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“IMPORTANCE OF YOGA FOR WOMEN MENTAL HEALTH”

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ABSTRACT:

In this modern era stress has become an integral part of human life. Today's woman is much more than her traditional role of a housewife, a mother or a daughter. She plays an equal role in the decisions of socio-economic and political life she leads. She is multi-faceted. Every woman goes through three important stages in life – menstruation, pregnancy and menopause.[1] Yoga is considered to be one of the most important, effective and valuable tools available to overcome various psychological problems. Yoga is a method of training the mind and developing its power of subtle perceptions so that man may discover for himself the spiritual truths on which religion, beliefs and moral values finally rest. It not only prevents and cures the disease but also helps in maintenance of positive health. The aim of Yoga therefore is also the attainment of physical, mental, social and spiritual health. It develops immunity and resistance in human body and helps the body and mind in attaining homeostatic balance. The strengthening of defense mechanism and harmony between mind and body prevents onset of disease. Yoga activates the energy Chakras and provides strength to women to deal with their physiological and psychological changes. Yoga includes Yama, Niyama, Aasana, Pranayama, Yoga nidra, Gyan mudra and Dhyana.

KEYWORDS: - Yoga, Women, Mental health, Mental wellbeing, Quality of life, Yoga methodology

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INTRODUCTION:

Mental disorders affect women and men differently. Common mental disorders like depression, anxiety and somatoform disorders are more prevalent among women than in men. Reproductive events influence the presentation of mental disorders. Women specially are vulnerable to mental health problems during pregnancy and postpartum periods due to biological and environmental changes occurring in these periods. Though there are established pharmacological treatments but the fear of potential side effects has made people to explore alternative treatment strategies all over the world, *Yoga* being the most important of them. *Yoga* is easily available, can be self-administered and lacks significant side effects and which make it an attractive alternative for women. In this article we explore benefits of yoga in premenstrual syndrome, perinatal mental health, chronic pain condition in women and menopausal symptoms. *Yoga* combines breathing exercise, meditation and poses that are proven to benefit mental and physical health. Stress causes an imbalance of the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system due to psychic stimuli which lead to disturbances of homeostasis in the body. Here comes the role of yoga which not only improves the physical stress but also the mental stress. It also helps in establishing equilibrium between the sympathetic and parasympathetic components.^[2] *Yoga* activates the energy chakras and provides strength to women to deal with their physiological and psychological changes. The real joy of life appears when we can unify nature and culture, wealth and poverty, movement and stillness, attachment and detachment. The yogic activities provide immense help in assisting an individual to seek his all-round growth and development

in all the personality dimensions including the union of his self with Greater soul.^[3]

Yoga: “Yoga is the Cessation of the Fluctuation of the Mind”

Yoga is thus the art and science of mental discipline through which the mind becomes cultured and matured. *Yoga* is the union of the individual soul with the absolute or divine soul. *Yoga* also means the unification of physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects of human being. *Yoga* is the science of development of a person’s consciousness.^[4]

Ashtang Yoga (Elements of Yoga)^[13]

1. Yama (Ethical disciplines)
2. Niyam (Self-observation)
3. Asana (Posture) - A stable and comfortable posture which helps attains mental equilibrium.
4. Pranayam (Breathing control) – Extension and control of breath
5. Pratyahara (Sense withdrawal) – A mental preparation to increase the power of mind.
6. Dharana (Concentration) – Concentration of mind on one object and its field.
7. Dhyana (Meditation) – Drawing mind from all external objects and focusing it on one point and meditating on it.
8. Samadhi (Salvation) – State of super bliss, joy and merging individual consciousness in to universal consciousness. Union between Jivatman and Paramatman. Union of Shiva and Shakti in Sahasrar Chakra (the top of the head). Realizing the Bramhan (pure consciousness) or Realization of God is the ultimate achievement of Human Birth.

Importance of yoga:

Here, we look at the important benefits of *Yoga* practice,^[5]

1. Physical Purity
2. Cures and Prevention from Disease
3. Reduces Mental Tension
4. Beautification of Body
5. Provide Relaxation
6. Keeps the Correct Posture of Body
7. *Yoga* can be Performed Easily

8. Spiritual Development
9. Increases Flexibility
10. Reduces Obesity

11. Improves Health
12. Enhance Moral and Ethics Value

Table 1: Yoga for Women Health:

Sr.no.	Health Problems ^[6]	Yogaasan ^[7]
1.	Premenstrual syndrome	<i>Suryanamskar, Sirsasana, Balasana, Padahastasana, Setu-bandasana</i>
2.	Menstrual Cramps	<i>Baddha konasana, Supta baddha konasana, Janu sirsasana, Viparita karani</i>
3.	Perinatal period (Pregnancy)	<i>Baddha konasana, Trikonasana, Bhadraasana, Sukhasana</i>
4.	Chronic Pelvic pain	<i>Supta masyendrasana, Ananda balasana, Supta virasana</i>
5.	Menopausal syndrome	<i>Malasana, Salamba-sarvangasana, Marichyasana, Supta baddha konasana</i>
6.	Obesity	<i>Virabhadrasana, Trikonasana, Adho mukha svanasana, Setu bandha sarvangasana</i>
7.	Endocrine disorders (PCOS)	<i>Bhujangasana, Suryanamskar, Ustrasana, Sasangasana</i>
8.	Hypertension	<i>Paschimottasana, Veerasana, Baddha konasana, Nadi shodhana</i>
9.	Insomnia	<i>Shavasana, Supta Baddha konasana, Halasana</i>

Yoga Methodology: The Yoga practice (1hour) schedule consisted of Asana, Pranayama, which was concluded by meditation and prayer as follows: ^[8,12]

Table2: 1 hour Yoga methodology

Sr.no.	Yoga	Time
1.	Prayer	1 min
2.	Mild stretching exercise	4 min
3.	Surya Namaskar	15 min
4.	Asanas (as per condition)	15 min
5.	Pranayama	15 min
6.	Meditation/laughing exercise	5 min
7.	Yoga nidra	5 min

Mechanisms of Yoga: Have you ever wondered what was behind the magic that you feel at the end of a yoga practice? ^[9,10]

Endocrine System: “The strongest evidence in both quality and quantity suggests yoga has a positive impact on hormone regulation,” Level of salivary cortisol decreased significantly in a number of the studies and reviews examined. Lower cortisol levels are related to decreases in perceived stress and anxiety, increase in feeling of well-being and improved pain management. Other effects of yoga practice cited included elevated serotonin production, the release of oxytocin during visualization, and higher levels of melatonin, which are related to improve, sleep quality and immunity.

Nervous System: Yoga is commonly believed to directly influence sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system activity. Evidence suggests that pranayama, meditation, and calming techniques, and physical movement (asana) increase

parasympathetic activation. In addition, they elevate levels of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), and regulate the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. The latter are related to decreased stress, anxiety and depression and improved subjective well-being.

DISCUSSION:

Yogic Practice of Yama, Niyam, Asana, Pranayam, Dhyana and Yoganindra support and nurture the overall health of women from childhood to old age. Stress at any age affects the mind body complex negatively and is the root of all health disorders in one way or another. A daily yoga routine can be modified and adapted to suit a woman's changing needs in each phase of life, helping her to achieve peace of mind and improves subjective feeling of wellbeing. Yoga should be considered as an effective alternative treatment by clinicians whenever feasible. Hence nobody is exempted from yoga practice and there is no excuse for not doing yoga. How useful yoga is can only be understood by practicing it. It is thus well said, 'Yoga Karmasu Kaushalyam'.^[14,15]

CONCLUSION:

Depression and Anxiety are common mental disorders affecting women in the perinatal period. Yoga has proven to be successful in alleviating these symptoms without causing risk to the fetus or infant and is therefore preferred by women as compared to pharmacotherapy. Apart from, yoga has benefits in chronic pain conditions and perimenopausal symptoms. Yoga should be considered as an effective alternative treatment by clinicians whenever feasible.^[11]

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