

A Literature Review on *Suryanamaskar* (Sun Salutations)

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Abstract

“*Surya*” means “Sun” and “*Namaskar*” means “to bow down.” The traditional sequence of set of twelve postures is called *SuryaNamaskar* practiced since years together. The logical conclusion is that the sun is the life or energy source for all and is an element in everything we eat, drink or breathe. The earth and the moon are significant in the way they affect life, but the sun is the source of all energy and when one is in tune with the cycles of the sun, physical health, well-being, vitality, and energy. We expect life from sun. There is no possibility of life in the absence of the Sun’s rays. *SuryaNamaskar* or Sun Salutation is a very ancient technique of paying respect or expressing gratitude to the Sun. The Sun Salutations are regularly practiced by almost all Indians and in many Indian schools. As per new Government regulations Yoga training has been made mandatory in primary and secondary school curriculum. *SuryaNamaskar* has a deep effect in detoxifying the organs through copious oxygenation and has a deeper relaxing effect on whole body including mind. Synchronizing the breath with the movements of the body is very important while performing *SuryaNamaskar*. When the *SuryaNamaskar* are done a little quickly, the gain is more physical while if they are done slowly with the awareness of breath the gain is more mental and spiritual. Incorporating the *SuryaNamaskar* into our daily routine makes a positive difference to our life. It is the ultimate combination of physical exercise, breathing exercise and chants during various postures of *SuryaNamaskar*. The body (through the physical movement), the mind (through the control on breathing) and the spirit (through the chants) get a boost from the practice of *SuryaNamaskar*. *SuryaNamaskar* is a set of twelve postures, preferably to be done at the time of sunrise. The regular practice of *Surya Namaskar* improves circulation of blood throughout the body, maintains health, and helps one remain disease-free. There are numerous benefits of *SuryaNamaskar* for the heart, liver, intestine, stomach, chest, throat, legs. From head to toe, every part of the body is greatly benefitted by *Surya Namaskar*, which is why it is highly recommended by all yoga experts.

Keywords

SuryaNamaska, Yoga, Physical, Mental, Spiritual, Twelve Postures



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INTRODUCTION

Recognizing universal appeal, on 11 December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed 21 June as International *Yoga* Day by resolution 69/131. Hence World Health Organization has decided to celebrate 21 June as International *Yoga* Day every year¹. Yoga is believed to be 4000 to 8000 years old with its origins in the Indus Valley civilization in the northwestern part of India². In India 12 January is celebrated as *SuryaNamaskar* day³. Numerous scientific studies have reported beneficial physiological changes after short- and long-term yoga training. The aim of *Swasthavritta* is not only to achieve medical excellence in curing the patients but also and perhaps more importantly to prevent people from becoming sick. At present, a major cause of morbidity and mortality is modern lifestyle which includes stress, physical inactivity and high fat diet leading to obesity. These factors manifest themselves as lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus and coronary artery disease^{4,5}. To prevent and control these entities Primary level of prevention is much useful in the form of *Suryanamaskar*. *Suryanamaskar* consists of a sequence of 12 postures performed in a rhythmic manner

starting in an upright standing position and then moving into alternate forward and backward bending movements interspaced with movements involving all four limbs before ending the practice in an erect standing position^{6,7}. *Suryanamaskar* concentrates physical health and mental well-being. Through practicing various body postures (*asana*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), and meditation, it is believed that one can obtain a sound physical body as well as a calm and peaceful mind⁸.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Lot of problems are emerging due to our faulty diet, life style, sedentary habits, western culture and changes in the environment such as Hypertension, Diabetes mellitus, metabolic syndrome, Obesity, early ageing etc. practice of *Suryanamaskar* may able to prevent these problems. The objective of this study is:

1. To explain the concept of *Suryanamaskar* in *Ayurvedic* Perspective w. s. r to *Swasthavritta* and *Yoga*.
2. To highlight on inverse relationship between *Suryanamaskar* and stress related life style disorders.

3. To educate the people regarding the preventive aspect of *Suryanamaskar* on health.

4. To explain the benefits of *Suryanamaskar* and its good effects on health and promotion of health.

5.

MATERIALS

This article is based on a review of *Ayurvedic and modern* texts. Materials related to *Suryanamaskar* concept, and other relevant topics have been collected. The main *Ayurvedic* texts referred in this study are *PatanjalYog-darshan*, *Yog-chintamani*, *Gherand-samhita*, *Yog-vasishta*, *Shivsamhita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and available commentaries on these. I have also referred to the modern texts and searched various websites & reports to collect information on the relevant topics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

In Indian culture, yoga has traditionally been a part of daily routine which is meant for attaining healthy life. *Ashtang* yoga, as described by *Maharishi Patañjali*, comprises of 8 stages viz. *yam* (code of conduct, self-restraint), *niyam* (religious

observances, commitments to practice, such as study and devotion), *asana* (integration of mind and body through physical postures), *pranayam* (regulation of breath leading to integration of mind and body i.e. controlled breathing), *pratyahar* (abstraction of the senses, withdrawal of the senses of perception from their objects), *dharana* (concentration, one-pointedness of mind), *dhyana* (meditation) and *Samadhi* (the quiet state of blissful awareness, superconscious state). Sun salutation, also called as *Suryanamaskar*, sun adoration for health, efficiency and longevity is a part of Indian traditional yogic practices⁹. It involves *pranayam*, *asana* and *upasana* i.e. rituals. The sun salutation is performed as a cyclical event synchronized with a specific breathing pattern. But *Suryanamaskarpractice* has not been mentioned in any of the above mentioned texts or *samhitas*¹⁰. Few references are found as

Mysore king Krishnaraja¹¹, Pant Pratinidhi of Aundh (1868–1951; Raja of Aundh 1909–1947)¹²

Who published the book¹³, Aditya Hridayam^{14,15} is another ancient practice which involves a variation of *SuryaNamaskara*, Sage Samarth Ramdas and the Marathas have performed

SuryaNamaskara as a physical exercise to develop able bodies¹⁶ and "*TrichaKalpavidhi*" from "*AdityaPuranam*" describes the vidhi as "Modes of rendering homage to Sun, with praise and spells; the object being health or delivery from disease^{16,17}".

2. MODERN PERSPECTIVE

There is no modern literature available on *SuryaNamaskara*. They are performed traditionally taught by various teachers.

METHODS:

Each Sun Salutation round consists of two sets. These 12 yoga poses complete one set of *SuryaNamaskar*¹⁸.

1. *Urdhwanamaskarasana* (Raised Arms pose).
2. *Hastapadasana* OR *Padhastasana* (Hand to Foot pose)
3. *Dakshinpadprasaranasana* (Extention of Right Leg)

4. *Dwipadprasaranasana* (Stick pose)
5. *Bhujanwasana* or *Shashankasana* (Rabbit Pose) *Bhujanwasana* is the name given by Yoga Institute, Pune which was established by Mr. BKS Ayyangar. The same is called as *Shashankasana* by Yoga Institute (S. Vyasa, Bengaluru). Only name is different but the procedure is same¹⁷.

6. *AshtangaNamaskarasana* or *Sashtangapranipatasana* (Salutation with eight limbs)

7. *Bhujangasana* (Cobra posture)

8. *Parvatasana* (Mountain posture)

9. *Bhujanwasana* or *Shashankasana* (Rabbit Pose)

10. *Dakshinpadsankochanasana* (Flexion of Right Leg)

11. *Hastapadasana* OR *Padhastasana* (Hand to Foot pose)

12. *Pranamasana* or *Namaskarasana* (Salutation posture) *Mantras* to be chanted during *Suryanamaskar* and their meaning

MANTRAS	TO	BE	MEANING OF THE MANTRA
CHANTED			
1. AumMitrayaNamah			Who is friendly to all
2. AumRavayreNamah			The shining one, the radiant one
3. AumSuryayaNamah			Who is the dispeller of darkness and responsible for bringing activity
4. AumBhanaveNamah			One who illumines, the bright one
5. AumKhagayaNamah			Who is all-pervading, one who moves through the sky

6. AumPushneNamah	Giver of nourishment and fulfillment
7. AumHiranyagarbhayaNamah	Who has golden color brilliance
8. AumMarichayeNamah	Who gives light with infinite number of rays
9. AumAdityayaNamah	The son of Aditi, the cosmic divine Mother
10. AumSavitreNamah	One who is responsible for life
11. AumArkayaNamah	Worthy of praise and glory
12. AumBhaskarayaNamah	Gives of wisdom and cosmic illumination

Best time to perform *SuryaNamaskar*

Suryanamaskar is a good link to warm up the body before performing any exercise. It can be done anytime when stomach is empty. It is wrong consideration that it has to be done only early in the morning. Instead when stomach is empty around 11.00 am or 6.00 pm, means two hours after breakfast is a good time. In the morning it nourishes body, refreshes mind. In the afternoon it fulfills energy in the body and in the evening it deals with stress. Best time for males to practice *Suryanamaskar* is in the morning before going to work. For female, after children went to school and for children after coming from school in the evening.

Science behind *SuryaNamaskar*

It has been said (by the ancient *Rishis* of India) that the different parts of the body are governed by different *Devtas* (divine impulses or divine light). The solar plexus-

Manipurchakra (located behind the navel or umbilicus which is the central point of the human body) is said to be connected with the Sun. This is the main reason why the ancient *Rishis* recommended the practice of *SuryaNamaskar*, because the regular practice of this technique enhances the solar plexus, which increases one's creativity and intuitive abilities. This plexus is governed by lord Vishnu and is responsible for *AgniShakti*. They will generate good thought, optimistic thoughts; will give a charitable and sanguine turn to disposition and will imbue with a spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of community, country and person. In short, *SuryaNamaskar* unlock the door to glorious health, strength, efficiency and longevity, which God intended for us. *SuryaNamaskar* possess the unique feature of co-ordinated actions of all the vital organs, nerves, muscles and other parts

of the system, which are stimulated, developed and strengthened simultaneously, a result not achieved by any other single exercise.

All our emotions get stored in the solar plexus, and it is also the point from where one's gut feelings arise. The size of the solar plexus is said to like the size of a small gooseberry. However, for those who do yoga and meditation, it becomes much bigger - almost three to four times bigger than the normal size. The more expanded your solar plexus, the greater is your mental stability and your intuition¹⁹.

SuryaNamaskar is the quickest method for increasing and maintaining youthfulness. The spirit of youth represents an invaluable asset. It is wonderful and satisfactory feeling to know that we are fit and getting the most of happiness out of life. *SuryaNamaskar* calms the mind and help in improving the concentration. Sun is the lord of stars, planets (eight planets) and all constellations (there are 27 constellations) . He is the origin of everything in the universe and is the cause of the lustre of all lives in the universe. Salutations to such great divine will definitely impart good properties in us.

Place-Where to perform *Suryanamaskar*

Suryanamaskar ideally performed in open

space, terrace, ground but if not possible can be performed at home, either in the morning or in the evening. The method of performing *suryanamaskar* should be learnt from a proper guide. Those with complications such as arthritis, slip-disk, and heart disease should take medical opinion before attempting *suryanamaskar*. *Suryanamaskar* should be performed facing the sun or if in a room, in the direction facing the sun. It should be performed on a mat and not on the bare floor.

Women who show severe cramping, lower back pain, and severe loss of blood during menstruation, are advised to wait till the period of menstruation is over before attempting the exercise. *Surya namaskar* can be performed during the first trimester of a pregnancy, but should be discontinued during the rest of the pregnancy. *Suryanamaskar* promotes easy delivery during pregnancy. Following delivery, *suryanamaskar* can be resumed immediately based on the health of the individual. It has been observed that *suryanamaskar* aids in the involution of the uterus.

Rub sweat into the skin to retain energy

When we practice *Suryanamaskar* and start sweating, do not wipe off the sweat but always rub it back²⁰. If we wipe off the sweat, we lose the energy that we have generated with the practice. Water has the capability to carry memory and energy. Hence don't wipe off sweat.

Drinking Water or Passing Urine

Don't drink water, or go to the bathroom during practice time, unless there is a special situation that makes it absolutely necessary. Holding urine is not a good practice.

SuryaNamaskar* Benefits*1. Boosts overall health performance**

Incorporating the *SuryaNamaskar* into your daily routine can make a positive difference to your life. It provides a complete body warm-up as well as mental awareness. The process involves taking deep breaths rhythmically while doing the 12 *asanas* which is beneficial for one's health.

2. Improves digestion, avoid constipation

It also improves digestive system by the alternate stretching and compression of the abdominal organs. People who suffer from constipation and dyspepsia or

indigestion should practise *SuryaNamaskar* every morning preferably on an empty stomach.

3. Avoids pendulous abdominal muscles

Abdominal muscles are strengthened when the *Surya namaskar* are performed on a regular basis. Abdominal muscles get a good workout. Yogic practices increase muscle strength, oxygen uptake, circulation and utilization²¹.

4. Detoxification of body

Due to the active inhalation and exhalation process, the lungs are thoroughly ventilated and the blood remains oxygenated. This also helps in detoxifying body by getting rid of carbon dioxide and other toxic gases. Improves function of the spleen by enabling it to eradicate toxic impurities through profuse perspiration and to absorb vital energy from the atmosphere.

5. Relieves anxiety normalise sleep cycle

It helps improve memory and nervous system and also helps calm down and get rid of anxiety. It normalizes the activity of the endocrine glands, especially the thyroid gland.

6. Improves muscular flexibility

The *asanas* performed in *SuryaNamaskar* workout entire body, making more

flexible and agile. Sun salutation practice leads to improvement in general muscle endurance²².

7. Promotes regular menstrual cycle

If women have an irregular menstrual cycle, then this exercise will help to correct the irregularity. Regular practice of the movements can also help in easy childbirth.

8. Shapes the arms, strengthens the spine

It shapes arms and a broad chest. It also makes spine stronger and waist more flexible. The sequence offers a very good way to stretch and strengthen muscles, joints, ligament as well as the skeletal system. The movements can also help improve the flexibility of spine. Strengthens neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, fingers, back, stomach, waist, abdomen, intestines, thighs, knees, calves and ankles.

9. Always keeps youthful and fresh

Incorporating it in routine life will keep youthful and healthy even in old age. It improves blood circulation that aids in bringing back the glow on face; preventing the onset of wrinkles, making skin look younger and radiant.

10. Helps in weight reduction

It will help to lose weight faster, much faster than dieting. When done at a fast pace, *Surya Namaskar* can give an excellent cardiovascular workout helping to lose weight. The postures will help stretch the abdominal muscles while helping to reduce fat around belly.

11. Cardio-respiratory work out

Invigorates the heart and will prevent blood pressure. Improves the quality and circulation of the blood. Incorporating sun salutation in a yoga session contributes to significantly intense physical activity to improve cardio-respiratory fitness in unfit or sedentary individuals²³.

12. Good Immune Status

Makes immune against diseases by increasing disease-resisting power. The practical test of health is that one should never have even ordinary cold or cough after climatic changes.

13. Effect on mind

Performing *suryanamaskar* improves the efficiency of work. There is an increase in energy levels and mental stamina. Concentration, forgetfulness, worries and other forms of mental derangement, memory and the functioning of the nervous system are improved. The mind becomes calm stable. There is an improvement in sleep

cycles and metabolic functions. A regular regimen improves the self-confidence levels, self-perception, working ability and the general attitude towards life.

14. Endocrine system

Functioning of the endocrine system, including thyroid, pituitary glands, adrenal gland, parathyroid, testes, and ovaries are improved to good extent. Stimulates glandular activity and correct glandular functioning.

15. Balancing Tridosha

According to *Ayurvedic* science the body is made up of – *Vata, Pitha and Kapha*. Practicing Sun Salutation daily helps balance the three constitutions.

16. Enhances the chances of normal delivery

Child-bearing is less painful and easier due to stretching of lower abdominal muscles. Strong muscles facilitate the good labour pains and normal delivery.

Age

Not mentioned in any *Ayurvedic* literature regarding precise age to perform *SuryaNamaskar*. But can be performed after 5 years till 60 years of age²⁴.

Duration: For how long to perform *SuryaNamaskar*

Not mentioned in any *Ayurvedic* literature regarding how many *SuryaNamaskar* to perform or how long we are supposed to perform. But mentioned in *Ayurvedic* texts about how long to perform *Vyayam* (exercise). According to *SushrutSamhita*²⁵ rise in heart beats, perspiration at axilla (*kakshapradesh*), forehead (*lalata*), nose (*nasa*), breathlessness (*mukhenshwasa*) are the indicators for cessation of exercise (*ArdhashaktiVyayam*). This rule can be implemented to *SuryaNamaskar* also. So number of *SuryaNamaskar* is of no importance.

Contraindications

Though *SuryaNamaskar* should be a part of our routine, there are certain exceptions when it comes to who cannot practice this exercise.

- People suffering from (PID- Prolapsed Intervertebral Disc, Straight spine, birth defects) back pain, neck pain, frozen shoulder should seek proper orthopaedic advice before commencing *SuryaNamaskar*.
- Women should avoid *SuryaNamaskar* and other *asanas* during their periods.

- Pregnant women should not practise this after their third month of pregnancy.
- Patients of hernia, high blood pressure, Potts spine, birth defects, and muscular dystrophy should strictly avoid.

DISCUSSION

By practicing *SuryaNamaskar* we can sprinkle our life with a spiritual element. It should be the daily part of our life style. It is for those who want strong spiritual aspects. *SuryaNamaskar* is the fundamental practice and a powerful process of activating the sun within us. Only through learning how to better “digest” the sun, internalize it, and make it a part of our system, we truly benefit from this process. *SuryaNamaskar*, also known as Sun Salutation in the West, is therefore a process to harness this solar energy to build a dimension within us where our physical cycles become in sync with the sun’s cycles. *SuryaNamaskar* also helps the person get stress free. This is done because of the right kind of breathing that helps get fresh flow of oxygen in body and brain. The finest thing about *SuryaNamaskar* is that it can be practiced many times during the day giving you different types of benefits. It can be said

that *SuryaNamaskar* is a package of *yoga asanas* giving you key health benefits. Along with physical health, it helps in getting emotional and mental health benefits also. This era is the era of cut throat competition. Children are also not excluded. During exams they face anxiety, restlessness, stress. To cope with this type of stress *SuryaNamaskar* is one of the best exercise for body as well as for mind. *SuryaNamaskar* can be considered as a complete exercise.

Suryanamaskar benefits at the physical, mental and spiritual levels. It is disgraceful to see children with poor eyesight, obesity, metabolic syndrome, girls lining up at the gynecologists, young women suffering from miscarriages and infertility. It has become so common now. Have we thought about why there has been a rise in such conditions over the last few years? The main possible culprits of this trend are our life style, inactivity, sedentary life style and warped food choices (preserved, canned food, fast food). We are living like machines, not human beings.

Suryanamaskar should be made mandatory in schools, colleges and workplaces because we are getting out of our health. Schools have no grounds, so children don’t

get an opportunity to exercise. The best part about *Suryanamaskar* is that it can be performed in very little space and requires no equipment. So, a quick five-six rounds of it before school or work can do wonders to people's health.

CONCLUSION

For healthy life, the lifestyle should also be considered along with the diet. We can control the diet to a considerable extent. But we cannot control much of the lifestyle. It does depend on others, but whatever lifestyle is under our control, if we try to control it properly, we can become more and more healthy. *SuryaNamaskar* can keep body clean, flexible, strong, well hydrated, mind calm and emotions well balanced. We can significantly reduce the catabolic process of cell deterioration. Ageing process which is an exaggerated response to our wrong life style can be slowed down by practicing *SuryaNamaskar*. *SuryaNamaskar* not only act as a preventing measure but also work well as an alternative and complimentary therapy. Regular practice can help such diverse ailments such as Diabetes, Atherosclerosis, Blood Pressure, Asthma, Arthritis, Chronic Fatigue, Stress. Hence *SuryaNam*

askar could be considered to be the fastest means of reducing and maintaining the optimal level of psychosomatic performance. Ideally it is the best Primordial Level of Prevention of diseases.

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