

Yoga Therapy in Anxiety and Depression: A Clinical Round Up

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Abstract

Anxiety and Depression are recognized as common, serious disorders and debilitating mental health problems in the changing social context and are afflicting adolescents and student population to a large extent. Lifetime prevalence increases drastically from 1% of the population under age 12 years to 17–25% of the population by the end of adolescence, with an increase in cases in age-group of 15–18 years. Yoga therapy practice includes clinical yoga, which involves evidence based yoga techniques, such as asana, pranayama and meditation and relaxation . Yoga therapy appears to be a promising treatment in anxiety and depression.

Anxiety and Yoga Therapy

Anxiety is the normal reaction of an organism to a stressor, may be external or internal. The anxiety reaction has physiological and psychological components, mediated by the adrenergic neurotransmitter system.¹

Yoga therapy is a practical discipline, offers a good tool for anxiety management and relaxation. A general feature of yoga practices is their capability of inducing a coordinated psycho physiological response, which is the antithesis of the anxiety response.² All yoga practices are parasympathetic in nature. In anxiety sympathetic activities are increased.

In a study practice of yoga showed reduction in anxiety level of medical students in stressful state such as examination anxiety.³ In another study showed an improvement in 68% of patients with anxiety states treated with a combination of yogic methods, asana, pranayama, meditation.⁴

The following yoga therapy^{5,6,7,8} for one hour daily may be beneficial in patients suffering from anxiety.

Physical postures: Swastikasana , Parivrt-atadasana, Trikonasana, Bhujangasana.

Breathing practices: Anulomaviloma Pranayama, Bhramari Pranayama.

Meditation practice: Nadanusandhana Dhyana.

Relaxation practice: Makarasana, Shavasana.

Asanas should be practiced with gentle stretching of the muscles, without any effortful jerky movements and attention is always focused on breathing, probably effects as passive stretching which releases muscular tensions and produces relaxing effect on the nerves.

Pranayamas should be practiced as rhythmic diaphragmatic breathing with gradual and equal prolongation of inhalation and exhalation affects as the body and mind will experience a sense of deep relaxation and rest in subjects.

Practice of Dhyana silences the surface activity of the mind thereby allowing to look deeper within. During the practice of Shavasanas the horizontal and relaxed position of the body on the ground facilitates efficient and easy blood circulation. Breathing becomes slower, slightly deeper, rhythmic and abdominal in nature as one progresses in relaxation there by producing soothing effect on the higher brain centers while sympathetic activities are reduced and takes one to deeper level of relaxation.⁹

Thus yoga therapy may balance the functions of autonomic nervous system by reducing and preventing anxiety.

Depression and Yoga Therapy

Yoga therapy practice includes clinical Yoga, which involves evidence based yoga techniques, such as asana, pranayama and meditation and relaxation .

Yoga is an increasingly popular therapy for relieving depression and optimizes quality of life. Yoga therapy is believed to work, by calming the nervous system, easing muscle tension, significantly reduces body pain, improves range of motion, and alleviates associated symptoms of anxiety, and sleep disturbance by improving blood circulation and releasing endorphins into the brain and nervous system.¹⁰

The patients may be given training for regular practice of yoga postures, including the back bending postures

Bhujangasana (cobra posture), Purvatanasana (anterior stretching), Ardha chakrasana (half wheel), Dhanurasana (bow posture) which emphasize on chest expansion, back arching and relaxation , may elevate mood and psychological well being.¹¹

Practice of inverted postures such as Sarvangasana (shoulder stand), Padottanasana (legs stretched up), Adhomukha shwanasana (down ward face dog posture), Prasrita padottanasana (head down posture) which enhances blood circulation to brain. Practice of restorative postures like sequence of Shavasanas (supine poses) cultivate relaxing benefits and help to elevate mood.

Aasana practice has a strong dimension with stretching, balancing and breathing routines. These Asanas are specially designed to improve mood and alleviate depression on each patient's condition and abilities.

Regular practice of Pranayama (rhythmic breathing) and Meditation (contemplation on one thought) reduces sadness, anxiety, stress, mood variations, sleeplessness, negative thoughts, emotional state by improving mental calmness. Both reduction rate and depth of respiration have affect on Autonomic Nervous System and vagal control of the heart as emotional regulation.

In conclusion Yoga therapy appears to be a promising treatment in depression.

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