

INTEGRATED APPROACH OF YOGA THERAPY FOR PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS

Dr. Jyoti Keswani

Assistant Professor

B.N.Y.S, M.A. (Yogic Sciences)

S.H.M. College of Naturopathy & Yogic Sciences, Bhopal (M.P.)

Stress, we have become much too familiar with the name. It is indeed a necessary evil. Stress only drives us to put efforts in order to survive. In fact, stress is the sole reason for our survival. So stress is also vital and hence has been called a necessary evil. But, if stress is so important for our survival, why it has become a problematic issue in today's life. Stress is basically a psychological and physiological response to events that upset our personal balance in some way. It is a state of mind which distorts comfortable way of living. Our body responds to each stressful stimuli through a number of physiological and psychological changes. These changes have been termed as "fight-or-flight" stress response. This response involves a small part of the brain called the hypothalamus which triggers the sympathetic nervous system to release stress hormones, including adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol. These stress hormones circulate through the bloodstream and bring about various changes in the different systems of the body. Heart rate and blood flow to the large muscles increase so we can run faster and fight harder. Blood vessels under the skin constrict to prevent blood loss in case of injury, pupils dilate so we can see better, and our blood sugar ramps up, giving us an energy boost and speeding up reaction time. At the same time, body processes not essential to immediate survival is suppressed. The digestive and reproductive systems slow down, growth hormones are switched off, and the immune response is inhibited.

The above changes are aimed at safeguarding us from different kinds of danger. Today, the external dangers have reduced but still we are facing stress due to the disturbances in internal environment. The potential causes of stress are numerous and highly individual. It depends on many factors, including your personality, general outlook on life, problem-solving abilities, and social support system.

Prolonged exposure to stress i.e. Distress leads to reduced productivity, reduced enjoyment and reduced stability of mind. Stress can result in physical ailments in most of the cases whereas mental ailments in some.

Yoga identifies stress with **Kleshas**, as stated by **Maharshi Patanjali** in his **Yoga Sutras**

"Avidya Asmita Raga Dvesha Abhinivesha kleshah" (II.3)

Ignorance is the imbalance at subtlest level, then because of ego, stress starts building up leading to fragmentation. Attachments, hatred and fear of death further aggravate the stress and sends the person to the kingdom of misery and limitness.

Maharshi Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras has indicated that Stress is due to ever increasing desires (Kaam) and attachment (Raga) to the material objects of enjoyment. If the person cannot fulfill his desires, stress is generated. Even if he can fulfill his present desires, new desires arise and the person again starts having stress. Thus, this becomes a vicious circle which never ends. This also leads to fluctuations in mind (Chitta Vrittis) and give rise to a agitated state of mind.

Our personality is said to be composed of five sheaths i.e. Annamaya Kosha, Pranamaya Kosha, Manomaya Kosha, Vijnanamaya Kosha and Anandmaya Kosha. Continuous distress causes disturbances in Manomaya Kosha which is manifested through pranamaya Kosha (the vital sheath) and Annamaya Kosha (the physical sheath) Kosha. These manifestations are termed as Psychosomatic disorders. To treat these psychosomatic ailments, it becomes necessary to work at all these levels of existence.

The integrated approach of Yoga is thus not only to treat these at the physical level to get the best temporary relief; but it also includes the practices which involve different sheaths of our existence.

Thus, Yoga offers a holistic approach and treats the Body- Mind complex as a whole.

Yogic practices like slowly performed static Asanas, Relaxation techniques, Pranayamas, Meditation etc help to reduce Stress by inducing body's inborn power to come back to normal (state of homeostasis). It has been found by researches that 20-30 minutes of Yoga practice daily decreases the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and leads to release of Endorphins which are known to have mood elevating effect. Endorphins are proteins released from the brain that act as the body's natural pain reliever.

Thus, the integrated approach of yoga therapy can be utilized effectively not only to treat the symptoms but also to bring the complete cure.

Keywords: *Yoga, Integration, Holistic, Kleshas*

INTRODUCTION

Stress, we have become much too familiar with the name. It is indeed a necessary evil. Stress only drives us to put efforts in order to survive. In fact, stress is the sole reason for our survival. So stress is also vital and hence has been called a necessary evil. But, if stress is so important for our survival, why it has become a problematic issue in today's life.

To understand this, we will have to understand what is stress.

What is Stress?

Oxford dictionary defines Stress as "Pressure or worry resulting from mental or physical distress or difficult circumstances."

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to events that upset our personal balance in some way. It is a state of mind which distorts comfortable way of living

Stress is defined as a non-specific conventional phylogenetic basic response pattern which prepares the body for physical activity such as fight or flight.

The Body's Stress Response:

The "fight-or-flight" stress response involves a series of biological changes that prepare us for emergency action. When danger is sensed, a small part of the brain called the hypothalamus sets off a chemical alarm. The sympathetic nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol. These stress hormones circulate through the bloodstream, thus making us ready to face the emergency situation. This is done by various changes in the different systems of the body. Heart rate and blood flow to the large muscles increase so we can run faster and fight harder. Blood vessels under the skin constrict to prevent blood loss in case of injury, pupils dilate so we can see better, and our blood sugar ramps up, giving us an energy boost and speeding up reaction time. At the same time, body processes not essential to immediate survival is suppressed. The digestive and reproductive systems slow down, growth hormones are switched off, and the immune response is inhibited.

The above changes are aimed at safeguarding us from different kinds of danger. In the primitive times, when the man's sole aim in life was to secure food and protect him from variety of dangers, stress response was must for survival.

Types of Stress:

Depending on the long term effects of stress, there are two types of stress:

- 1) **Eustress**, which is good, healthy and essential stress as it promotes us in life.
- 2) **Distress**, which is bad or morbid stress causing various physical and mental health problems. Prolonged exposure to distress increases the risk of heart disease, obesity, infection, anxiety, depression, and memory problems.

Thus, Stress affects the mind, body, and behavior in many ways— all directly tied to the physiological changes of the fight-or-flight response.

Signs and Symptoms of stress:

The specific signs and symptoms of stress vary widely from person to person. Some people primarily experience physical symptoms, such as low back pain, stomach problems, and skin outbreaks. In others, the stress pattern centers around emotional symptoms, such as crying jags or hypersensitivity.

Cognitive Symptoms

- Memory problems
- Indecisiveness
- Inability to concentrate
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Poor judgment
- Seeing only the negative
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying
- Loss of objectivity
- Fearful anticipation

Emotional Symptoms

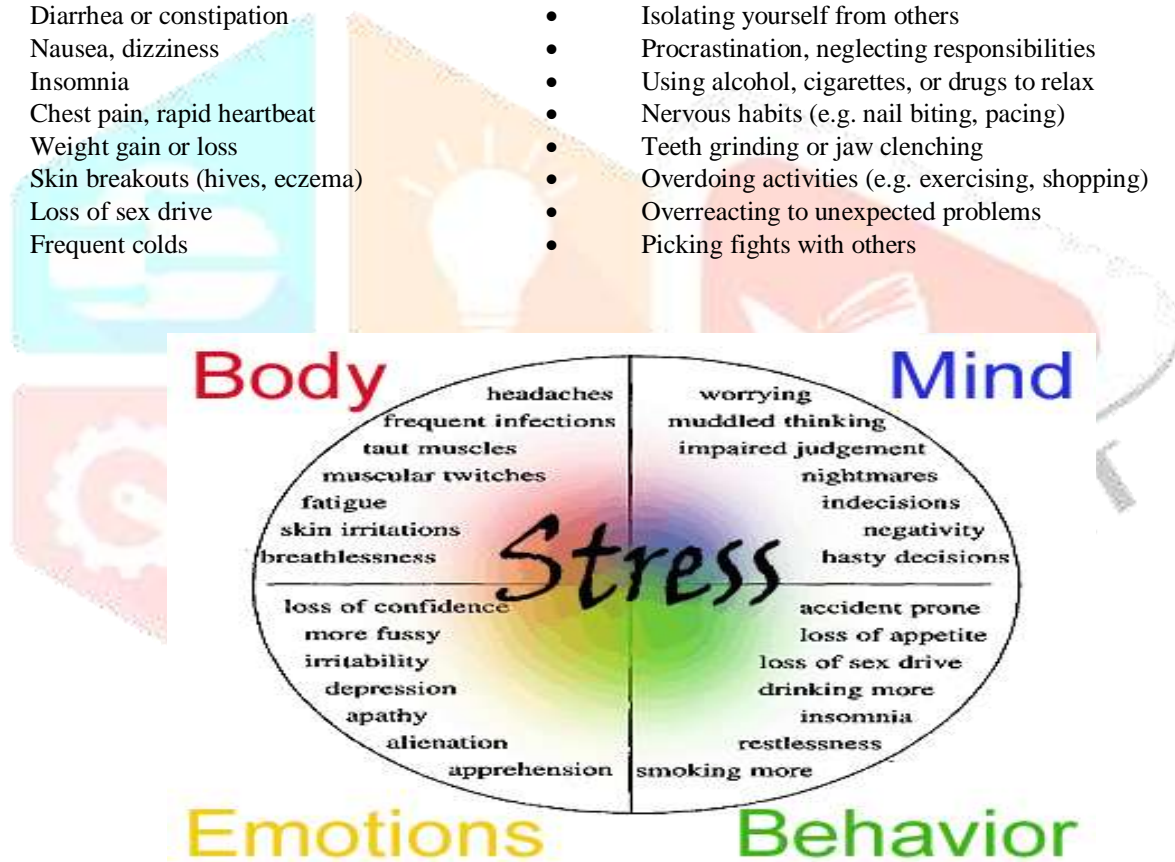
- Moodiness
- Agitation
- Restlessness
- Short temper
- Irritability, impatience
- Inability to relax
- Feeling tense and “on edge”
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Depression or general unhappiness

Physical Symptoms

- Headaches or backaches
- Muscle tension and stiffness
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Nausea, dizziness
- Insomnia
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Weight gain or loss
- Skin breakouts (hives, eczema)
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds

Behavioral Symptoms

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastination, neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)
- Teeth grinding or jaw clenching
- Overdoing activities (e.g. exercising, shopping)
- Overreacting to unexpected problems
- Picking fights with others



Causes of stress:

The potential causes of stress are numerous and highly individual. It depends on many factors, including your personality, general outlook on life, problem-solving abilities, and social support system. The pressures and demands that cause stress are known as *stressors*. We usually think of stressors as being negative, such as an exhausting work schedule or a rocky relationship. However, anything that forces us to adjust can be a stressor. This includes positive events such as getting married or receiving a promotion. Regardless of whether an event is good or bad, if the adjustment it requires strains our coping skills and adaptive resources, the end result is stress.

Daily causes of stress include:

- **Environmental stressors** – Your physical surroundings can set off the stress response. Examples of environmental stressors include an unsafe neighborhood, pollution, noise and uncomfortable living conditions.

- **Family and relationship stressors** – Problems with friends, romantic partners, and family members are common daily stressors. Marital disagreements, dysfunctional relationships, rebellious teens, or caring for a chronically-ill family member or a child with special needs can all send stress levels skyrocketing.
- **Work stressors** – In our career-driven society, work can be an ever-present source of stress. Work stress is caused by things such as job dissatisfaction, an exhausting workload, insufficient pay, office politics, and conflicts with your boss or co-workers.
- **Social stressors** –social situation can also cause stress. For example, poverty, financial pressures, racial and sexual discrimination or harassment, unemployment, isolation, and a lack of social support all take a toll on daily quality of life.

Internal Causes of Stress include:

Not all stress is caused by external pressures and demands. Stress can also be self-generated. Internal causes of stress include:

- Uncertainty or worries
- Pessimistic attitude
- Self-criticism
- Unrealistic expectations or beliefs
- Perfectionism
- Low self-esteem
- Excessive or unexpressed anger
- Lack of assertiveness

Complications of Stress:

Prolonged exposure to stress i.e. Distress leads to reduced productivity, reduced enjoyment and reduced stability of mind. Stress can result in physical ailments in most of the cases whereas mental ailments in some.

Some of the health problems caused due to excessive stress are:

- Pain of any kind
- Heart disease
- Digestive problems
- Sleep problems
- Depression
- Obesity
- Autoimmune diseases
- Skin conditions, such as eczema

The physical diseases resulting from prolonged exposure to stress are known as psychosomatic diseases. Psychosomatic disorders are health problems whose origin is at the psychic or mental level and are manifested at the physical level in the form of a disease.

When a person is exposed to stressors, changes start taking place in his behavior and personality. These changes proceed through four phases and ultimately result in a disease or disorder:

- PHASE I PSYCHIC PHASE (at mental level)
- PHASE II PSYCHOSOMATIC PHASE (involves both physical & Mental levels)
- PHASE III SOMATIC PHASE (at physical level)
- PHASE IV ORGANIC PHASE (involves changes within the organs)

Causes Of Stress according to Yoga:

Yoga identifies stress with **Kleshas**, as stated by **Maharshi Patanjali** in his **Yoga Sutras**

“Avidya Asmita Raga Dvesha Abhivesha kleshah’ (II.3)

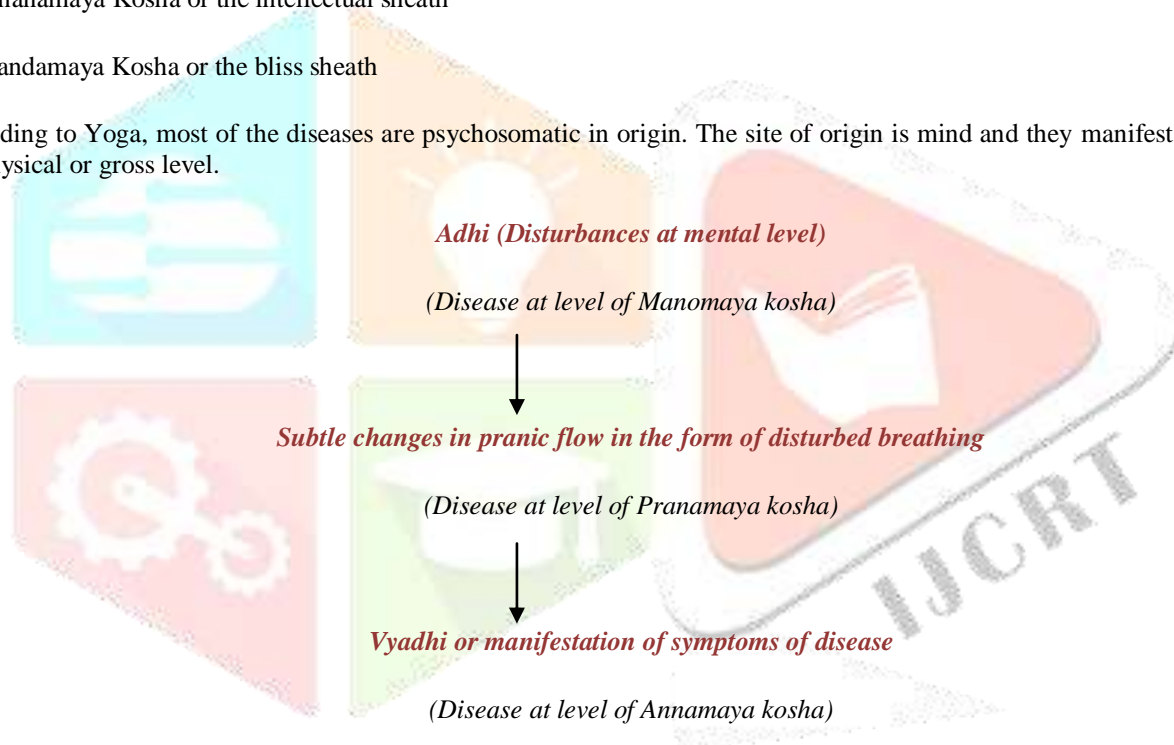
Ignorance is the imbalance at subtlest level, then because of ego, stress starts building up leading to fragmentation. Attachments, hatred and fear of death further aggravate the stress and sends the person to the kingdom of misery and limitness.

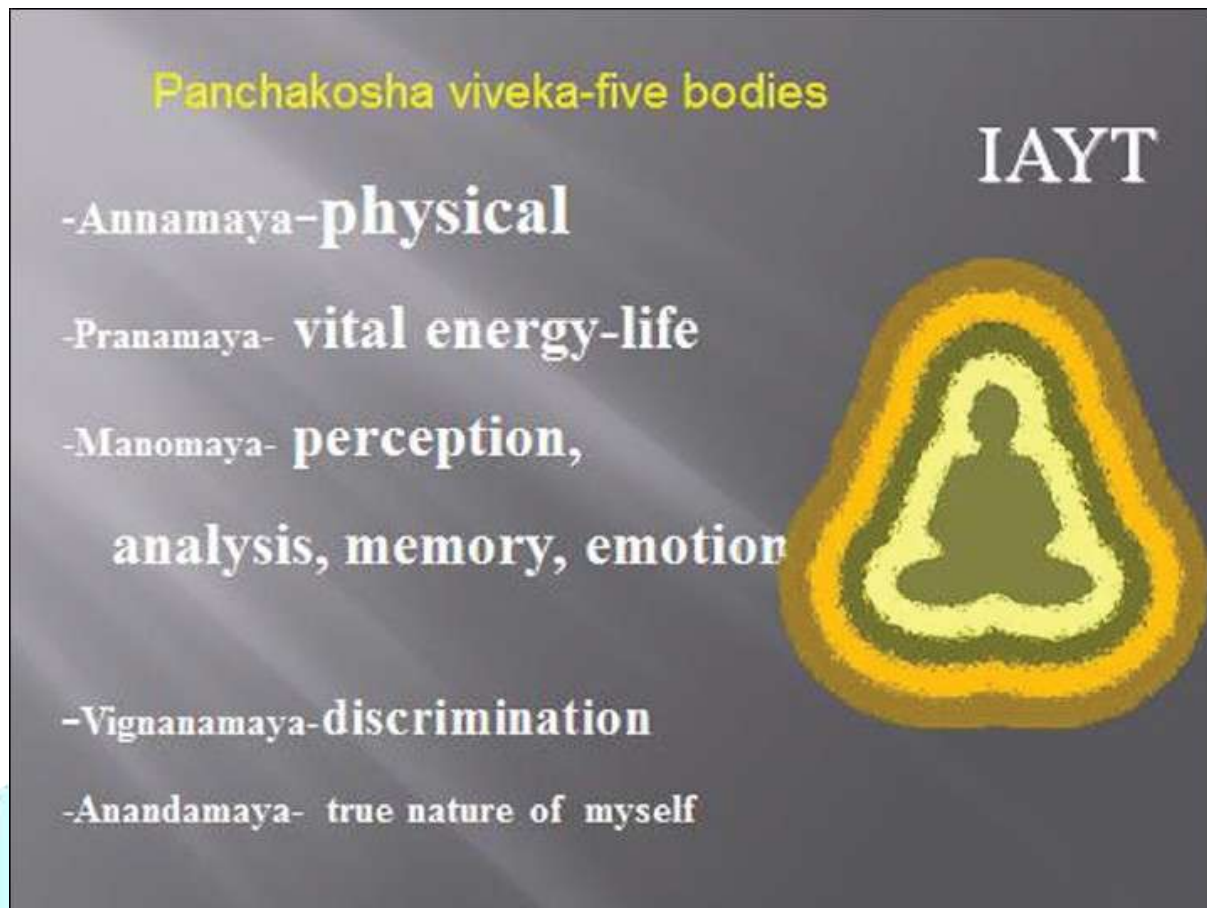
Maharshi Pathanjali in his Yoga Sutras has indicated that Stress is due to ever increasing desires (Kaam) and attachment (Raga) to the material objects of enjoyment. If the person cannot fulfill his desires, stress is generated. Even if he can fulfill his present desires, new desires arise and the person again starts having stress. Thus, this becomes a vicious circle which never ends. This also leads to fluctuations in mind (Chitta Vrittis) and give rise to a agitated state of mind.

As per **Panchakosha theory**, the human existence is explained on five planes of being. These planes are known as Vital Sheaths or Koshas.

- 1) Annamaya Kosha or the physical Sheath
- 2) Pranamaya Kosha or the vital sheath
- 3) Manomaya Kosha or the mental sheath
- 4) Vijnanamaya Kosha or the intellectual sheath
- 5) Anandamaya Kosha or the bliss sheath

According to Yoga, most of the diseases are psychosomatic in origin. The site of origin is mind and they manifest themselves at the physical or gross level.





Integrated Approach of Yogic therapy for the management of Psychosomatic disorders:

As already explained, disturbances in Manomaya kosha manifest themselves in the Annamayakosha (physical layer) through Pranamaya kosha. So, to treat these psychosomatic ailments, it becomes necessary to work at all these levels of existence.

The integrated approach is thus not only to treat these at the physical level to get the best temporary relief; but it also includes the practices which involve different sheaths of our existence.

Thus, the complex psychosomatic problems can be tackled by harmonising the disturbances at different levels, by different yogic techniques.

I. Practices at Annamaya-kosha level: The Physical Layer-

(To remove physical symptoms of the disease.)

1. Yogic diet
2. Kriyas
3. Loosening exercises (SHITHILIKARAN VYAYAMA)
4. Yogasanas

II. Practices at Pranamaya kosha level: the layer of prana-

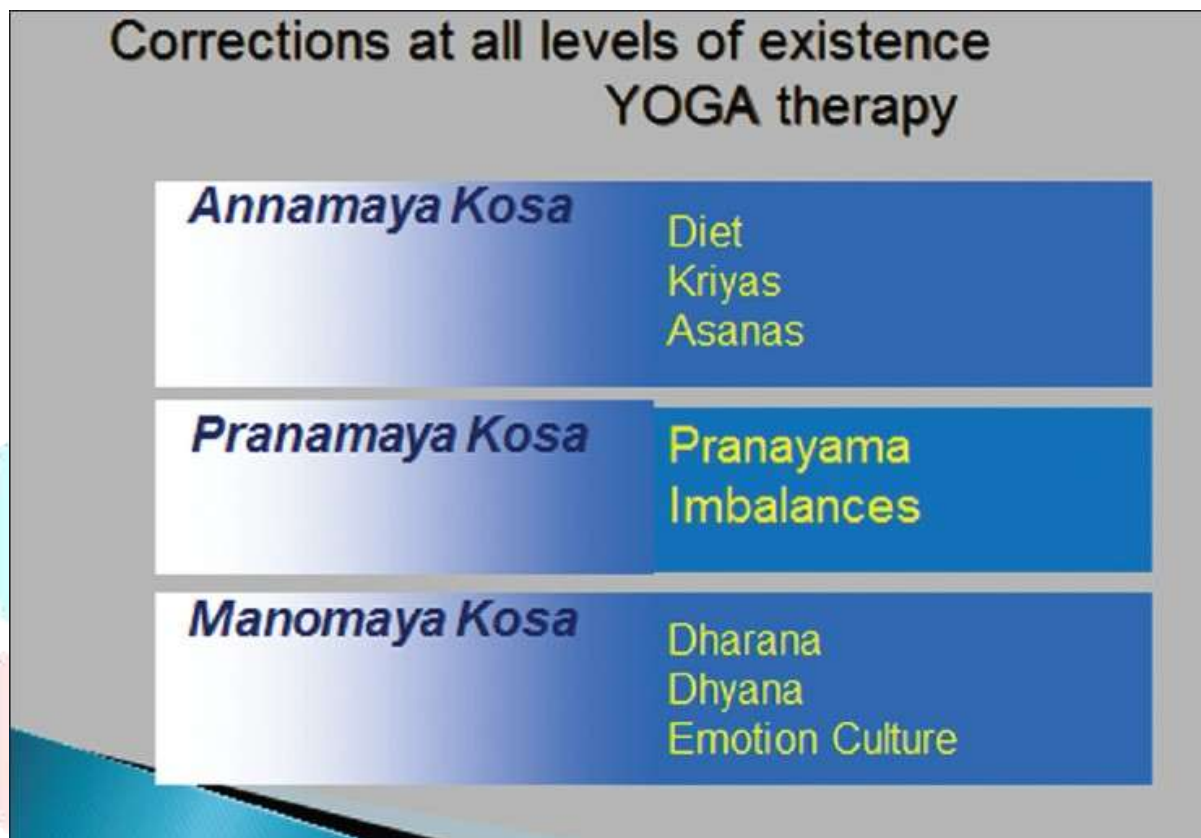
(Remove random agitation in pranic flow in Pranamaya kosha)

1. Breathing practices
2. Pranayama

III. Practices at Manomaya kosha level: the mental layer-

1. Dharana
2. Dhyana
3. Bhakti

4. Emotional culture/ devotional songs
- IV. Practices at Vijnanamaya kosha level: the layer of wisdom-**
1. Jnana
 2. Lecture
 3. Yogic counselling
- V. Practices at Anandmaya kosha level: layer of bliss-**
1. Working in blissful awareness
 2. Karma yoga



Thus, Yoga offers a holistic approach and treats the Body- Mind complex as a whole.

Yogic practices like slowly performed static Asanas, Relaxation techniques, Pranayamas, Meditation etc help to reduce Stress by inducing body's inborn power to come back to normal (state of homeostasis). It has been found by researches that 20-30 minutes of Yoga practice daily decreases the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and leads to release of Endorphins which are known to have mood elevating effect. Endorphins are proteins released from the brain that act as the body's natural pain reliever.

The integrated approach of yoga therapy can be utilized effectively not only to treat the symptoms but also to bring the complete cure.

REFERENCES:

1. Bhole M.V. (1990) "Stress management for executives and yoga", Yoga Mimansa Vol. XXIV. No. 1, 49 -50
2. Udapa K.N. and Singh R.H. (1972) "Scientific basis of yoga" jour A. medicine asso. 220: 1365
3. Nagarathna R. & Nagendra H.R. (1980) Therapeutic application of yoga: A report Kanyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra Yoga therapy and research center.
4. Saraswati Satyanand Swami- Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha, Bihar Yoga Bharti, Munger (1997)
5. Kuvalyananda Swami and Vinekar S.L.- Yoga Therapy- Its basic principles and methods, Kaivalyadham SMYM Samiti, Lonavla (2008)
6. en.m.wikipedia.org

7. <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
8. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
9. www.medicinenet.com

