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Yoga Therapy: Addiction Recovery

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Abstract: Alcohol dependency is the most severe type of alcohol misuse. It is a chronic condition defined by excessive alcohol intake that interferes with physical and mental health, as well as family and social duties. An alcoholic would continue to drink despite major health, family, or legal issues. (**Psychology Today (2016)**). There are several ways and programmes for treating addiction, ranging from traditional to alternative and complementary. More and more programmes are promoting a holistic or "whole person" approach that encompasses a range of strategies and resources to aid in the attainment, maintenance, and development of recovery. Yoga fits in effectively as part of a holistic treatment programme since it treats the mind, body, and spirit. The present paper aims at explaining about Health Impact, Management, and Yoga management, Yoga's Role in Addiction Treatment, The Benefits of Yoga in Substance Addiction Recovery and Yoga positions to help beat Addiction.

Index Terms – Alcohol dependency, alcoholism, addiction recovery, Yoga therapy.

INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism is the excessive and recurrent use of alcohol to the point where the drinker continually causes harm to himself or other people. Physical, mental, social, legal, and economic harm can all result. Most, but not all, doctors consider alcoholism to be an addiction and a disease due to the fact that such use is typically seen as compulsive and under considerably diminished voluntary control.

Around 2 billion people worldwide consume alcoholic beverages, which can have immediate and long-term consequences on health and social life. More than 76 million people are currently affected by alcohol use disorders, including alcohol dependence and alcohol abuse. Depending on the amount of alcohol consumed and the pattern of drinking, alcohol use can lead to drunkenness and alcohol dependence. It can cause disability or death from accidents or contribute to depression and suicide. Furthermore, it can cause chronic diseases such as cancer and liver disease in heavy drinkers over many years.

Alcohol causes 1.8 million deaths annually, or 3.2% of all deaths globally. Unintentional injuries account for about a third of alcohol-related deaths. In developed countries, alcohol is the third leading cause of mortality. In the small number of developing countries where overall mortality is low, alcohol is the leading cause of disease and illness. (WHO 2010)

1. HEALTH IMPACT

Drinking too much alcohol at one time or over time can cause health problems, including:

- **Liver disease.** Excessive alcohol consumption can cause an increase in fat in the liver (fatty liver disease) and inflammation of the liver (alcoholic hepatitis). Over time, excessive alcohol consumption can cause irreversible destruction and scarring of liver tissue (cirrhosis).
- **Digestive problems.** Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to inflammation of the stomach lining (gastritis), as well as stomach and esophageal ulcers. Additionally, it may prevent body from absorbing adequate B vitamins and other nutrients. Excessive alcohol consumption can damage the pancreas or cause inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis).
- **Heart problems.** Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to high blood pressure and increases the risk of an enlarged heart, heart failure, or stroke. Even a single binge can cause severe irregular heartbeats (arrhythmia) called atrial fibrillation.
- **Complications of diabetes.** Alcohol interferes with the release of glucose from the liver and can increase the risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). This is dangerous if have diabetes and are already taking insulin or some other diabetes medicine to lower blood sugar.

- **Problems with sexual function and menstruation.** Excessive use of alcohol can make men have difficulty maintaining an erection (erectile dysfunction). In women, heavy alcohol consumption can interrupt menstrual periods.
- **Eye problems.** Over time, heavy alcohol consumption can cause involuntary, rapid eye movements (nystagmus), as well as weakness and paralysis of the eye muscles due to a vitamin B-1 (thiamine) deficiency. A thiamine deficiency can lead to other brain changes, such as irreversible dementia, if not treated promptly.
- **Birth defects.** Drinking alcohol while pregnant can cause a miscarriage. It may potentially result in fetal alcohol disorder (FASD). Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders can cause a baby to be born with lifelong physical and developmental problems.
- **Bone damage.** Alcohol can prevent the growth of new bones. Loss of bone mass can lead to thinning of the bones (osteoporosis) and an increased risk of fractures. Alcohol can also damage the bone marrow, which makes blood cells. This can cause a low platelet count, which can lead to bruising and bleeding.
- **Neurological complications.** Excessive alcohol consumption can affect the nervous system, causing numbness and pain in the hands and feet, impaired thinking, dementia and short-term memory loss.
- **Weakened immune system.** Excessive alcohol consumption can make it harder for body to resist disease, increasing risk for various diseases, especially pneumonia.
- **Increased risk of cancer.** Long-term excessive consumption has been linked to an increased risk of many types of cancer, including cancers of the mouth, throat, liver, esophagus, colon and breast. Alcohol use, even in moderation, can raise risk of developing breast cancer.
- **Drug-alcohol interactions.** Some drugs interact with alcohol, increasing its toxic effects. Drinking while taking these drugs can make them work better or worse, or make them dangerous.
- **Learn new skills and make a treatment plan.** This process usually involves alcohol treatment specialists. It may include goal setting, behavior change techniques, use of self-help manuals, counseling, and follow-up care in a treatment center.
- **Psychological assistance.** Group and individual counseling and therapy help you better understand drinking problem and support recovery from the psychological aspects of drinking. You may benefit from couples or family therapy: Family support can be an important part of the recovery process.
- **Oral medications.** A drug called disulfiram can help you stop drinking, although it won't cure alcohol use disorder or stop the urge to drink. If you drink alcohol while taking disulfiram, the drug causes a physical reaction that can include flushing, nausea, vomiting, and headache.
Naltrexone, a drug that blocks the good feelings that alcohol brings, can prevent being drinking and reduce the urge to drink. Acamprosate can help you fight the craving for alcohol once you stop drinking. In contrast to disulfiram, naltrexone and acamprosate do not cause nausea after drinking.
- **Injected drugs.** A healthcare practitioner injects Vivitrol, a form of the medication naltrexone, once a month. While similar drugs can be taken in pill form, the injectable version of the drug may be easier to use consistently for people recovering from alcohol use disorder.
- **Continuous support.** Aftercare programs and support groups help people recovering from alcohol use disorder stop drinking, manage relapses, and make necessary lifestyle changes. This may include medical or psychological treatment or attending a support group.
- **Treatment of psychological problems.** Alcohol use disorder commonly occurs alongside other mental health disorders. If you have depression, anxiety, or another mental health condition, you may need talk therapy (psychotherapy), medication, or other treatment.
- **Medical care for health conditions.** Many alcohol-related health problems improve significantly when you stop drinking. But some health conditions may require continued treatment and follow-up care.
- **Spiritual practice.** People who are involved in some form of regular spiritual practice may find it easier to maintain recovery from alcohol use disorder or other addictions. For many people, gaining a greater understanding of their spiritual side is a key element to recovery.

2. MANAGEMENT

Treatment for alcohol consumption disorder might vary based on the individual's requirements. A quick intervention, individual or group therapy, an outpatient programme, or residential hospitalisation may be used in treatment. The fundamental goal of therapy is to help people quit drinking in order to enhance their quality of life.

2.1. Treatment for alcohol use disorder may include:

- **Detoxification and withdrawal.** Treatment may begin with a medically supervised detoxification-withdrawal program. Sometimes called a detox, this usually takes 2-7 days. You may need to take sedative medications to prevent withdrawal symptoms. Detoxification is usually done in an inpatient treatment center or hospital.

2.2. Alternative Medicine:

Avoid substituting conventional medical care or psychotherapy for alternative medicine. However, when utilized in conjunction with a treatment plan for recovering from an alcohol use problem, the following approaches can be beneficial:

- **Yoga.** Yoga's range of postures and controlled breathing exercises can help you relax and manage stress.
- **Meditation.** During meditation, focus attention and remove the flow of confusing thoughts that may be cluttering mind and causing stress.

- **Acupuncture.** Hair-thin needles are placed under the skin during acupuncture. Anxiety and despair can be alleviated by acupuncture. (Mayo clinic 2022)

There are many methods and programs available to treat substance abuse and addiction, from traditional to alternative and complementary. More and more programs are focusing on a holistic or "whole person" approach that includes a variety of methods and tools to help achieve, maintain and enhance recovery.

3. YOGA MANAGEMENT

Yoga has rapidly become popular around the world over the past few decades. It consists of many gentle exercises specially designed to improve the harmony between body and mind. For people with alcoholism who often feel out of control, yoga can be effective in maintaining balance. You will learn to breathe deeply and slowly, as well as move body smoothly. Yoga's ultimate purpose is to create a connection between the body and the mind. This can help alleviate tension and enhance overall well-being. More importantly, the practice can help use body more healthily and efficiently. There are many forms of yoga available, ranging from vigorous power to slower categories. You can practice it in various settings, such as yoga studios, gyms or community centers.

Yoga is a complementary or adjunctive health practice that is often considered a natural form of medicine. Attached means "besides" and not "instead of". Yoga is often helpful when used in conjunction with other traditional methods of substance abuse treatment.

Yoga is increasingly being used in substance abuse treatment programs and during recovery to help prevent relapse, reduce withdrawal symptoms and drug cravings, and provide a healthy outlet for coping with potential triggers and factors of stress of daily life.

3.1. Yoga's Role in Addiction Treatment

Practicing yoga can actually help balance certain parts of the brain and body that are naturally affected by drug abuse. In addition to the physical aspects of yoga, there are many emotional benefits as well. By practicing yoga, people tune into their bodies, learn to regulate their breathing, and really listen to their bodies. This can create a self-awareness of how things can make a person feel a certain way without judgment.

By focusing all energy inward, people can learn to take ownership of how they feel and gain control over themselves and their subsequent actions. In this way, they can also become more independent and self-confident. By recognizing cravings when they occur and not trying to avoid or give in to them, for example, a person may be better able

to deal with and manage these feelings if they are more physically aware of them when they occur.

Yoga can also boost energy levels, encourage people to eat better, and improve the quality of sleep that can be disrupted by drug or alcohol withdrawal symptoms. When people feel better physically, they are better able to handle stress and anything else that may arise during the day. Sleeping more means having a clearer mind and lower levels of irritability. Exercise can also improve self-image, as healthy habits can also improve physical body appearance.

Many of the 12-step programs people join during treatment and recovery for support are infused with spirituality and spiritual concepts. Yoga can enhance this and help people achieve that spiritual connection through mindful meditation and breathing techniques. Calming all outside influences through yoga can help a person find inner peace through self-reflection and a personal realization of what needs to change to improve life.

Yoga goes way beyond stretching. It can be used as part of a substance abuse treatment programme or performed on its own. When used in conjunction with other traditional healing practices, yoga can be a wonderful complementary therapy that people can practice throughout their lives to calm down and improve mental clarity when needed.

3.2. The Benefits of Yoga in Addiction Recovery

Many addiction recovery centers are now incorporating yoga into substance use recovery treatment programs. This is because yoga can be very beneficial for people who are struggling with addiction. Yoga helps reduce stress and this can ease progress on the road to recovery. It helps people become more aware so they can identify destructive thoughts and behaviors. Yoga also provides a healthy outlet for dealing with negative emotions and triggers.

3.2.1. Neurological benefits of yoga

Many people practice yoga for physical health benefits. However, people with anxiety disorders are often told they should try yoga. It is an exercise program that can benefit the body and mind. In fact, the mental advantages may outweigh the physical advantages.

- Practicing yoga can enlarge the hippocampus region of the brain. Memory processing occurs in part in the hippocampus. Patients battling Alzheimer's disease often have atrophied or abnormal hippocampal structures.

- Yoga students and instructors often have signs of swelling in the amygdala sections of their brain. The amygdala region of the brain is heavily involved in emotional regulation. Many patients with drug addiction could greatly benefit from a neurological change like this.

- Doing yoga regularly can also expand or improve the prefrontal cortex of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is active when people are making decisions, considering their options, planning ahead, and multitasking. Some of the people who struggle with drug addiction have problems with these specific cognitive abilities, as drugs can directly damage or affect the prefrontal cortex. Yoga may be able to reverse some of these effects.

- Some of the neurological changes yoga can cause have been correlated with better scores on emotional regulation or cognitive exercises. Some people with emotional regulation issues turn to drugs for help, so these improvements may make them less likely to rely on drugs for the same benefits. Addiction can also negatively impact a person's emotional regulation abilities, so yoga can help a person restore balance that has been disrupted by chemical addiction.

- Yoga significantly aids in the management of emotional stress, which may be the direct cause of some of these mental health benefits. However, managing stress has many additional benefits for physical and psychological health. Addiction recovery causes stress, just like addiction.

- Aerobic forms of exercise are known to have cognitive and psychological as well as physical benefits. Something as simple as walking could widen the brain's hippocampus. This may also be the case with forms of anaerobic exercise such as yoga, which illustrate the importance of the link between a person's psychological and physical health.

3.2.2. Physical Benefits of Yoga

People struggling with addiction can also benefit from the physical aspects of yoga. As body gets stronger, it will feel better inside and out. Can gain confidence and feel more in control of life. There is a great deal of scientific research into the physical benefits of yoga.

- Regular yoga practice can lower blood pressure. The declines were greatest for people who practiced yoga with an emphasis on relaxation and breathing techniques. Drug use and withdrawal can cause blood pressure levels to rise. Yoga may be a good way to combat drug-induced hypertension.

- Like any physical activity, yoga gets the body moving and the blood flowing. Both physical postures and breathing help improve circulation. This is important for former drug addicts because long-term drug use can affect the cardiovascular system. When blood flows properly, it pumps nutrients and oxygen to other parts of the body. If the system malfunctions, it can lead to heart failure, stroke, and organ failure.

- Withdrawal symptoms can be very distressing. The body is going through changes, and this can manifest itself in physical symptoms such as headaches and body aches. Yoga can help with back pain, neck pain and arthritis. yoga can reduce the intensity and frequency of headaches.

- Yoga helps normalize a number of body functions. This is because the positions stimulate numerous internal organs. For example, twisting yoga poses can massage the intestines to aid in digestion. Certain poses kick-start the endocrine system so that the body produces the hormones it needs to function properly.

- Everyone has two nervous systems: the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is frequently referred to as the "fight or flight" response mechanism. It responds to stress by releasing the hormone cortisol. The parasympathetic is the opposite. It produces a relaxation response that lowers heart rate, respiratory rate, and cortisol levels. Yoga activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which makes it simpler for the body to respond to stresses. **(Cardinal Recovery 2022)**

3.3. Yoga positions to help beat Addiction

Yoga asanas are postures that combine movement and breathing. This mindful movement practice requires to focus on certain parts of the body, grounding, and breathing. Ultimately, yoga has some of the many benefits of meditation, such as regulating emotions.

Can practice yoga on own to help on journey to recovery, or can talk to treatment center for advice on getting started. There are several yoga asanas that ease the mind-body connection, and we've listed some beginner-friendly poses that you can do at home.

• Balasana, Child's pose

Balasana is derived from two Sanskrit words: bal (infant) and asana (posture). This pose helps relieve stress by relieving tension in the lower back. To get into this pose, start by kneeling on the floor with heels lifted. First, inhale through nose and then, as exhale, lower r head to the floor. can either extend arms at the front of space or keep them at sides. While holding this position, inhale through nose and exhale through mouth. To come out, slowly lift torso up, using hands for extra support. Balasana flexes internal organs, encourages smooth breathing, and relieves neck and back pain.

• Vajrasana, seated mountain position

Vajrasana comes from Varja (diamond or thunderbolt) and asana (posture). This pose is good for spinal alignment. To perform this pose, kneel in a seated position while keeping back straight. Keep shoulders relaxed and chest open. Breathe in through nose and out through mouth and feel the stress fade away. The Vajrasana pose helps relieve back pain, heals digestive acidity and keeps the mind stable.

• Savasana, corpse pose

To perform Savasana, lie on back with legs slightly apart. Arms should be relaxed at sides with palms facing up. Inhale through nose and exhale through mouth.

Savasna relaxes muscles, balances the central nervous system and aids digestion.

There are many other yoga poses that are used to relieve stress and are helpful for those recovering from addiction, but they require guidance from professional yoga practitioners. (MAT Clinic 2022)

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