

Therapeutic Impact of Yoga

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to put forward the Therapeutic impacts of yoga in the present era. The human body is made up of five elements namely akash, vaayu, jal, prithvi and agni (akash, air, water, earth and fire) . These five elements are the root cause of life on earth and also of the environment. The complete universe is made up of these five elements or pancha tattvas and human body follows the same. Humans are affected with disease only when there occurs any sort of imbalance among these tattvas weather this imbalance occurs in the body or in the environment. Here a brief study is being done regarding the impacts of theses elements and their impacts in curing and helping the various eight systems of the human body.

Keywords: Therapeutic impacts, Yoga, Panch Tattvas.

INTRODUCTION

The human body is made up of five elements namely akash, vaayu, jal, prithvi and agni (akash, air, water, earth and fire) . These five elements are the root cause of life on earth and also of the environment. These panch tattvas are used to cure any kind of ailment occur in our body. For instance we can see animals around us curing themselves from panch tattvas itself. Firstly they hardly get diseased but in any case if they get affected they cure themselves with these natural ingredients only, they hardly need any medicine or doctor to heal them. Naturopathy in yoga is getting famous now-a-days due to this tremendous power of nature to heal everything by itself.

Let us try to understand the naturopathy. Nature is also made of these panch tattvas akash, vayu, agni, jal and prithvi. Naturopathy uses these panch tattvas to heal every short of disease. [1]

Naturopathy uses the following methods under its treatment:

1. **Treatment by akash tattva:** Akash symbolises the free space. Our body is also having this tattva as the free space in our body signifies the akash tatva .As yoga talks about the mitahara in which half of our body should be filled with food. In the remaining half one fourth part should be filled with water and rest one fourth should be kept free for akash tattva. Treatment from akash tattva is related with Upvaas in naturopathy. Many kinds of upvaas are done according to the conditions of the patients weather its falahaar (only fruits will be taken for a few days or as suggested by the doctor), dugdahaar (only milk will be taken as suggested for a couple of days), etc. Upvaas balances the akash tattva in the body.
2. **Treatment by vayu tattva:** Vayu tattva stands for the air that we breath. Excess vayu tattva causes joint pain and sudden pain in any body part . The pranayama practises done in yoga purifies the vayu tattva . Vayu tattva is balanced by practicing various pranayamas as sheeteli pranayam (balances and reduces the heat inside the body), sheetkari (also reduces the extra heat and provides cooling and beneficial for teeth and gums), anulom vilom (balances the nadis) etc .
3. **Treatment by agni tattva:** Agni tattva stands for excess heat inside the body. Agni is balanced by massage done in naturopathy. Steaming and massage done in naturopathy balances the heat or we can say agni tattva. Excess of agni tattva makes the nature of patient aggressive.
4. **Treatment by jal tattva:** Jal tattva is the water inside the body. The main element inside the body is water only. Steam bath, jal neti, kunjil, hip bath, are the various forms of water treatment by which jal tattva is balanced. [2]
5. **Treatment by prithvi tattva:** Soil is the main constituent in the environment. The food that we eat comes from the earth only. Our body takes that food and all nutrients from soil only. Also mitti patti is used to cure various ailments and reduction of excess heat inside the body. Chronic constipation of Mahatma Gandhi was cured by mitti patti treatment only.

The therapeutic effects that yoga can create in us can be very far reaching and are in proportion to the quality and consistency of practice. Benefits range from improved circulation to greater mental clarity to better digestion. One could argue that exercise in general also does this but the mechanism via which such changes are achieved in yoga practice is very different.

Main query is what distinguishes yoga from other forms of exercise?

The answer can be found by looking at the key elements within yoga theory and practice. The triumph of yoga as a complete mind body discipline is due to the combination of these elements, many of which are acting simultaneously.

- Bandha control – the use of subtle muscular actions to harness energy.
- Breath control – the use of the nose to modulate air flow. [3]
- Focus on the breath – the use of the breath as a means of concentration and as a barometer of effort.
- Breath movement synchronisation.
- Asana – physical movements and positions which nurture awareness, concentration and physical attributes like balance, flexibility, etc.[4]
- Drushti – a direction or point of gaze to assist concentration and body position.
- Internal focus – the mindful yogi practises with an internal focus based on some or all of the above.
- Underlying theory based on the concepts of chakras, nadis, prana, mantras, mudras, and kundalini energy. [5]

Many classes also include some pranayama and/or meditation plus a relaxation to finish. The physical movements and postures in yoga help to make sitting still in meditation easier, with the ultimate goal of calming the mind. Additional cleansing techniques or “Kriyas” are also practised by many yogis such as Dauti, Neti, Basti and Nauli.

The Respiratory System

Yoga pays attention on the breath, probably more than any other mind/body discipline or exercise method. Various methods of breathing have different effects on both physical and mental health. A thoracic (chest) breath tends to stimulate the nervous system whereas an abdominal breath tends to calm the nervous system. Each and every method and different styles of yoga has its own merits and tend to encourage one method over the other. A calm but full breath repeated during a typical yoga class boosts energy levels by oxygenating the blood and thus all our organs, tissues and cells. The mechanism by which this occurs is by both moving between postures, holding postures and breathing deeply. Deep breathing supercharges the alveoli of the lungs, diffusing oxygen into the capillaries and blood stream. [6]

With each breath the diaphragm is literally massaging the internal organs as it moves up and down like a piston in the ribcage. The expansion of the body on inhalation also stretches the trunk muscles from the inside out and can even help create space between the vertebrae of the spine. Breath plays a vital role in getting benefited in a short span of time and it distinguishes yoga practice from simple stretching exercises. When specific pranayamas are performed the breath can be manipulated in many ways as a vehicle for producing a calmer, more meditative state.

At the end of a yoga class, Savasana is performed and it acts like a sponge, the body absorbs and integrate the benefits of the practice. This deep relaxation does many things. Most obviously it rests the body and mind and allows for true rejuvenation. Lying still and horizontal on the back rests the cardiovascular system, facilitates the return of venous blood from the legs and gradually lowers heart and breathing rate. This deep relaxation at the end of a class should not be rushed otherwise these benefits may not be fully felt and a calm mental state not fully achieved.

The Cardiovascular System

The vertically upright posture of humans has many challenges. In terms of blood flow, venous blood has to be constantly pumped back up the legs to the heart while at the same time, the brain requires sufficient arterial blood and oxygen to maintain mental faculties and ultimately consciousness. Inversions reverse this arrangement. Venous return from the legs is augmented due to gravity, with additional venous return from the abdomen adding to this waterfall of venous blood converging towards the heart. Inversions are well known for stimulating the digestive “fire” by draining venous blood from the abdominal organs and in so doing, allowing for a fresh influx of oxygen rich arterial blood. [7]

Initially, the heart beats faster and stronger to deal with this additional surge of blood resulting in a rise in blood pressure in the head and neck. This is detected by pressure receptors in the arch of the aorta and the carotid artery of the neck that send

a message to the brain that the arterial pressure has increased. The brain then sends a message to the heart to slow down its rate and force of contraction which helps to normalise blood pressure. This can take a minute or more, which is one reason why inversions are more therapeutic in terms of lowering blood pressure when maintained for 2 minutes or longer.

Regular practice of inversions can help reduce blood pressure over time. Inversions are however, contraindicated in cases of high blood pressure requiring medication or those suffering from glaucoma. Semi inversions are a good alternative for such individuals as well as therapeutic for anyone unable to perform shoulder stand and headstand. Examples include downward facing dog and a standing forward bend. At the other end of the scale, many individuals have low blood pressure and the sun salutation can improve the body's ability to deal with this. Often individuals with low blood pressure can feel light headed or even faint. The cardiac reflexes mentioned above can also work in the opposite way – increasing heart rate and blood pressure to maintain good blood flow to the brain as the body moves sequentially into the horizontal plane from the vertical plane and back again.

Regular practice of the sun salutation improves the “efficiency” of these reflexes, enabling moving from lying to standing without disturbances in blood flow to the brain. The lymphatic system also gets a boost from inversions which facilitate the return of lymph towards the heart with the help of gravity. Raising arms overhead helps to create space and improve circulation at the axillary (armpit) lymph nodes and lunge style stretches do the same for the inguinal (groin) lymph nodes.

The Nervous System

The nervous system has essentially two modes of operation – The Para - Sympathetic System and the Sympathetic system. Most of the time we are ideally using the parasympathetic system which works during sleep, rest, digestion, etc. The sympathetic system is activated in response to danger (flight or flight response), varying kinds of stress or intense exercise. It speeds up heart rate, releases adrenaline and diverts blood to the skeletal muscles and away from the abdominal organs. Yoga practice nurture the parasympathetic system and create a calm state of mind. The sympathetic system will operate to some degree during the more strenuous elements of a class but the overall effect should be a calming one. Watch out for breathing too forcefully or squeezing your “mula bandha” (root lock/muladhara chakra) hard as this is associated with sympathetic activity. [8]

Finally, the seal of the savasana at the end of a practice really allows any sympathetic activity to stop and the parasympathetic system to operate unhindered. A relaxive and deep sleeping pattern should be an important benefit derived from a well balanced yoga practice. Good quality sleep will strengthen the immune system and lead to better resistance against disease and illness.

Organs and Endocrine Glands

The basic movements of the trunk in yoga – forward and backward bends plus side bending and twisting help create space in the body for blood flow to internal organs and endocrine glands. For example, forward bends create space in the back body and promote good circulation to the kidney and adrenal (supra renal) gland.

Another good example is the increase in blood flow to the thyroid gland in shoulder stand, plough and variations of these postures. This gland is also associated with Visuddha chakra. In a general sense, back bending helps to stretch the chest and abdominal area, helping to prevent stagnation of blood flow and organ function which can occur with too much time spent sitting in chairs and cars.

The Spine

Yoga practice enhances the alignment of the spine and result in improved balance the left and right sides as well as the front and back of the body. (with a balanced practice of forward and backward bends). Standing forward bends help to decompress the discs of the lower spine and inversions do this too.

All movements of the body, done through Yoga, particularly deep stretches, also stretch nerves too (in a healthy way). As spinal nerves exit the spine between the vertebrae, many go on to form nerve plexuses (networks) which correspond with the location of chakras in the body. For example, the nerves of the lower thoracic spine form the mesenteric flexi of the abdomen one of which forms the celiac or solar plexus, corresponding with the Manipura chakra. [9]

As the spinal nerves exit the spine, joint stiffness may compress part of a nerve and have a detrimental effect on the flexi/chakra and therefore organs to which they supply. (This is the main principle of osteopathy).

So keeping the spinal nerves free moving as they exit the vertebral column is important and is facilitated by a regular and mindful yoga practice. To complete this article, I would like to mention the importance of savasana again, this time with regard to the spine. Firstly, it relaxes the spine by allowing the benefits of asana practice to consolidate as the body cools down with spinal discs and joints unloaded. Lying on the back at the end of a practice can help reduce excessive spinal curves in a front to back direction e.g. over arched lower back and/or rounded upper back.

Some individuals feel the need to lie with legs bent while lying on the back. This is either due to an excessive arch in the lower back or tight hip flexors but often both are usually present together. So the ground, with the help of gravity and body weight, is helping the spine to flatten out a bit plus integrate the realignment (left to right) of the spine achieved by the practice. The muscles and fascia of the body are also stretched and kept healthy due to both rhythmic contraction and stretching experienced when doing yoga.

Chronic pain in the spine (no specified) is a musculoskeletal disorder with public health and economic impact. Back and neck pain are two of the most common musculoskeletal problems in modern society causing considerable costs in health care. Low back pain is common and poses a challenge for clinicians to devise effective, preventive treatment from becoming chronic. Research shows that spinal pain has become the largest category of medical claims, placing a major burden on individuals and health care system.(10)

What could bring positive changes into the health behaviors as a noninvasive, nonsurgical and nondrug method of treatment, which would reduce this ailment? Extensive research points to the subject of yoga that is proposed to be an effective solution. A carefully adapted set of yoga poses can help reduce pain and improve functional (the ability to walk and move). (11)

CONCLUSION

From the above study it can conclude that the greatest healing tendency lies itself in nature only in the form of panch tattvas. As nature is formed from these panch tattvas as akash, vayu, agni, jal and prithvi. Our body is also made up of these five elements and almost all sort of ailments occur due to the imbalance of any one of them. So, by balancing these panch tattvas we can heal them completely.

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