

Importance of Yoga during Adolescence Period

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Abstract

Mental health problems affect one in every five young people at any given time, says Cornell university of New York. Since to face all the problems such as: strain, tension, depression, anxiety and more our intellectual level adolescents are targeted first. Yoga in its original sense was devised as a method of spiritual awakening but of late it is being accepted as a science of health. Currently yoga is being taken as a therapeutical agent for health. It not only prevents and cures the disease but also helps in maintenance of positive health. Yoga lays great emphasis on strengthening inherent defensive mechanisms of human body and mind rather than attaching and eradicating individual offending factor. It develops immunity and resistance in human body and helps the body and mind in attaining homeostatic balance. The strengthening of defense mechanism and harmony between mind and body prevents onset of disease. The aim of yoga therefore is also the attainment of physical, mental, social and spiritual health¹.

Key words: *Yoga, Physical and Mental Health, Adolescents, Body and mind, Asanas, Pranayama, Mantra.*

Introduction

“Pleasure and suffering arise as a result of the drawing together of the sense organs, the mind and objects. When that does not happen because the mind is in the self, there is no pleasure or suffering for one who is embodied. That is yoga”

Adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. This tender age is considered to be between 12 and 19 years and usually is riddle with difficulties. This is the time when our youth is most prone to mental diseases like depression and anxiety. Did we ever ask ourselves why? Estimated 20% of youth (12-19) in developed countries are affected by mental illness (depression and anxiety). According to W.H.O. by 2020, 50% of youth with mental challenges will be under-served. Therefore, there is an urgent need to take appropriate steps so that the adolescents can attain normal, healthy growth and become productive and positive contributors' to the society. Adolescence is a time of confusion for a child who is usually not prepared for dramatic changes happening in his/her body. Physiological and endocrine system changes create imbalances in the body and mind.

Rapid growth of body limbs creates physical imbalance while new strong urges like sex, start governing one's behavior. The cortex part of the brain is still under-developed and limbic (emotional) brain is lacking proper control. This results often in an erratic behavior highly charged by emotions, both negative and positive. A new chapter in life is opening but there is no map where to go and how to get there. Today's society witnesses break down in family values and in intergenerational communication. As a result, young people have no road signs to follow, no moral or ethical values instilled and no understanding of what really is happening. During this time, peer groups and external appearance tend to increase in importance. The media knows exactly how to use this void in young people's lives and exploits it to the advantage of commerce².

Role of Yoga:

Yoga teaches order and discipline in life and living. Disciplined Yoga practices can transform the human consciousness into divine consciousness. To achieve this state there are innumerable methods employed by ancient yogis to suit the different temperaments of

people. To name a few Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali, Hatha/ Laya/ Mantra/ Jnana/ Bhakti/ Karma etc.. In this paper, a few yoga practices are taken into consideration with a view to guide the young people.

Scientific Research studies, all over the world, have revealed that disciplined yoga practices can play important role by way of improving our physiological, psychological and mental functioning. It can help young people in developing and integrating their cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities. And thereby they can develop healthy social interaction with others and the environment³.

How to Develop the Ability to Focus the Mind:

Probably the most important question for the adolescent is how to develop the ability to focus the mind. The primary aim of Yoga is to develop consciousness. Yoga nidra (relaxed alertness), Trataka (the practice of fixed gazing at a point), Nada Yoga and Mantra are such Yogic techniques which can help the child to develop Dharana and Dhyana (concentration and absorption)⁴.

Yoga nidra: Yoga nidra or relaxed alertness is a great way to learn and prepare for exams, especially if the child has been working hard or actively engaged in sports, and is physically tired. After some time he can bring about the same state of relaxation as while sitting with this practice. It has been shown that we are capable of absorbing more information if we are relaxed⁴.

Trataka: Trataka is used to improve memory and concentration. With this practice you are not only able to watch your concentration, but also intensify it. Trataka is also especially good for tackling insomnia. So when one has been studying hard and needs a rest, a bit of Trataka will get a good night's sleep⁴.

The Nada Yoga: The Nada Yoga not only brings about a very deep state of relaxation but can also help facilitate one of the fundamental behaviours necessary for learning to read, that is, listening⁴.

The basic practice of Nada Yoga is to close the ears and inhale deeply and exhale by humming out or by chanting Ommmm... One listens to the sound from the moment it explodes until the sound totally disappears. After about five to ten minutes, the humming can be stopped, the ears are still closed, and one simply listens.

Finally, one may relax the arms, open the ears and sit quietly for a few minutes before opening the eyes. This has a specific effect on the brain wave patterns. When we chant O or AU, beta rhythms dominate and when we chant M, alpha rhythms dominate. So, a long O and short M gives alertness and is great for morning chanting. Short O and long M induces introversion and relaxes alpha rhythms in the brain so it is perfect for preparing for Meditation or for going to sleep⁵.

Mantra: Relaxing the brain through Mantra is one of the methods of increasing perception. The superficial aspects of thoughts, emotions or desires which are not needed within the mind and which need to be expressed will be swept away by the Mantra. A proper Asana or posture should be selected and maintained for the duration of the practice so that there is no movement to distract the concentration⁶.

According to Patanjali control of mental modifications can be achieved by the steps in ashtanga yoga. Yama is for social well-being. Niyama is for self discipline. Then comes Asanas, such as Sarvangasana - benefits for nervous system, strengthening and blood circulation in brain. Sasankasana to activate spinal cord, Dhanurasana (Bow-curve pose) for fresh blood supply. Ustrasana (camel pose) develops strength and confidence. Gomukhasana (cow pose), alleviates tiredness, tension and anxiety. Sukhasana (easy pose) facilitates mental and physical balance without causing strain and pain⁷.

Yoga, according to Patanjali, is a method by which these chittavritti are controlled and restless mind is calmed. Yoga is a systematic and conscious process for accelerating the growth of a human being, further leading him/her towards all round personality development. Health is a state of dynamic equilibrium between body and mind. Various researches conducted to study the effect of yogic practice establish that Asana, pranayama, Bandha, Mudra, Dhyana, Shatkriyas etc, if done according to the environment nature of individual, place & time, have positive influence on physical and mental health⁸.

Pranayama, Nadisodhan (Alternate nostril breathing) to create a balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic system. Bhastrika strength the whole solar plexus area, build stamina, cleanses organs

Kapalbhati, dyanamic technique that enables to break out of the deep depression by creating a sense of activation. Bhramari pranayam, work towards creating an inner harmony that results in the attainment of a state of mental calmness. The bandha trayam as well as the asvini mudra are both a God send for those suffering from mental disorders since; It revitalizes the entire psycho-neuro endocrine system. here in yoga a complete blend of kriya and breathing patter is alien as the name of "Surya Namaskar" that relieves one from all the mental disorders and cures many diseases. It composes 12 poses at all in which four are repeated. It is a complete set of exercise for the every chakra as well as part of body. or here I can say that surya namaskar is a whole body exercise⁹.

A research has been done on evidence-bases complementary an alternative medicine in 2012, which summarizes the current evidence on the effects of yoga interventions on various component of mental and physical health. There are several randomizes clinical trials (RCT's) of relatively high quality indicating beneficial effects of yoga for pain-associated disability and mental health. Department of Internal and complementary Medicine, Berlin, Germany sounds that application of yoga as a therapeutic intervention, which began early in the twentieth century, takes advantages of various psycho physiological benefits of the component practices. The physical exercise (asana) may increase patient's physical flexibility and strength while breathing practices and meditation may cause calm and focus the mind to develop greater awareness and diminish anxiety and thus result in higher quality of life¹⁰.

Following are a few yoga practices:

1. In order to develop physiological and mental functions properly, young people should learn to regulate their food habits by way of rejecting the fast food habits and selecting only the satvika food. Yoga teaches us- 'What to eat?', 'what not to eat?', 'how to eat'? 'How much to eat?' Our young people should know that 'Food' not only nourishes our physical body but also responsible for our thoughts and behavior. This could be the reason that sages like Vasishtha, Yajnavalkya and Charandasa have described the concept of Mitahara under Yamas. Moreover, the concept of food is not limited to that which is consumed by the mouth only.

The other sensory inputs are also considered to be food. So the person cannot claim that he is consuming only fruits and milk which is satvika in nature unless the food taken by sensory inputs is satvika¹¹.

2. It is accepted fact that health of a person depends upon the healthy functioning of various tissues of the body. Muscular tissues can maintain their force and elasticity if they are regularly stretched and contracted. Sun salutation (Surya namaskara) and Yogic postures (Asanas) are proved to helpful in strengthening various tissues of the body – muscular tissues, the glandular tissues (which are responsible for the secretion of juices when active), the nerve tissues (they transmit impulses when functioning properly). More importantly, the functioning of the endocrine system is kept in the balanced state which not only helps in eliminating the waste material from the body but also helps in maintaining the circulation of blood as well as the digestive system¹².

Researchers have established that Shirasasana, Viparitkarani, sarvangasana, matsyasana are best for preserving the health of pineal and pituitary and thyroid glands whereas Dhanurasana and Uddiyana keeps the proper secretion of adrenal glands. Sexual urge is more dominants in young people which can be sublimated with help of Sarvangasana and Uddiana. The waste material can be eliminated from the body if the functioning's of the digestive, respiratory and urinary systems are kept healthy and this can be done with the practice of Danurasana, Bhujangasana, Uddiyana. In short, asanas, if practiced under proper guidance, are capable of keeping the health of an individual by influencing the different systems of the body and making them healthy in order to enable them to perform their function more efficiently¹³.

3. Yogic breathing exercise (Pranayama) not only helps in improving the functioning of respiratory system but also the other systems. Researches show that Pranayama exercise keeps respiratory system in order by way of stretching the chest muscles to the maximum and this action gives space to the lungs to open fully that improves absorption of oxygen in the blood. During puraka (inhalation) the diaphragm is lowered contracted and abdominal muscles are kept under control. This joined action of diaphragm and abdominal muscles lift

the lower part of the spine and during chin lock the upper part of the spine is lifted that improves the functioning of the sympathetic nerve. During breathing exercises particularly in the practice of Bhastrika circulation of blood becomes rapid and pure blood is supplied to endocrine system. This, in turn, ensures the proper secretions from endocrine glands. Nature has made a provision to give gentle massage to all the digestive organs (stomach, pancreas and liver etc.) to maintain their health. One can observe this by attending to abdominal movements during normal respiration. With every exhalation front abdominal muscles are contracted and all the digestive organs are pushed inward and upward and with every inhalation, the diaphragm presses the abdominal viscera downward and forward and in this way gives them a gentle massage that keeps the digestive organs naturally healthy. However, during the practice of yogic breathing this action takes place more deeply that keeps the digestive organs at proper place and improves their functioning¹⁴.

Practice of Pranayama, if properly practiced, can induce:

- Ø Subtle energy balance,
 - Ø Activates parasympathetic nervous system, Disperses their confusion,
 - Ø Develops mental control mechanisms, Makes them introspective,
 - Ø Brings peace of mind, Clarity of thought and
 - Ø Improves their concentration.
4. Yamas & Niyamas -not only instill values but also provide road map in regulating one's instincts.
 5. Pratyahara- develops an ability to manage sensory inputs (development of supremacy of cortical brain over senses and limbic brain. This is development of emotional intelligence).
 6. Dharana & Dhyana –both these practices give key to manage ones thought process that develops an ability to focus without any disruption.

Following points may be recommended for guiding the young people:

Ø Yoga respects the uniqueness of each and every individual.

Ø Yoga teachers and researchers need to work out a methodology of teaching yoga wherein what can be effectively taught through group techniques, what can be taught only through personalized instructions, and what has to be self-taught through self-directed learning strategies.

Ø Yoga teachers should ensure that whatever they teach to young students conforms to the principle given by Vyasa-bhasya (II 1), that is “citta-prasadanam- abadhyamana”(the mental composure of the students should not get adversely affected or upset).

Ø There is a need to develop “homogenous grouping of students with common features and interests”

Ø Yoga regards any development to be worthwhile only when it is capable of producing concrete personal experiences (svanubhava, svakarna-samvedya or arthavisesah pratyaksikartavyah). Such direct and concrete personal experiences bestow conviction and trust (shraddha) in students in what is being taught. Shradha, in its turn, brings up all the necessary qualities like enthusiasm, confidence, determination, pertinent memory, improved concentration, quicker decision-making, and ease in handling responsibilities in the young students to live a healthy and meaningful life¹⁵.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that Adolescence is a growing age and if proper understanding, guidance (in the form of road map) is provided to young people in the initial stage they can be saved from various psychosomatic diseases like stress, depression, anxiety etc. and they can grow in an integrated manner. This, in turn, may give them a sense of responsibility of their role towards family, society, nation and the world. It is an established fact all over the world that Yoga has potential to develop this sense of responsibility and a person can live a meaningful, healthy and happy life when both aspects of yoga (practical & theoretical) are adopted not as a ‘view of life’ but as a ‘self disciplined way of life’¹⁶.

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