

“Impact Of ‘Yoga-Nidrā’ On Stress Reduction And Emotional Well-Being”

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Abstract

A disease starts its journey from our psychic level and ends at organic level. Stress (psycho-physiological) takes place in different situation, called stressor. A stressor can be mild or strong. A mild stressor like traffic jam or a strong stressor like heart attack of someone in family. The concept of positive health is one of Yoga's unique contributions to modern healthcare. Yoga has both a preventive as well as promotive role in health that will help to tide over health challenges that occur during lifetime. Yoga-nidrā is now prescribed by doctors in many countries both as a promotive and curative therapy in stages of stress related disease. The Yoga-nidrā state appears to reflect an integrated response by the hypothalamus, resulting in decreased sympathetic nervous activity and increased parasympathetic function. Yoga is not only a way of coping with stress; it provides a means of transforming and positively utilizing tension as a stepping stone to greater awareness, efficiency and achievement in life.

Keywords: Stressor, Autonomic nervous system, Lifestyle, Yoga-nidrā, Yoga

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I. Introduction

In day-to-day as well as special occasions of life, man performs several activities as a part of his daily duty and responsibility and there by incurs a lot of pressure on mind and body, described as stress. It needs to be released and relaxed. Thus, stress is both a physiological and psychological reaction to a perceived threat or demand, often called a stressor. It is the body's mechanism for preparing to confront a challenging situation. Stress is used to describe any shift that puts pressure on the physical, mental and emotional situation. (Hypertension study group, 2001) Prolonged-stress can negatively affect both physical and mental health and may get manifested in physiological. Stress is a normal response of the body towards the situation which seem difficult to manage. Actually, our body has various bio-psychological systems which regularly work for the sake of our survival. For this purpose, a constant monitoring of our internal and external environment is done by our brain. Stress is not caused by the situation, rather it is caused by the perception about the situation. The degree of stress would depend upon how much threat is being perceived by the individual in the situation. However, same situation may create different amount of stress in different persons, depending on the bio-physical condition of the mind and body.

Yoga, an ancient mind-body practice, has gained significant attention as a potential strategy for mitigating the adverse effects of stress. Yoga is basically a mind controlling discipline. In ‘Yoga-Vasistha’ which is one of the best texts on Yoga, the essence of Yoga is beautifully portrayed, “*Manah prasamanopāyah yoga iti abhidhiyate*” (3.9.32)

Yoga is therefore called a skillful technique to calm down the mind. *Yoga-nidrā* is a more efficient and effective form of psychic and physiological rest and rejuvenation than conventional sleep. *Yoga-nidrā* has been found to be excellently useful amongst all therapies, since it includes long term systematic relaxation. Those who adopt *Yoga-nidrā* in their daily routine of life, they can experience the extreme changes.

II. Research Methodology

The research methodology plays an important role for research work. So that the present study is based on both primary and secondary source of data. This study enlists a qualitative, impedimental and textually secured research design. The primary source of data is based on some key respondents. The secondary sources contained fundamental insights helping for management of stress and psychological well-being. The ancient texts were analyzed through historical linguistic methods, commentaries of eminent personalities in this study. In this present paper, the researcher used explanatory research methodology.

Physiology Of Stress

The autonomic nervous system is very much important for explaining stress. Imbalances in the autonomic nervous system, endocrine glands, and in the chemical and hormonal and composition of the blood

become permanent, with increasingly disturbed functioning of all the organs and systems of the body. During stress, sympathetic nervous system gets activated to cope with the situation. As a result, a number of hormonal and physiological changes take place in response to stressor. These changes provide strength to fight or to run away from the stressor. Under such fight and flight reaction, secretion of adrenaline increases, heart rate shoots up blood pressure and boots up energy supply. An enhanced respiratory rate pumps in more and more oxygen to the vital muscles specially to leg muscles in sufficient quantity to enable running. The response also increases muscular tension and improves pupil dilation for enhanced vision. Once the stressor disappears; the parasympathetic nervous system of the body takes over. Then the hormone levels return to normal; body starts to calm down, blood pressure becomes normal; heart rate falls and muscles relax.

Symptoms Of Stress

It is said that states of anxiety, depression, frustration and anger are accompanied by a variety of physical responses including palpitations, excessive sweating, diarrhea, indigestion, headache and weakness. Some common symptoms of stress include alterations in mood, sweaty palms, reduced sex desire, difficulty in sleeping, digestion issues, dizziness, feeling tense and distracted, recurring illnesses, headaches, low vigor, muscle tension particularly in cervical spinal area and shoulder, pain around joints, increased heart rate. (Selye, 1976) These responses are the outcome of the complex process by which the physiological systems of the body adapt to stress.

As the equilibrium of the body, even at rest, becomes increasingly disturbed, a variety of nervous symptoms usually manifest, including insomnia, anxiety and irritability, often leading to neurosis. As the imbalance is further aggravated, physical changes in sensitive or weakened organs result. In this way, major psychosomatic diseases such as asthma, peptic ulceration and hypertension which are relayed into physiological systems of the body.

III. Discussion And Explanation

Stress has become major killers in our developed world, particularly the youth. Good mental health is one of the greatest resources for vitality, creativity and wealth, while poor health in contrast significantly drains. In modern society, stress has reached on alarming prevalence, establishing itself as a major concern for public health on a global scale. It has significant negative impact on physical, mental and social aspects of health. Stress is a global issue impacting individuals across all age groups and backgrounds, making it a prevalent concern worldwide.

Yoga is a holistic discipline that promotes a healthy life style through self-restraint, balanced diet, regulated sleep and moderate activities, along with the practice of yoga postures, breathing exercises and meditation. Yoga has been found to reduce stress, improve cognitive function, and foster emotional well-being, making it a valuable tool for holistic health management. Over the past two decades, Yoga has gained substantial recognition as a valuable tool for reducing stress, resulting in a surge of research on its therapeutic potential.

‘Yoga-nidra’ is explained as a state of consciousness which is, neither the state of sleep nor awaken, neither concentration nor hypnotism. It has been termed ‘sleepless sleep’ because one learns to enter the state between sleep and wakefulness without loss of awareness. This is the beginning stage of experience of ‘Yoga-nidra’. Unenlightened man is dreaming constantly, even when he is awake. He does not know this because his sensory functions are extroverted. The moment he cuts off his awareness from the sensory functions and relaxes, he begins to witness the dreams. This is exactly what ‘Yoga-nidra’ accomplishes. The general psyche of man is to dreaming all the time, consciously as well as unconsciously.

In the ‘Patanjali Yoga sutra’ (1.38), ‘Rishi’ Patanjali mentions: “*Svapnanidraññānāmbanam vā ||*”

It means the mind can be made steady by giving it knowledge of dream and sleep for support. The mind can be controlled by developing the method of conscious dreaming and conscious sleeping. According to Megha Deuskar, “Yoga-nidra is rooted in the model of ‘pancha kosha’ or five body-sheaths. In this model, every human being is thought of as existing on five sheaths. The outermost is the body ‘Annamaya’, then the sheath of vitality ‘Prānamaya’, then the mind ‘Manomaya’, then the psychic layer ‘Vijnānamaya’ and finally the subtlest level of pure consciousness ‘Ānandamaya kosha’. Instructions, therefore, follow the sequence of deep muscle relaxation, observation of breath, awareness and release of feelings, creative visualization and finally the experience of silence. The practitioner is gradually brought back to normal wakefulness”. (Deuskar,2010)

Defining ‘Yoga-Nidra’

The word ‘Nidra’ means sleep which all living organisms require everyday life. The sleep consists of three different states of perception, the ‘Jāgrat’ state, ‘Svapna’ state and ‘Sūsupti’ state. As mentioned in Ayurved, the significance of ‘Nidra’ is described as follows:

- It boosts the strength and power of mind and brain.
- It develops happiness in life.
- It balances the hormonal functions in the body.

➤ It restores energy.

The states between wakefulness and deep sleep which transcends mere sleep with awareness is the state of ‘*Yoga-nidra*’. In this state, the mind is fixed in inner consciousness and this causes withdrawal of senses which is exactly ‘*Pratyāhāra*’. By the regular practice, one mastered over ‘*Bahiranga Sādhana*’. In ‘*Jāgrat*’ state, the mind runs and the body exhausts, but in the subconscious state of psychic sleep, the higher quality of inner awareness originates. ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ restores the consciousness of the true identity. The mind has natural tendency towards external world. The yogi again and again withdraws the mind from outer world to inner self with the help of ‘*Yoga-nidra*’. With the power of ‘*Pratyāhāra*’, one can enter into ‘*Antaranga sādhanā*’ (*Dhāranā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi*).

Practice Of ‘*Yoga-Nidra*’

‘*Yoga-nidra*’ though, a very difficult realization actually follows very simple technique. For beginners, it is recommended to practice *Yoga-nidra* under the guidance of an experienced teacher. It should be practiced in a quiet, closed room that has a comfortable temperature and is free of insects. It should be practiced in semi-darkness and well-ventilated room. The body temperature tends to drop during relaxation; it is advised to cover the body with a thin blanket. ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ should be practiced at the same time every day, either early in the morning, or in the evening just before going to bed in order to induced deep and refreshing sleep. It should be practiced on an empty stomach. ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ is practiced in *śavāsana*. Scientific studies have shown that this is the position most conducive to relaxation, since it reduces sensory stimulation to the minimum. Although it is the best position for ‘*Yoga-nidra*’, it can also be practiced in a sitting posture or while standing. If one has a tendency to fall asleep very quickly in ‘*Yoga-nidra*’, then it is better to practice while standing. The important thing in ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ is to follow the voice of the instructor. Simply follow the voice with total attention and feeling. (Satyananda, 2012)

Response Of ‘*Yoga-Nidra*’

The level of relaxation attained in ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ serves to lessen harmful effects of ‘fight or flight’ response. Studies have shown that regular practice of ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ induces a significant decrease in both systolic and diastolic blood pressures in hypertensive patients, and also alters the circulating levels of stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, which are secreted by the adrenal glands. ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ appears to work by changing the neurohumoral reactivity to stress, creating somatic conditions essentially opposite to those prompted by sympathetic over activity. During ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ the organs and systems of the body attain deep physiological rest and the body’s powerful, inherent, regenerative mechanisms are set in motion. The complete physical, emotional and mental relaxation is attained through ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ which helps to activate the parasympathetic system, and it creates a balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. As a result, body tissues are physiologically braced against stress, becoming less susceptible to its harmful influences. ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ also brings simultaneous relaxation by inducing alpha brainwave in both hemispheres of brain and alter the states of consciousness.

IV. Conclusion

Stress is a pervasive and detrimental force in the lives of individuals across the globe, contributing to various physical and psychological health issues. Yoga has been found to reduce levels of cortisol, the primary stress hormone, and activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the body’s relaxation response. In the present modern life style, where psychological and psychosomatic problems are on the rise, the technique of ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ may serve as a real boon for mankind. The ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ state appears to reflect an integrated response by the hypothalamus, resulting in decreased sympathetic nervous activity and increased parasympathetic function.

Lastly, it is concluded that the ultimate objective of ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ goes far beyond merely combating stressful influences and rectifying the imbalances created by poor stress management. The glimpse of ‘*samadhi*’ obtained by the practitioner of ‘*Yoga-nidra*’ is sufficient to transform him from a victim of stress into a victor of life, which has been tested time and again by great Yogic saints of India.

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