Yoga and its Evidence

Yoga is an ancient Indian practice and a way of life that includes regulated breathing, maintaining various postures and meditation. The word “yoga” comes from Sanskrit and means “to yoke” or join. The focus is on the union of mind and body or the harmonic synchronization of body, breath, and mind. Patanjali formally described the practice of yoga in the treatise Yoga. He defined yoga as the process of eliminating the fluctuations of mind and allowing it to settle down to silence. Attainment of such a balance ultimately leads to a balanced and healthy mind and body.

Yoga as a complementary and Mind Body Medicine is being practiced increasingly in both Indian and Western populations. Although there are many forms of “yoga” that come from Eastern countries (India, China, Tibet, and Japan), yoga has been said to originate mainly from India. Practitioners in the West have adopted 3 aspects of traditional yoga from India including asana (postures), pranayama (breathing techniques), and meditation. In contrast to the East, yoga is perceived by many in the West to be a form of exercise. This is actually contrary to the concept of yoga. Yoga is a systematic process of calming down the mind and Maharshi Patanjali advocated systematic practices which includes—yama (ethical disciplines), niyama (purificatory practices), asana (postures), pranayama (regulated nostril breathing), pratyahara (introspection), dharana (attention/concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (detached awareness of self) aimed towards attainment of self-realization or the inner blissful state. Among these, asanas, pranayama, and meditation are popular and have been used as a therapy for decades.

Yoga has been used and using for therapeutic benefit in numerous health care concerns in which mental stress was believed to play a role. Important facets of a yoga program such as relaxation and mental awareness are known to alter the perceptions, and mental responses to both external and internal stimuli, slow down reactivity and responses to such stimuli and instill a greater control over situations in the participants. Several research studies over the years have shown the effect of yoga in numerous health problems where mental stress was believed to play a role. Yoga practices have shown to reduce airway sensitivity and improve pulmonary functions and decrease medication score in asthmatics. Yoga has been used in rehabilitating patients with arthritis in elderly population and also found useful in fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome. It has been found to retard progression of coronary artery disease and control blood pressure and blood glucose. It has also been found useful in pulmonary tuberculosis, obesity, in preventing epileptic seizures, insomnia, improving pregnancy outcomes, reducing anxiety, depression in both healthy as well as diagnosed cases, reducing negative affect, improving positive affect and quality of life among cancer patients. Yoga practices have also shown to improve immunity and reduce stress hormone levels. These studies show the utility of yoga for a broad range of psychosomatic problems.
In the last several decades, the millions of practitioners and the rise of yoga studios have popularized yoga. Though there is growing interest in the therapeutic benefits and cost-effectiveness of yoga for prevention and management of disease, there is a need for more evidence. The use of yoga as a complementary therapy in clinical practice may lead to health benefits beyond traditional treatment alone; however, to effect changes in health care policy, more high-quality, evidence-based research is needed.

In this endeavor, the Journal Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge is bringing a special volume concentrating only on Yoga studies is indeed timely and also need of the hour in the context of upcoming 3rd celebration of International Day of Yoga. The articles in this special issue is addressing the beneficial effects of Yoga on various dimensions of health and disease such as DNA Repair Mechanism, Insomnia & Sleep, Ageing, HIV, Infertility, Obesity, Asthma etc by eminent and renowned authors are very encouraging and an article Super brain yoga on short-term memory and selective attention of students and articles combining Yoga with other systems of practices such as Naturopathy and Ayurveda are encouraging. The articles in this issue are of good quality and most of the articles adopted proper research designs and review article on Therapeutic benefits of Raj Yoga and Effects of yogic exercise on glycemic control and lipid profiles in Type 2 diabetes: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials by Korean authors which provides an evidence based to the ancient practice of Yoga becomes useful to the students, academicians and researchers in the field of Yoga.

I express my congratulations to the entire editorial team in this endeavor.

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