



## Yoga & Mental Health

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### Abstract:

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which affects our thoughts, feelings, and actions. It also plays a crucial role in handling stress, relating to others, and making decisions. Mental health is important at all stages of life. The World Health Organization reports that one in four people worldwide will experience mental disorders at some point in their lives. Risk factors for mental illness include stressful life situations, traumatic events, and the use of illegal drugs. Yoga is a potential tool for individuals to cope with stress and regulate their emotions. It trains the mind and body to achieve emotional balance. We argue that children and young people need such tools to listen inward to their bodies, feelings, thoughts, and ideas, as yoga can help them develop in sound ways, strengthen themselves, and become contributing social beings.

In today's world, children and young people face numerous expectations and constant stimulation through the internet and other media technologies. Globalization exposes individuals to various new demands, standards, and options, leading to increased pressure to succeed in all phases of life, thereby affecting mental health. Modern society offers plenty of distractions and unwelcome attractions, especially linked to new media technologies and materialistic things. These factors have become predominant factors affecting mental health. Our study argues that yoga can help individuals cope with stress and contribute positively to balance in life, well-being, and mental health. Current research literature suggests that yoga can genuinely improve mental well-being. Incorporating yoga into an individual's life can improve resilience, mood, and self-regulation skills related to emotions and stress.

**Keywords** –Individual person, multimedia, lifestyles, materialistic things, well-being, Mental health, yoga.

### Introduction-

Mental health, as defined by the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, is a condition of emotional and psychological well-being that helps people manage the pressures of life, develop their abilities, learn effectively, work productively, and contribute positively to society. It is a fundamental aspect of overall health and well-being that fosters our capacity to make decisions, form relationships, and shape our world.

Mental health is not a separate entity from overall health. It is a vital and fundamental component that can be defined in at least three ways - as the absence of disease, as a state of the body that allows for the complete performance of all its functions, or as a state of equilibrium within oneself and between oneself and their physical and social surroundings (**Sartorius, 2002**). The definition depends on how basic health needs are met, such as food, shelter, survival, protection, society, social support, freedom from pain, environmental

hazards, unnecessary stress, and exploitation (**Maslow, 1968**). Mental health refers to a person's ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with others, fulfill social roles as expected by their culture, cope with change, recognize and express positive thoughts and actions, and manage emotions like sadness. It provides a sense of self-worth, control, and understanding of internal and external functioning. According to the Society for Health Education and Promotion Specialists (**SHEPS, 1997**), mental health also encompasses feeling positive about oneself and others and experiencing joy and love. The individual's ability to function is influenced by the social environment surrounding them, including family, friends, employers, peers, colleagues, and society and culture.

Mental health involves several key senses: trust, challenge, competency, accomplishment, and humor. It also includes various capacities, such as the ability to develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Additionally, mental health enables individuals to initiate, develop, and maintain mutually satisfying relationships, be aware of others and empathize with them, and use psychological distress as a means of growth and learning. This process helps individuals to overcome any hindrances or impairments that may impede their further development. (**HEA, 1997**)

According to the Mental Health Foundation (**MHF, 2008**), mental health refers to an individual's emotional and psychological well-being, which affects their ability to cope with challenges and manage their lives. It directly or indirectly impacts a person's functioning and ability to take advantage of available opportunities, participate in society, and interact with family, colleagues, and friends. Mental health and physical health are closely related and can affect each other. Therefore, it can be said that mental health is a state of balance where a person is comfortable with themselves, can function well in society, and can meet their basic and advanced needs. (**Mental Health, 2014**)

The World Health Organization predicts that depression will become the second largest contributor to the global disease burden, after ischemic heart disease. Anxiety is also being diagnosed more frequently than in the past. However, the current treatment options mainly involve pharmaceutical therapies, which are often inadequate to prevent further illness or promote mental well-being. To effectively address mental health concerns, a comprehensive approach is required that targets the root of the problems.

In this paper, we present supporting evidence for the benefits of yoga in promoting health, preventing illnesses, and treating depression and other mental health imbalances. By incorporating yoga as part of a holistic approach, individuals can potentially achieve greater mental well-being.

### **What is Yoga?**

The eight-limbed path of yoga includes Yama (moral codes), niyama (self-discipline), asana (postures), pranayama (breath practices promoting life force), pratyahara (sensory transcendence), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), samadhi (state of bliss). words root of yoga means “to join” in Sanskrit, joining mind and body, and individual and collective selves is the essence of this ancient South Asian practice. Yogic philosophy posits that every life form is interconnected and united. Yoga exists in the world because everything is linked.” Yoga’s greatest aim is to create compassion within and a deep sense of unity and oneness with all forms of life. Yoga is an individual activity that has social implications. those who regularly participate in yoga typically interact with the world in calmer and more reasonable ways. More positive social interactions and relationships are one of the ripple effects of individual yoga practice.

Yoga, an ancient cultural heritage of India, understands health and well-being as a dynamic continuum of human nature and not a mere ‘state’ to be attained and maintained (Bhavanani 2013). **Yogi Swatmarama**, author of the **Hatha yoga Pradipika**, one of the classical Hatha yoga texts assures us, that “one who tirelessly practices yoga attains success irrespective of whether they are young, old decrepit, diseased or weak” (Bhatt, 2004). Yoga conceptualizes the human being as a multi-layered, conscious being, possessing three bodies or sharira (sthula-gross, sukshma -subtle, and Karana -causal) and having a five-layered existence (pancha kosha) consisting of our anatomical, physiological, psychological, intellectual, and universal existential layers (**Giri, 1976; Bhavanani, 2008**). Yoga as a way of conscious living, enables the individual to attain and maintain a dynamic sukha sthanam that may be defined as a dynamic sense of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. The **Bhagavad Gita (II: 48)** defines Yoga as samatvam meaning thereby that Yoga is a

harmonious and balanced state of equanimity or equipoise at all levels (**Chidbhavananda, 1984**). This may be also understood as a perfect state of dynamic well-being wherein physical homeostasis, emotional balance, and mental equanimity manifest in harmony.

### How Does Yoga Work?

From a yogic perspective, the breath bridges mind and body. Slow diaphragmatic breathing is common in almost all forms of yoga. The key to quieting the mind is slowing and deepening the breath. Practicing yoga helps to regain mental stability, calmness, and tranquillity, primarily because of this kind of breathing. Practitioners can connect internally through this stillness and silence. Virtually all yogic practices, including asana (postures), pranayama (life force practices), and dhyana (meditation), encourage quietness and listening within. A yogic saying states that through a flexible body, we gain a flexible mind. It helps people become more patient, forgiving, and less prone to anger and sadness.

Chitta in a state of dullness is purified through Yama, niyama, and asana through which the mind is spurred to activity. Asana and Pranayama bring the wavering mind to a state of some stability. The disciplines of pranayama and Pratyahara make the Chitta attentive and focused its energy. It is then restrained in this state by dhyana and samadhi. As it progresses the higher stages of Yoga become predominant, but the preceding stages which lay the foundation should be neither ignored nor neglected. Before exploring the unknown 'Atma', the sadhaka must learn about his known body, mind, intellect, and ego. When he knows the 'known' in its totality, these merge into the 'unknown' like rivers merging into the sea. At that moment he experiences the highest state of joy (Ananda). First, Yoga deals with health, strength, and conquest of the body. Next, it lifts the veil of difference between the body and the mind. Lastly, it leads the sadhaka to peace and unalloyed purity. Yoga systematically teaches man to search for the divinity within himself with thoroughness and efficiency. He unravels himself from the external body to the self within. He proceeds from the body to the nerves, and from the nerves to the senses. From the senses, he enters the mind, which controls the emotions. From the mind, he penetrates the intellect, which guides reason. From the intellect, his path leads to the will and thence to consciousness (Chitta). The last stage is from consciousness to his Self, his very being (Atma). Thus, Yoga leads the sadhaka from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality.

### Qualities of a mentally healthy person:

The central theme of Yoga is the golden mean (yukta), finding the middle path, a constant search for moderation, and a harmonious homeostatic balance (Feuerstein, 2003; Bhavanani, 2010). Yoga is the "unitive impulse" of life, which always seeks to unite diverse streams into a single powerful force (Giri, 1976; 1995). Proper practice and living of the Yogic principles produce an inner balance that gives stability and calm even during chaos. This ancient science shows its adherents a clear path to the "eye of the storm" and ensures stability that endures within, even as the cyclone may rage on externally.

Some of the prerequisite qualities of a mentally healthy person (stitha prajna) are enumerated in the **Bhagavad Gita as follows**: Beyond passion, fear, and anger (**veeta raga bhaya krodhah–BG II.56**), devoid of possessiveness and egoism (**nirmamo nirahamkarah- BG -II.7**), firm in understanding and unbewildered (**sthira buddhir asammudhah–BG – V.20**), engaged in doing good to all creatures (**sarva bhutahiteratah–BG V.25**), friendly and compassionate to all (**maitrah karuna eva – BG XII.13**); and pure hearted and skilful without expectation (**anapekshah sucir daksah– BG XII.16**) (**Chidbhavananda, 1984**).

**Bhagavad Gita's Teachings** for improving their mental health and bringing about a dynamic change in their living patterns in society. It seems that the present educational system in India is facing a challenge of mental health due to rapid change in the advancement of modern technologies. The world is becoming more and more competitive. The quality of the individual has become the dominant factor for personal progress. The study is needed and significant from several points of view not only in bringing excellence among individuals but also in revealing the probable interplay among disciplines of action, devotion, and knowledge. Besides disciplines of action and knowledge, there is a need for discipline of devotion which will build up mental well-being.

### **Some Yogic tools for mental health and wellbeing:**

- ❖ **Tools to induce psycho-physical harmony:** Asana-s (static postures), kriya-s (systematic and rationale movements), mudra-s (seals of neuromuscular energy) and bandha-s (locks for neuromuscular energy) gently stretch and strengthen the musculoskeletal system healthily. They improve the mobility and flexibility of the different joints and groups of muscles. There is also concomitant improvement in systemic functions such as respiration, circulation, metabolism, digestion, and elimination. A general sense of health and well-being is also promoted by these aspects of Yoga that help release feel-good hormones like endorphins and encephalins (Bhavanani, 2008; 2013).
- ❖ **Contemplation, relaxation, and meditation:** There are a great many Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga techniques of relaxation and visualization that are useful (Giri, 1976; Bhavanani, 2008). Other practices such as trataka (concentrated gaze), pranayama, pratyahara, dharana as well as dhyana may also be utilized. Relaxation is a central element in Yoga as it is the body's way of recharging its cells and helps to ease physical, emotional, and mental tensions. We can facilitate our healing when we are relaxed. We often unintentionally retard our inherent healing mechanisms when we are tense and uptight. The choice is ours to make.
- ❖ **Enhancing spiritual awareness:** Yoga is the best way for us to consciously evolve out of our lower, sub-human nature, into our elevated human and human nature (Giri, 1995). Ultimately, this life-giving, life-enhancing, and life-sustaining science of humanity allows us to achieve in full measure the Divinity that resides within each of us. Swadhyaya, satsanga (spiritual gathering), bhajana sessions, and Yogic counseling are important aspects of Yogic living. We need to realize that "Oneness" is health whereas "Duality" is a disease. We cannot remain lonely, depressed, and diseased if we realize that we are part of a wonderful, joyful, and harmonious Universe. Spirituality is the personal connection we feel with our inner being. This can be strengthened greatly through conscious introspection and self-inquiry. When we begin to understand the oneness manifest through all forms of life, we manifest gratitude, respect, and love. Our life becomes one of selfless service (nishkama seva) for humanity. At that point, we start to radiate joy, love, and well-being (tejasvi).
- ❖ **Relieving suffering and pain:** - In the Bhagavad Gita (VI:23), Yoga is also defined as "dukkhasamyogaviyogam yoga samjnitham", the conscious disassociation from union with suffering (Chidbhavananda, 1984; Bhavanani, 2013). Yoga improves pain tolerance and provides an improved quality of life. It can be safely said that Yoga helps us endure conditions that it may not be able to cure. This is vital in end-life situations where the patient must have a sense of the improved quality of life during their final days and moments on earth. Yoga can also benefit caretakers of such terminal patients who are under great stress themselves as it enables them to realize that we fulfill ourselves best as human beings when we help others.

The **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita (SBG)** is an excellent leadership guidebook that stirs management's consciousness by demonstrating the power of spirit over material things and unfolds the gospel of ethics and morals. It teaches us how to progress from indifference, sadness, grief, and melancholy to comprehension, clarity, wisdom, and fortitude and ultimately achieve victory. Yoga is the original mind-body medicine and is one of the greatest treasures of the unique Indian cultural heritage. Yogic lifestyle, Yogic diet, Yogic attitudes, and various Yogic practices help man to strengthen himself and develop positive health thus enabling him to withstand stress better. This Yogic "health insurance" is achieved by normalizing the perception of stress, optimizing the reaction to it, and releasing it effectively through various practices. Yoga is truly a wholesome and integral science of life that deals with multidimensional aspects of health in both the individual and society.

## Conclusion:

Yoga helps us to take the appropriate attitude towards our challenges and thus tackle them effectively and efficiently. “To have the will (iccha shakti) to change (kriya shakti) that which can be changed, the strength to accept that which cannot be changed, and the wisdom (jnana shakti) to know the difference” is the attitude that needs to be cultivated. An attitude of letting go of the worries, the problems and a greater understanding of our mental process helps to create harmony in our body, and mind whose disharmony is the main cause of ‘aadi – vyadhi’ or psychosomatic disorders. “Health and happiness are your birthright, claim them and develop them to your maximum potential.” Most people today are so busy trying to find health and happiness that they forget why they are here in the first place. Yoga is the best way for us to regain our birthrights and attain the goal of our human existence.

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