory, and learning efficiency improve.
SOME BIOCHEMICAL EFFECTS OF YOGA

The biochemical profile improves, indicating an anti-stress and antioxidant effect which is important in the prevention of degenerative diseases.

- Decreased levels of: blood glucose, total white blood cell count, total cholesterol, triglycerides, LDL and VLDL.
- Increased levels of: HDL cholesterol, ATPase, hematocrit, hemoglobin, thyroxin, lymphocytes, vitamin C and total serum protein.

PRINCIPLES OF YOGA CHIKITSA

A major benefit of Yoga practice is attainment of health, as healthy a state that may be attained in spite of our genetic predispositions and environment. Yoga also helps maintain and sustain this dynamic state of health after it has been attained.

- Become aware of your body, emotions and mind
- Improve your dietary habits
- Relax your whole body
- Slow down your breath making it quiet and deep
- Calm down your mind and focus it inwardly
- Improve the flow of healing ‘pranic life energy’
- Fortify yourself against omnipresent stressors
- Increase your self-reliance and self confidence
- Facilitate natural emanation of wastes
- Take responsibility for your own health
- Health and happiness are your birthright-claim them!

SOME DISORDERS AMIABLE TO YOGA THERAPY

- Endocrine and metabolic disorders: DM, obesity, thyroid disorders, syndrome X
- Cardiovascular disorders: HT, CAD, atherosclerosis, arrhythmias, cardiac rehabilitation
- Respiratory and ENT disorders: COPD, sinusitis, rhinitis
- Musculoskeletal disorders: lumbago, neck pain, arthritis
- Psychiatric disorders: stress, anxiety, depression, BPAD, insomnia
- Obstetrics and gynecological conditions: prenatal, postnatal, HT and DM in pregnancy, dysmenorrhea, PCOD, pelvic muscle weakness and infertility
- Urological disorders: urinary incontinence, recurrent UTI, erectile dysfunction
- Dermatological disorders: psoriasis, allergies.