

Promoting Health and Happiness through Yoga

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Abstract

Health and happiness are valuable assets of human life. Traditional Indian knowledge system particularly Yogic and Ayurvedic texts, elaborately describes ways and means to live disease-free, healthy, and happy life. Yoga is universally known to offer prevention, cure, and permanent solutions to various physical and mental ailments of the body. A treasure in the form of 'Sutras' and 'Shlokas' is available in abundance, promoting health and happiness in Vedas, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, various Upanishads, and Samhitas. The contemporary world is investing hugely in getting evidence-based results about the impact of Yoga in the management of physical and mental ailments of the body. Some studies successfully established the fact that Yoga is immensely beneficial in promoting health and happiness. The paper endeavors to evaluate the facts mentioned in texts and scriptures embedded in various Yogic texts that promote health and happiness.

Keywords: Health and happiness, ancient knowledge system, yoga, Samhita

1. Introduction

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) commonly known as lifestyle diseases have been fast-growing ailments globally for the last few decades. A sedentary lifestyle, an enormous shift in working patterns, behavioral changes, heavy intake of fast food, and bad eating habits are primarily responsible for common NCDs like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, cardiac problems, weak metabolism, and mental disorders. These ailments are posing significant financial burdens to individuals, and governments with loss of independence and untimely death of millions in the world. Rich people are contracting NCDs because of job-related stress, familial issues, excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption, bad eating patterns, and physical inactivity, while the poor are facing the burn because of

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malnutrition, unemployment, bad societal conditions, and a faulty education system.

As per the World Health Organization (WHO) report, 41 million deaths annually are attributed to NCDs, equivalent to 71 % of all deaths globally, out of which 16 million are premature (under the age of 70) deaths. The burden of NCDs falls adversely on developing countries, where 82 % of premature deaths are from these diseases only. WHO Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes NCDs as a major challenge and plans to reduce one-third of premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment **by 2030**.

According to the study report "India: Health of the Nation's States"- The India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative in 2017 by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), it is estimated that the proportion of deaths due to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in India has increased from 37.9% in 1990 to 61.8% in 2016.

WHO recognized Yoga as a powerful tool for individuals, communities, and countries to improve not only physical but also mental health, and to prevent and control non-communicable diseases. Further a study, revealed that a healthy weight, exercising regularly, a nutritious diet, and no smoking can reduce the 80 percent risk of developing the most common NCDs.

Yoga has been a blessing to realize souls and great sages of India from time immemorial and remained an important tool to normalize physiological and psychological functions of the human body with a single motto of spreading health, happiness, and mental peace to mankind.

The concept of health and happiness for all finds first mention in Garunpurana, (an ancient spiritual text) in the form of a prayer.

सर्वेषां मङ्गलं भूयात् सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग् भवेत्॥ (2.35.51)

"May good fortune and happiness bestow to all, all be disease-free and witness to auspicious events and no one has to be a part of miseries.

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ १.२॥

Yoga is 'cessation of mind' through Yogic practices that enhance concentration and power to control the senses. Recent research established

the fact that Yoga has a sound scientific impact on the holistic and integrated development of physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of human beings.

“समत्वं योग उच्यते”

“Yoga is a state of equilibrium and equanimous state of mind”. It is not just exercises to keep our body fit and flexible, but also a passport to health assurance, a key to wellness and higher happenings in life that brings oneness in Body, Mind, and Soul. Sound health, sustainable happiness, and spiritual growth which are widely discussed as the ultimate goal of life in ancient Indian Scripts and Vedas, can easily be achieved through regular and committed practices. The philosophy of Yoga is practical and applicable to routine life.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥

Yoga is a destroyer of all miseries, sorrows, and diseases. It is a journey of awareness from ‘Me to Us’. A person established in ‘Self’ through Yoga, contributes constructively to society and communities with camaraderie and bonhomie. A bond of ‘Oneness’ develops with families, societies, fellow human beings, and all creatures of the planet.

2. Definition of Health

World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. WHO has also emphasized the fourth dimension of well-being which is spiritual health. From a Yogic perspective, it is heartening that the WHO definition gives importance to ‘well-being’ i.e. spiritual health which is a vital aspect of ‘being’ healthy as well as ‘feeling’ healthy.

2.1 Yogic concept of Health

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः।
प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते॥

A person is healthy whose body, mind, and soul are in a normal state and all physiological actions are proper, not a person who is physically healthy but mentally and spiritually not in a proper state. This definition of Health

closely resembles that given by the World Health Organization (WHO). The Yogic texts have said thousands of years ago what WHO admits today.

2.2 Yogic concept of Happiness and Wellbeing

सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तद्बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् |
वेत्ति यत्र न चैवायं स्थितश्चलति तत्त्वतः || 21 ||

In Shrimad bhagwad gita Lord Krishna says the union of mind with God is the expression of bliss beyond the scope of the senses which the soul experiences during the state of Samadhi. The ultimate aim of Yoga is the attainment of supreme bliss in the state of Samadhi.

तं विद्याद् दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसञ्ज्ञितम् |
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विण्णचेतसा || 23 ||

Yoga advocates dissociating oneself consciously from sorrows treating them as temporary. This state is achieved through rigorous Yoga practices.

3. Insights from Yoga for health

i. Yoga offers permanent and time-tested solutions to physical and mental ailments of the body. If the body is the temple of the mind, yoga creates a beautiful temple. Hatha yoga Pradipika, one of the classical Yoga texts assures us, “One who tirelessly practices Yoga, attains success irrespective of whether they are young, old, diseased or weak”. It gives us assurance about health improvements and the removal of diseases, provided one follows the rules and regulations and continues with committed practices.

युवो वृद्धोऽतिवृद्धो वा
वयाधितो दुर्बलोऽपि वा
अभ्यासात्सिद्धिमाप्नोति
सर्व-योगेष्वतन्द्रितः

ii. The Hathayoga Pradipika says, “Slimness of body, the luster on the face, clarity of voice, brightness of eyes, freedom from disease, control over seminal ejaculation, stimulation of gastric heat and purification of subtle energy channels are marks of success in Hathayoga”.

वपुः कृशत्वं वदने परसन्नता
नाद-सफुटत्वं नयने सुनिर्मले |
अरोगता बिन्दु-जयो | अग्नि-दीपनं
नाडी-विशुद्धिर्हठ-सिद्धि-लक्षणम्

iii. Yoga is instrumental in the glorification of the body and consists of beauty, radiance, strength, and adamant hardness.

रूप लावण्या बळ वज्र सम्हाना कायसंपत.

iv. Maharishi Patanjali says that one can gain unexcelled happiness, mental comfort, joy, and satisfaction by practicing contentment.

संतोषादनुत्तम सुख लाभः

4.1 Attaining and Maintaining a State of Health & Wellbeing

It is important to follow a Yogic lifestyle to live a healthy life. The yogic school of thought offers appropriate Action (Achar), Diet (Ahar), and Thought Process (Vihar) to deal with worldly sorrows, miseries, and diseases.

(i) **Achar** - Yoga stresses the importance of healthy activities such as exercises and recommends Asana, Pranayama, and Meditation regularly.

Dattatreya Yog shastra clearly says that merely reading texts will not be beneficial, only practice of it, leads to fruitful results.

क्रियायुक्तस्य सिद्धिः स्यद्क्रियस्य कथं भवेत् ।

न शास्त्र पाठ मात्रेण काचित्सिद्धिप्रजायते ॥३९॥

One who follows the six limbs of Yoga as mentioned in Gherand Samhita, Purification and cleansing, strength, stability, fortitude, lightness of body, clear mental perception, and freedom from illusions are achieved with time.

षट्कर्मणां शोधनञ्च आसनेन भवेद्दृढम्, मुद्रया स्थिरता चैव प्रत्याहारेण धीरता

प्राणायामाळाघवञ्च ध्यानात्प्रत्यक्षमात्मनि, समाधिना निर्लिप्तञ्च मुक्तिरेव न संशयः

Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita emphasize Nauli and Agnisar Kriya for digestion-related problems which are very common these days and cause several other diseases.

मन्दाग्निसंदीपनपाचनादि संधापिकानन्दकरी सदैव
अशेषदोषामयशोषणी च हठक्रियामौलिरियं च नौलिः

Nauli is the foremost of the hatha yoga practices. It kindles the digestive fire, removing indigestion, sluggish digestion, and all disorders of the doshas, and brings about happiness.

नाभिग्रन्थिं मेरुपृष्ठे शतवारंच कारयेत्
अग्निसारमेषा धौतियोगिनां योगसिद्धिदा

Agnisaara Dhauti” or Fire Purification to Cure Digestive Problems is a process of contracting the navel towards the spinal cord.

Because of the enhanced life span, people are very much concerned about aging problems. A huge amount of money is spent to postpone aging through the modern healthcare system. Gheranda Samhita offers Mool Bandh to deal with aging problems.

अपानप्राणयोरैक्यात् क्षयोमूत्रपुरीषयोः ।
युवा भवति वृद्धोऽपि सततं मूलबन्धनात्

Even an aged person becomes young by the practice of Mool Bandha.

Good looks and proper shape of the body are highly sought these days and taken the form of an industry, however effective solution to the issue is still far from the reach of the common man. Gheranda Samhita offers a special practice that makes the body handsome.

शीत्कृत्य पीत्वा वक्त्रेण नासानलैर्विचयेत् ।
एवमभ्यासयोगेन कामदेवसमो भवेत्

A special Yogic practice that assures a handsome body.

World Health Organization (WHO) is very much concerned about mental well-being as one person in every eight in the world is suffering from mental ailments. Maharshi Patanjali has given time tested solution that is Pranayama for mental well-being and supreme bliss.

आनन्दो जायते चित्ते प्राणायामी सुखी भवेत् ॥

Through proper practice of Pranayama, one attains a blissful state of mind.

(ii) **Vichar** - Right thoughts and the right attitude towards life are vital for well-being. A balanced state of mind is obtained by following moral

restraints and ethical observances (*yama-niyama*). As Mahatma Gandhi said, “There is enough in this world for everyone’s need but not enough for any one person’s greed”. Maharshi Patanjali says that observance of Yama & Niyama must be for a long duration with firm determination and respect.

सा तु दीर्घकाले नैरन्त्र्यम दृढभूमे सत्कारसेवितो

(iii). Ahar –

सुस्निग्धमधुराहारश्चतुर्थांशविवर्जितः ।
भुज्यते शिवसम्प्रीत्यै मिताहारः स उच्यते

आहार तोड़ौ निद्रा मोड़ौ कबहुँ न होइबा रोगी।

Appropriate diet and controlled sleep make a person free from diseases.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा॥6.17॥

Yoga is the remover of sorrows, when the yogi is on a balanced and regular diet, and makes the right efforts with wakefulness.

Conclusion

The art and science of Yoga have infinite possibilities for providing answers to most of the health problems troubling mankind. However, we often misunderstand this science and want it to be a miracle pill. A pill that we take only once, and want all the problems to vanish into thin air! Yoga is a holistic science and must be learned and practiced with a holistic view to achieve better results. “Health and happiness are our birthright claims”, and we should inculcate habits and practices to our maximum potential for achieving them. Yoga helps us to regain our birthrights and attain the goal of human life.

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