

# Effects of Yoga on Mental Health and Well-Being-Benefits for Secondary School Students-A Study

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*“Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self.” – The Bhagavad Gita*

## **Abstract**

In the world and present scenario, the Bhagavad Gita is an ancient scripture that narrates part of the story of Hinduism. When you begin practicing yoga, it is genuinely like the start of a whole other journey. There are many who experience a sort of coming home feeling, that is a comfort, a life changing part of them coming to the forefront and to love, to the self. You set out with no knowledge, no experience of yoga and for most of us, not much stretch or bend! But as you learn and practice yoga more often, you find out more about yourself. You find out how to quiet the mind. In this connection, the present paper explores the regular yoga practice appears to correlate with increased mental health and wellbeing, it includes better sleep, better body awareness, weight loss, and greater happiness and most important factor the secondary grade students are focused and concentration in their regular studies. By improving mindfulness, it simultaneously helps to boost compassion, gratitude, and "flow" states, all of which contribute to greater happiness. Early evidence suggests that yoga may even slow aging on the cellular level, perhaps through its stress-busting effects. Yoga is a healthy way of leading life and it is believed to be a form of science.

**Keywords:** *Effects of yoga on Mental Health, Mental-Well-being and secondary school students.*

## **Introduction**

Yoga is a physical, mental and spiritual discipline originating in ancient India. The *Yoga Sutra* is a collation of philosophical statements believed to have been compiled around 2000 years ago, and still serves as the foundation for modern yoga practitioners. The all-round development of an individual is only possible through the development of organized activities in educational settings. Co-curricular activities are defined as the organized activities that enable to supplement and complement the curricular or main syllabi activities at academic endeavor. For the holistic development of the secondary school students, there is an immense need for emotional, physical, spiritual and moral development. Co-curricular activities had proved its vital role in the development of the various domains of mind and personality such as intellectual, emotional, social and aesthetic development. Creativity, enthusiasm and energetic, positive thinking are some of the facets of personality development and the outcomes of organized activities. These are the important half and parcel of academic establishments to develop the students' temperament furthermore to strengthen the schoolroom learning. Organized activities have a wide horizon to cater to the cultural, social, aesthetic development of the child.

Co-Curricular Activities facilitate in the development of various domains of mind and personality such as intellectual development, emotional development, social development, moral development and aesthetic development. Creativity, Enthusiasm, and Energetic, Positive thinking are some of the facets of personality development and the outcomes of Co-Curricular Activities or Extracurricular Activities. Co-Curricular Activities are an essential part of the curriculum. These activities are important for the harmonious development of the personality.

Earlier the activities like games, sports, excursions, picnics, singing, drawing, painting, etc. we're not included in the curriculum and considered as Extracurricular activities. But now the importance of these activities is recognized by modern educationists. Therefore, these activities are included in the total education program of school as well as college and turned as Co-Curricular Activities. A few examples of common educational opportunities that may be considered as an organized activity are Indoor and Outdoor Sports, NCC and NSS, Youth Parliaments, Student Associations, Yoga, Debates, Dance and drama, Art and Music and Literature clubs and buzz groups, etc.

### **Historical Background of Yoga**

As Swami Vivekananda puts it "It is a means of compressing one's evolution into a single life or a few months or even a few hours of one's bodily existence". In general, there is a growth process due to interactions with nature in all creation. But it may take thousands and millions of years for this natural growth; that is the long, instinctive way in animals. Manas, endowed with discrimination power, conscious thinking faculty, the intellect (Buddhi) and well-developed voluntary control systems, aspires to accelerate his growth. Yoga is a systematic conscious process which can compress the process of man's growth greatly. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes on all-round personality development; at the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels. He means by Yoga a methodical effort towards self-perfection by the development of the potentialities latent in the individual. It is a process by which the limitations and imperfections can be washed away resulting in a Superhuman race. Thus, Yoga is a systematic process for accelerating the growth of an individual in his or her entirety. With this growth, one learns to live in higher states of consciousness. Key to this all-round personality development and growth is the culturing of mind.

The word 'yoga' comes from a Sanskrit word 'Yuga' which means 'union'. Traditionally, yoga is a method joining the individual self with the Divine and Universal Consciousness. Physical and mental exercises are designed to help and achieve this goal, also called self-transcendence or enlightenment. On the physical level, yoga postures, called Aasanas, are designed to tone, strengthen and align the body. These postures are performed to make the spine supple and healthy and to promote blood flow to all the organs, glands and tissues, keeping all the bodily systems healthy. On the mental level, yoga uses breathing techniques called Pranayama and meditation (dhyana) to quiet, clarify and discipline the mind. The science of Yoga imbibe itself the entire essence of the method of Life, including - Gyan Yoga or philosophy, Bhakti Yoga or path of devotional bliss, Karma Yoga or path of happy action, and Raja Yoga or path of mind control. Yoga attitude refers to a range of mental sets people can have towards the benefits of yoga refers to the harmonious well-being of body, mind, and spirit in people. As yoga generally has the tactic of creating a dynamic body, enriching the mind, and elevating the spirit. Over the past three decades, the research material available based on yoga has convinced the researchers that most of our fundamental attitudes to life have their physical counterparts in the body.

It has been observed that the practice of Yoga attunes the body, mind, and energy to bring balance and harmony in our personality. The balanced development of body, mind, and consciousness enhances the positive feeling towards life. The blend of ancient technology of Yoga with the present education system will have added advantages because it sharpens the human tool called mind by controlling it, its practices inculcates disciplines and sound moral and ethical values in pupil and learning about certain principles of life. The practice of yoga will help students deal with uneven situations in life, conflicts, distractions, routine problems, disease, and disorders. It will surely prepare students to deal with stress, realities of life, psychological growth and overall personality development. The present education system devoid of yoga education will be a linear development of students and the intellectual development will be kept in priority. The other aspect of personality like emotional, physical

and mental factors will be more or less left out. Thus, through yoga in education, there will be an increase in rationality, emotional structure and creative output of the students. Also, enhancing the physical activity in students will yield healthier outcomes.

### Yoga and Positive Health

The fast-paced and competition-oriented modern lifestyle tends to overtax the psychosomatic homeostasis of human organisms, resulting in stress-related disorders, coupled with erosion of the age-old humane values. This has rendered the modern man sorely prone to psychosomatic disorders like Diabetes and Hypertension, amidst overwhelming environmental demands, whereby he has to play ever-changing roles to get going in a work-a-day life. Modern therapeutic interventions, based on reductionist principles of modern physiology, have proved to be largely ineffective, particularly in the case of psychic and psychosomatic disorders. Modern interventions, at best, can give only a symptomatic relief from such disorders. Though, these methods work on anatomic-physiological level, yet the cure eludes these therapeutic measures because these methods are not possibly equipped to treat the very substrate of the psycho-physiological phenomenon. Inarguably, man is a complex psycho-neuro-immuno-endocrinological phenomenon and, therefore, needs only a holistic approach towards solving his existential problems. Traditional therapeutic interventions, being through and through natively holistic, may hold the key in such a scenario. Yoga, a time tested and research-supported practical science of the ancient lore, warrants a serious attention in the present context indeed. Yogic neurophysiology of Traditional Yoga with its principles of Prana (the prime energy dynamics operating within the body, creating the psycho-physiological substrate), as well as, with its subtle experience-awareness-transcendence phenomenon seems to hold a great promise for the modern man, thanks to the textual claims which have been, amply, supported by empirical research into Yoga practices.



Figure 1: Practicing Yoga

### Role of Yoga in Promoting General Well-being for Secondary School Students

You would be forgiven for thinking that talk of ‘prana’ and ‘asana’ is all a bit inaccessible, or even intimidating, to the yoga novice. However, the proven benefits of yoga, as with any other physical exercise or relaxation techniques, are many fold:

- Increase in muscle strength, joint flexibility and spinal movement gives protection from chronic conditions such as joint stiffness, back pain and arthritis, while improving posture, coordination and balance.



- Weight-bearing yoga poses or postures, particularly those that require load to be taken through the arms, strengthen bones, increase bone density and help protect against osteoporosis.
- Yoga can help your circulation, especially in hands and feet, increasing oxygen levels in your cells. Inverted postures, such as legs up the wall, shoulder stand, handstand and headstand, encourage blood flow from the lower parts of the body back to the heart, which can alleviate leg swelling and other circulatory problems.
- Any form of exercise that gets your heart pumping, including yoga, can improve cardiovascular health. More strenuous *aerobic* exercise, which includes some more vigorous forms of yoga (see later), is well documented in its ability to reduce risk of heart disease. But studies have shown that even yoga practices such as restorative yoga or meditation (see later), that don't raise your heart rate significantly, can lower your resting heart rate and reduce blood pressure.
- Movement of the whole body through a series of yoga postures causes the stretching and contraction of muscles, which in turn increases lymphatic drainage and increases the efficiency of your immune system.
- Meditation and relaxation can lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which has benefits such as the relief of stress, anxiety and depression, better immune function, downtime for the nervous system, improved sleep, reduced blood pressure and even, reportedly, the retention of bone calcium levels (reducing the risk of osteoporosis).
- An increase in mental focus can increase cognitive function, concentration levels, reaction speed and memory.
- Some reviews and other reviews suggested a number of areas where yoga may be beneficial, but more research is required for virtually all of them to more definitively establish benefits. However, this is not surprising given that research studies on yoga as a therapeutic intervention have been conducted only over the past 4 decades and are relatively few in number. Typically, individual studies on yoga for various conditions are small, poor-quality trials with multiple instances for bias. In addition, there is substantial heterogeneity in the populations studied, yoga interventions, duration and frequency of yoga practice, comparison groups, and outcome measures for many conditions (e.g., depression and pain). Disentangling the effects of this heterogeneity to better understand the value of yoga interventions under various circumstances is challenging. For many conditions, heterogeneity and poor quality of the original trials indicated that meta-analyses could not be appropriately conducted. Nevertheless, some RCTs of better quality found beneficial effects of yoga on mental health (see Uebelacker et al.'s critical review. Further investigations in this area are recommended, particularly because of the plausibility of the underlying psychophysiological rationale (including the efficacy of frequent physical exercises, deep breathing practices, mental and physical relaxation, healthy diet, etc.).
- While it is not surprising that physical fitness can be improved by training, using either yoga or conventional exercises, it is of interest that in individuals with pain yoga may have beneficial effects with overall moderate effects sizes. However, these effects were strong particularly in healthy individuals, but much weaker in patients with chronic pain conditions. The beneficial effects might be explained by an increased physical flexibility, by calming and focusing the mind to develop greater awareness and diminish anxiety, reduction of distress, improvement of mood, and so forth. Because patients may recognize that they are able to be physically active, even despite of persisting pain symptoms, they may therefore experience higher self-competence and self-awareness, which contributes to higher quality of life.

- Conceivably, *asanas* particularly have a positive effect on fitness and physical flexibility with a secondary effect on the mental state, while the *pranayama* practices and relaxation/meditation techniques may result in greater awareness, less stress, and higher well-being and quality of life. However, this remains to be shown in well-performed future studies.
- Because patients are engaged in the yoga practices as a self-care behavioural treatment, yoga interventions might well increase self-confidence and self-efficacy. On the other hand, patients with psychological burdens and/or low motivation (i.e., depression, anxiety, fatigue, etc.) might be less willing to participate fully in intensive yoga interventions. Some of these studies found relatively low participation and high dropout rates in some of the analysed studies. Patient compliance may be higher with the social support within group interventions, while private regular practices at home might be more difficult to perform consistently. These factors need to be addressed in further studies. Innes et al. [14] argued that most studies were from India where “yoga is an integral part of a longstanding cultural and spiritual tradition.” It is thus unclear whether adherence in Western patients might be the same. Many of the Indian clinical trials, which have been conducted in residential settings, not typically found outside India, include yoga class interventions 5 to 7 days per week, whereas such compliance would not be possible with patient populations outside India. However, such practices are unlikely to be continued, at least at such intensity. If as believed by some yoga practitioners, the intensity of the practice should be greater at the beginning of therapy, such programs would be an excellent way to begin yoga treatment. In India, there is a gradual shift in the attitude towards yoga with most urban Indians under the age of 35 believing yoga is a way to keep fit rather than attaching the same cultural importance to it, which earlier generations did. For these reasons, cross-cultural studies (which are lacking) using an identical intervention given to a population in India and parallel conducted elsewhere would be very useful.
- Motivation might be a crucial point. To overcome this, shorter time interventions might be an option for some specific indications (i.e., pain and depressive symptoms), while the cardiovascular and fitness effects might require long-term practices. In fact, some pain studies suggest that short-term interventions might be more effective than longer durations of practice. This would indicate a putative lack of motivation to be physically active. Indeed, a couple of reviews noted that data on subject treatment compliance was not routinely reported in most studies.
- Clearly yoga intervention programs require an active participation of the individuals as do all behavioral interventions, and thus adherence might be a crucial point that limits potentially beneficial effects of yoga. It is apparent in many life style diseases, that patients must change attitudes and behaviour in order to successfully treat these diseases. A positive feature of yoga interventions is that they may in fact be very supportive for the execution and maintenance of such lifestyle changes due to the experience of well-being from the practices which can support regular practice, and from the changes in mind/body awareness that occur over time with continued yoga practice, which will in turn support a desire to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours.
- Thus, further studies should identify which patients may benefit from the interventions, and which aspects of the yoga interventions (i.e., physical activity and/or meditation and subsequent life style modification) or which specific yoga styles were more effective than others. Larger-scale and more rigorous research is highly encouraged because yoga may have potential to be implemented as a safe and beneficial supportive/adjunct treatment that is relatively cost-effective, may be practiced at least in part as a self-care behavioural treatment, provides a life-long behavioural skill,

enhances self-efficacy and self-confidence, and is often associated with additional positive side effects.



### **Practicing the yoga by Secondary School Students**

#### **Misconceptions about Yoga**

There is a common misconception that yoga is a religious discipline. Yoga does occasionally refer to other philosophies such as Hinduism or Buddhism, but it is not necessary to study those paths in order to practice or study yoga, nor is it necessary to modify your own religious beliefs. In fact, the majority of yoga classes in the West contain little or no reference to spiritual philosophy.

#### **Conclusion**

The blend of yoga and modern education is the need of an hour and should be aimed at achieving good health, mental hygiene, emotional stability, moral values and making every student a responsible citizen of their country. Yoga, being an ancient but perfect science deals with the evolution of humanity. It is a complete system or better a Science or a way of life. Yoga is a way of life can be applied irrespective of age, gender, profession, state, conditions, and problems. Yogic practices to every human endeavor will boost the holistic development of an individual – personal, professional, social, family and societal. Especially this paper ancestrating the guidelines for the secondary school students for motivating, concentration and confidence about their achievement levels on their studies.

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