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## Effect of ashtanga yoga on health

**Sunil Jana**

### Abstract

Stress, anxiety, mental disorders are increasing all over the world today. Various pathological instruments and antibiotic medicine cannot completely solve human physical and mental problems, which is possible through yoga and exercise. Yoga originated in ancient India, which has spread all over the world today. The whole world today has accepted qualified exercise as a form of medicine. It is a blessing to the sick. Physical, mental and spiritual development has been observed in those who practice yoga daily. Research in two medical sciences, yoga and meditation, has amply proven that by activating the body's natural stress management, people around the world today are slowly trying to keep themselves healthy through positive thinking, spiritual healing, prayer, meditation through yoga. In this paper we will describe the eight limbs of yoga. This paper will try to describe how yoga improves our physical and mental health. Ashtanga yoga deals with Antaranga and Bahiranga yoga. The last three stages of Ashtanga Yoga act as dharana, dhyana, samadhi, Antaranga yoga or spiritual practice. The first four stages of Ashtanga Yoga are yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and act as Bahiranga or external exercises. Sometimes pratyahara is also considered as part of Bahiranga yoga.

**Keywords:** Health, mental health, yoga, physical health, spiritual health

### Introduction

Yoga literally means 'Union'. The ultimate aim of yoga is to merge jivatma (individual soul) into paramatma (supreme soul) laying aside conflicts, desire and many differences to achieve the state of Nirvana. Yoga and meditation are used to harmonize body and mind. There can be various ways of communication of the Supreme Being with the soul, which are Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga. Hot yoga is about energizing the body mind and keeping the body system clean. Regular practice of hatha yoga unifies the nervous system. Raja Yoga works with the mind. It advises the plan oriented one to experience a state of enhanced Samadhi, where one attains union with the Supreme Lord. Jnana is the state of pure consciousness. Knowledge is the only requirement for liberation. Through knowledge we can free ourselves from the misery of life and death. Bhakti yoga is the act of self-surrender. Covering the truth with rajas (egoism) and tamasha (pleasure-seeking attitude), Karma means Action, a true Karma Yogini will be devoted to Karma. Karma is the only path to liberation. Strength, flexibility and body-mind coordination are developed through this yoga combination. Along with that pranayama and meditation calm our mind.

### Ashtanga yoga

According to Maharishi Patanjali's Yogasutra, the eight steps are called Ashtanga Yoga, which means eight limbs in communication. The yogic limbs asana (postures of yoga) and Pranayama (Controlled breathing) are only part of these eight stages of activities. Some modern interpreters say that ashtanga yoga refers only to hatha yoga. But actually, whatever the eight limbs of yoga-

### Yama

Yama is first step of ashtanga yoga. That means self-realization, but actual yama is to free ourselves from all kind of malicious thought, jealousy, greediness, unlawful desire for things.

“अहिंसा - सत्यस्तेय - ब्रह्माचार्यपरिग्रह यम” ।

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**These are five yamas**

- Ahimsa:** It teaches us not to hurt others.
- Satya:** We wear the masks of different people at different times. This principle teaches us to stop wearing those masks. To act as a true personality. When we walk the path of truth we learn to be in tune with reality. Speaking the truth is difficult, but it leads to great action.
- Asteya:** This principle teaches people to know their energy, resources and time.
- Brahmacharya:** Moving forward on the path of liberation by rejecting everything that is real.
- Aparigraha:** Greed is the cause of all problems. So one has to give up greed and become attached to materialistic things.

**Niyama**

It is second stage of ashtanga yoga. After completed yama than we can begin to practice niyama. This refers to discipline with food, sleep, pleasure, profit and pain. The aspirant of yoga should maintain satsang (good partner), Svadhyay (study), Eeswara pranidhana. He must be consuming sattvik food, balanced and normal diet.

“आहारः शुद्धो सत्त्व शुद्धिः ।  
सत्त्व शुद्धो ध्रुवः स्मृतिः ॥”

**There are five Niyamas**

- Saucha:** This principle is clean your mind and things positive thought.
- Santosh:** To be happy with little is to be content with what you have.
- Tapas:** Acting without thinking about the consequences. To master anything.
- Svadhya:** To ignite our own inner wisdom. Expressing yourself through your inner wisdom.
- Ishvarapranidhana:** Surrender to God.

**Asana**

This is the third stage of Ashtanga Yoga. Daily asanas are necessary to control the body and mind. We have to control our breathing while doing asana. As a result, we develop a sense of discipline. Maharshi Patanjali mentioned in his book ‘Yogasutra’- “स्थिरः सुखमासनम्” that one should keep one's mind and body still while doing asana. As a result of which concentration will develop in us. We divide the seat into three parts. Namely - lying, sitting, and standing. All the meditative asanas we do today improve our mental and physical health. It helps the mind to concentrate.

**Pranayama (Breath control)**

The word Pranayama literally means Prana meaning power or life source and Yama meaning control or restraint. Pranayama is controlling the air as our energy. Pranayama is the control of breath. Pranayama helps us to concentrate our body and mind. The practice of pranayama changes the state of various entities. There are eight types of pranayama starting with Surya Bhedan and ending with Plavini Pranayama. The process of pranayama is of three types. Namely - Kumbhak (Hold breathing), Rechak - (Exhale the breath), Purok - (Inhale the breath).

“तस्मीन प्राणायामः” १

**Pratyahara**

The hardest step in Ashtanga Yoga is the pratyahara. An attempt to withdraw our consciousness, which teaches us to block out the external environment and external stimuli through consciousness. It teaches us to isolate ourselves from outside sensations, which are often harmful to our interests and hinder personal growth.

“प्रतिबिम्बस्वरूपानुका एवेन्द्रियाडः  
आत्मविषयकात्मसंयमेन सहः”

There are four main forms of pratyahara: indriya-pratyahara control of the senses; karma-pratyahara control of action; prana-pratyahara control of prana; and mano-pratyahara withdrawal of mind from the senses.

**Dharana**

It is a state of concentration on a particular object, the human body and mind go on various mental activities, which relieves our body of stress through sleep. The human mind is like a white screen and the various human pressures created by the mind act as black dots on the white screen. One must concentrate on a particular image or sound to bring these different consciousnesses together, which will help to calm our mind.

**Dhyana**

Dhyana is a state of meditation. Meditation is the process of bringing the naturally radiating rays of the mind into order. Different types of thoughts are eliminated by meditation. Meditation teaches us to focus our mind. Meditation is the fourth state of spiritual consciousness that transcends a person's spiritual elevation and enters into transcendental consciousness. It is a continuous process of holding meditation.

“ता प्रत्ययक्तानता ध्यानम्”।

**Samadhi**

This is the eighth i.e. last stage of Ashtanga Yoga. Samadhi is a state of pure consciousness and an attempt at union with the Supreme Being, Liberation from the spiritual world. In this state body and soul become one. Through this the consciousness of the universe merges with the consciousness of Brahman. Samadhi is a means of appeasing the living soul.

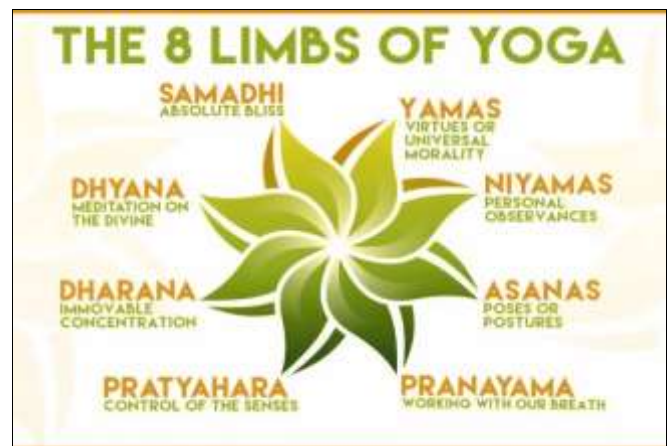


Fig 1: Types of eight limbs of yoga

**Benefits of ashtanga yoga**

Anxiety disorders impair people's mental health. Various studies have shown that daily yoga is necessary to control anxiety. It can be taken as an alternative treatment for anxiety disorders.

- Ashtanga yoga helps us lead a better life.
- Ashtanga yoga helps to unite our mind and body.
- Yoga helps develop intuition, which in turn helps us to consider what we should and shouldn't do.
- At least 30 minutes of yoga should be practiced every week.
- Practicing yoga reduces our risk of high blood pressure.
- Yoga exercise increase muscle flexibility. As a result, each muscle is fully developed.
- Ashtanga yoga balances our body and mind. As a result, it is possible to perform a task at twice the normal speed.
- Ashtanga yoga helps to cure various degenerative diseases in our body, which can get relief from various degenerative diseases of the spine and legs.
- Ashtanga yoga helps to eliminate all kinds of toxins from the body. As a result, it helps the body to glow and generate new skin cells.
- One of the beneficial properties of yoga practice is stress relief. Because cortisol, adrenalin produced in the body reduces the effect of various stress hormones and simultaneously increases the effect of serotonin, dopamine etc. hormones.
- Every task we do requires proper mental memory, which is achieved by daily practice of yoga practice.
- Ashtanga yoga helps in improving our memory. Because yoga helps our brain gets enough oxygen and blood.
- Ashtanga yoga improves to our internal and external body parts.
- Ashtanga yoga awakens our inner strength.
- So, Ashtanga yoga is a process that helps in harmonizing the body as well as the mind.

**Conclusion**

The symbol of a successful person is self-discipline. If body and mind can be bound in the same bond then we develop this quality. Yoga exercise is a way to improve our life. Yoga exercises bring out our positive outlook. Yoga helps in creating a beautiful life style. If there is any physical disorder then regular yoga should be done along with doctor's advice. Yoga and meditation help improve the overall health of people. Yoga needs to be included in every education curriculum. We should support various initiatives related to Yoga. Yoga should be expanded as a medical alternative all over the world. Maharishi Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga helps to shape us into complete human beings. Each step of this yoga teaches people to be healthy and strong. Mental health in particular improves immeasurably.

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