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Holistic Fitness- A Descriptive Study On Current Trends And Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

The term fitness commonly includes exercises, conditioning, physical training, cardio workout, etc. which are actually complex yet centre of attraction. The attention span of people today is next to zilch. To keep them motivated to be healthy and push them to workout is very difficult. People often follow the herd mentality and love to be a part of the bandwagon and end up accepting anything that is 'trending' or is in 'fashion'. Though modern medical and technological advancements in the fitness industry have led to prolonged life expectancy; the quality of life has deteriorated. It's high time that we turn back to ancient holistic practices like Yoga, from the existing reductionist approaches, for achieving optimal level of fitness.

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Introduction:-

Natural movement harmonizing exercises and stretches have likely been practiced since the beginning of mankind as fitness has always been an important part of life. In those days, fitness referred to full body movement exercises benefiting the mind and body by employing functional motions. It is theorized that when people left the tribal-rural lifestyle and formed modern agricultural and urban communities, the fitness levels declined. This does not refer to the decrease in physical work but the nature of tasks performed, were not favorable for general fitness levels. Therefore, regimented fitness came into existence in 19th century and became popular in classical civilizations such as [ancient Greece](#) and [Rome](#). Since then, evidence of gymnasiums can be found in many countries. Tracing the origin of Western

fitness training suggests that the regular practice of movement harmonizing exercises was embedded in ancient Greek culture which highlighted Greek mythology in everyday life. This philosophy gave rise to such sport activities which facilitated self empowerment and prepared for Olympics or military actions (Hoffman & Gabel, 2015).

FITNESS CONCEPT POST INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Around the turn of the 20th century, many independent Western fitness methods started emerging. The cultural changes, innovation and freedom that modern mind body pioneers brought to the exercise world were no less dramatic. Soon optimal exercise combinations became significant for remedial purposes, prevention of pathologies, enhancement of general

health and performance and to facilitate a regular active lifestyle. However, towards the end of the century, the original concept of harmonious interaction between the competitive and holistic exercise systems eroded and deteriorated. This was due to the shift in the fitness training environment towards harsh paramilitary style training. The fatal blow to traditional fitness culture in gymnasiums occurred and the new bodybuilding exercise force emerged, which dramatically superseded the entire floor space in the gyms. This forced the fitness system to adopt new professional establishments (Hoffman & Gabel, 2015).

CHANGING DEFINITIONS OF FITNESS

Earlier, fitness was defined as the capacity to perform daily activities without undue fatigue. But with the Industrial Revolution, as the lifestyle became more sedentary for many people, there was growing awareness that this had the intensity of being hazardous to health which was the key motivating factor for forming of a [physical movement culture](#), which advocated increased levels of physical fitness for men, women, children, youngsters, adults and old age thereby laying the foundations for modern fitness culture, especially in Europe and the USA. Since 1985, terms like physical activity, exercise, physical fitness and sports are often confused with one another and used interchangeably. The speedy socio-economic and demographic transformations and the necessity to make the most through natural ways led to multifariousness of physical exercises (Paoli & Bianco, 2015). The common and professional uses of terms like physical activity, exercise, physical fitness, and health need clarification for greater understanding. According to Caspersen et al., physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that result in energy expenditure whereas exercise is physical activity that is

planned, organized, recurring and target oriented focusing on refinement or maintenance of physical fitness components. However, physical fitness has been explained as the ability to perform daily tasks without undue fatigue, with vigor, alertness, and adequate energy to enjoy leisure time activities as well as to meet unexpected extremities (Caspersen et al., 1985). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmities”.

MODERN CONCEPT OF FITNESS

The roots of all fitness trainings are ancient and holistic. But, the challenge today is to reunite modern reductionist fitness practices with their ancient scientific yet forgotten and extinct holistic roots. After the Scientific Revolution the growing Western culture and sedentary lifestyle lead to the discovery of germs and viruses as the causation of diseases. Interventionist practices became the status quo due to the fear of death. Modern medicines abounded and cured specific illness resulting in instant recovery, making us quickly and easily lose the understanding of holistic health, wellness and healing. A shift from holistic to physical fitness culture began, where people started believing that only physical health is most important and must be taken care of. Various Western fitness trainings started gaining loads of momentum across the globe. Opening of gymnasiums lead to machine oriented workouts, supplement intake for body building and usage of drugs for performance enhancement. Industrialization and modernization disconnected us from ancient natural practices that incorporated not only physical but also psycho-emotional and spiritual aspects of health and fitness. Due to sedentary lifestyle, the need for momentary relief from physical ailments attracted masses towards physical fitness

practices ignoring its long term adverse effects. As a result, physicians and trainers paid less attention to the whole person and his emotional and environmental fitness. The holistic lifestyle choices became secondary. The emphasis was squarely on physical symptoms and modern approach to fitness became institutionalized, target oriented and a mass practice. Same fitness trainings were given to everyone, irrespective of their different physical and mental conditions. People were alienated from their own fitness care and they began relying on drugs and equipments to quick fix them. Fitness became an important part of routine and an inescapable trend due to the rapid development of information technology and electronic technology (Addolorato et al., 2020).

CURRENT TRENDS OF FITNESS-21ST CENTURY

Nowadays, modern fitness studios are highly structured in their usage of time and space, both in architecture as well as in fitness technologies. Users have mastered the art of monitoring their own bodies in accordance with the standards of being fit. The globalization of modern fitness is a classic example of the escalating global monoculture. The fitness industry is believed to flourish in the international market, serving customers with a miscellany of health and fitness needs with access to fitness resources, equipments, instructors, coaches, personal trainers, and fitness consultants. Fitness gyms and private health clubs are an outstanding global business with upcoming new trends such as franchising chains and specific environment workout spaces (Addolorato et al., 2020). Whether in a commercial complex or shopping mall, every city and even small towns seem to have a fitness gym. Gyms are one of the most drop-by breathing spaces in Western societies and have entrenched themselves as a part of the middle class culture. For attracting customers, most of the fitness clubs

present themselves as lifestyle or family oriented places rather than simple workout environment. The more time fitness freaks spend at their gym, the more they engage with its material and social environment, and the more they are affected by the same. Thus, the gym is not merely a place of training for them (Doğan, 2015). A substantive body of work in fitness studios deals with participants' motivation to visit their place. One of the most common motives among the young fitness enthusiasts is the desire to quickly achieve an attractive physique. For some participants the gym is a getaway from regular routine where people can unplug consciousness and engulf themselves in exercise (Crossley, 2006). Individuals feel overwhelmed with morality as they consider gymming to be the portrayal of the aspiration to be a good citizen, to practice and achieve individual health responsibilities (Lavery & Wright, 2010). Modern fitness techniques like aerobics, bollywood dance, calisthenics, cross-fit, gymnastics, pilates, zumba, etc. have become popular modes of exercise among all age groups due to its fun nature. With a catchy music, joyful steps, fitness props and machines, motivational workout interiors, fitness instructors, dieticians and fitness enthusiasts all around, people are able to have fun while sweating out. Depending on its level of aggressiveness, such workouts may be a great tool for weight loss, can make a person tougher, improve physical features, regulate diet and help achieve the ideal shape but soon end up with developing problems like fitness wrinkles, delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS), muscle spasm, joint injuries, tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, spondylosis, herniated discs, spinal stenosis, fibromyalgia, bone fractures, etc.

NEED FOR HOLISTIC APPROACH IN FITNESS

Despite an avalanche of new opportunities to boost fitness, the number of people with persistent physical problems is increasing. Arguably, this problem has more to do with the overall health and fitness than merely physical exercise. It is no surprise to most of us that a lack of holistic approach leads us to a host of medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, circulatory disorders, heart disease, cancer, hormonal imbalances, gastro-intestinal disorders and so on. Because of all this, fitness has become a major concern. Never before has there been a dire need for the holistic approach as population is calling for medical alternatives and keenly looking for better options for their personal fitness. This has resulted in constant research and development in the fitness industry.

The 21st century has been packed with discussions about holistic health, wellness and fitness. The entire movement is focused on simply achieving a happier, healthier and fitter self in a truly well-rounded way. The aim is to work towards achieving holistic health, wellness and fitness through a combination of mental, physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual avenues. Speaking about this growing trend, it's a logical progression. We have known for a long time that great results need a whole body approach and the fitness industry is finally recognizing this in a formal way. In general, when people use the term fitness, they are referring to a state of sound physical health in terms of strength, endurance, and freedom from illness. In recent years, however, the concept of fitness has broadened. It now believes that the body, mind, and spirit are all interconnected and are inseparable.

In 2020-21, during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, holistic health and fitness have gained significance all over the world. The holistic definition of fitness explains about

human adaptability to survive in different situations. It not only focuses on physical fitness but also the mental, emotional, social and spiritual fitness of an individual. It comprises the state of multidimensional wellness elucidating the existence of positive health in an individual represented in the form of quality of life and a sense of wellbeing. Agreeing with this definition, there is surely a strong connection between physical fitness and wellness. However, physical fitness is nowhere similar to health or wellness. Both these terms are much more comprehensive than physical fitness. Poor health can occur even in highly fit people because of other factors like drug addictions (steroids), hereditary conditions, bacterial or viral infections, wrong workout practices, sedentary lifestyle, compromised metabolism and immunity, hormonal imbalances caused by mood swings and relationship conflicts, etc. A low fitness level is widely associated with hypokinesia which is a risk factor for coronary diseases, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, hypertension and hypercholesterolemia (Paoli & Bianco, 2015). Physical inactivity causes 1.9 million deaths globally every year. The possible effect of this physical inactivity may be low back pain, insomnia, osteoporosis, arthritis, anxiety, depression, stress, obesity, diabetes, heart diseases, etc. (Baburao & Ramprakash, 2015).

YOGA- THE IDEAL FITNESS APPROACH

Yoga is gaining popularity and is being practiced by most of the people across the globe. It offers a broad range of health and fitness benefits along with healing and therapeutic aspects because it works holistically on the level of our whole being and not just the physical body. It is widely being used to maintain holistic health, improve fitness, relieve stress, and enhance the quality of life. Yogic practices boost muscular strength and body flexibility, improve respiratory and

cardiovascular functions, promote recovery from addictions and injuries, reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life, facilitate good behavioral characteristics like compassion, calmness and greater self control, enable significant changes in life perspective and self awareness, improve sense of energy, produce a stress free psycho-physiological state through which a sense of balance and union between the mind and body can be achieved. Yogic regime can be modified as per individual needs to offer health and healing by suspending the fluctuations of mind through regular practice. Yoga is a readily available practice which is easy to perform, incurs no cost and has a low attrition rate and therefore is increasingly being recognized as an important complementary therapeutic modality in disease states. Years of human experience has established that the regular practice of Yoga is an excellent way to maintain overall health and fitness and to prevent illness. Even moderate physical activity accompanied by other relaxing and restorative practices, breathing techniques and healthy food habits will net you better results than starting and then abandoning some intense physical fitness regimen a few times a year.

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CONCLUSION

While modern day Western medicine and fitness culture has brought many wonderful, time saving, instant result giving advancements, technologies, pills and food supplements; one of the downfalls of it is the often soloed approach which just focuses on the physical body in sections and pieces rather than the whole system it really is! This is why there is a need of holistic approach which can help to achieve optimal health. Yoga is one such practice that synchronizes the gross, subtle and mystical bodies of an individual. Fitness when clubbed with the ideals of Yoga, can take the concept of health to a whole new level of holistic wellbeing. It can [connect the mind to the body](#) through conscious movement patterns that energize, repair and strengthen the body, and helps one to take control of one's own life. Our fitness is compromised regularly due to long working hours, deficient nutrition and environmental contamination around us. Hence, we need to adapt practices like Yoga that not only address the physical issues at gross level but also deeper problems at the psychological, social, emotional, environmental and spiritual levels to get positive and long lasting results.

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