

## Stress Manage by Yoga

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### ABSTRACT

Stress management is the need of the hour. However hard we try to go beyond a stress situation, life seems to find new ways of stressing us out and plaguing us with anxiety attacks. There can be innumerable stress factors since different individuals react differently to the same stress conditions. The brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined stress. Failure in adopting a realistic attitude to events creates symptoms of depression and aggravates stress situations. Do "stressed out" parents necessarily have stressed out kids? Besides being at higher genetic risk for stress, children of stressed parents can also learn the tendency to get stressed out in reaction to life's challenges from their parents. "Children of stressed out parents are more likely to be ill equipped to handle stressors positively. Research shows that nicotine dependency actually increases stress levels in smokers—adults and adolescence alike. Adolescent smokers report increasing levels of stress as they develop regular patterns of smoking. The repeated occurrence of stressed moods between smoking means that smokers tend to experience distinctly above-average levels of daily stress. When adults quit smoking, they become less stressed rather than more stressed. Reduces stress hormones (studies shows, laughter induces reduction of at least four of neuroendocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortisol, dopac, and growth hormone, associated with stress response). It is well known that either a quick or constant stress can induce risky mind-body disorders. Stressed out individuals carry a great deal of physical tension in their bodies. Under stress the stiff muscles restrict the circulation of blood. Yogic asanas, meditation and breathing can help stress affected persons in many ways such as: (1) Reduce stress and tension. and (2) Mindfulness meditation helps stress reduction, improving physical and mental health.

*Keywords: 'STRESS MANAGEMENT, YOGA'*

### INTRODUCTION

Stress management is the need of the hour. However hard we try to go beyond a stress situation, life seems to find new ways of stressing us out and plaguing us with anxiety attacks. Moreover, be it our anxiety, mind-body exhaustion or our erring attitudes, we tend to overlook causes of stress and the conditions triggered by those. In such unsettling moments we often forget that stressors, if not escapable, are fairly manageable and treatable. Stress, either quick or constant, can induce risky body-mind disorders. Immediate disorders such as dizzy spells, anxiety attacks, tension, sleeplessness, nervousness and muscle cramps can all result in chronic health problems. They may also affect our immune, cardiovascular and nervous systems and lead individuals to habitual addictions, which are inter-linked with –

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-stress. Like "stress reactions", "relaxation responses" and stress management techniques are some of the body's important built-in response systems. As a relaxation response the body tries to get back balance in its homeostasis. Some hormones released during the 'fight or flight' situation prompt the body to replace the lost carbohydrates and fats, and restore the energy level. The knotted nerves, tightened muscles and an exhausted mind crave for looseners. Unfortunately, today, we don't get relaxing and soothing situations without asking. To be relaxed we have to strive to create such situations.

## **RECOGNIZE STRESS**

It is important to recognize whether you are under stress or out of it. Many times, even if we are under the influence of a stressful condition and our body reacts to it internally as well as externally, we fail to realize that we are reacting under stress. This also happens when the causes of stress are there long enough for us to get habituated to them. The body constantly tries to tell us through symptoms such as rapid palpitation, dizzy spells, tight muscles or various body aches that something is wrong. It is important to remain attentive to such symptoms and to learn to cope with the situations. We cope better with stressful situation, when we encounter them voluntarily. In cases of relocation, promotion or layoff, adventurous sports or having a baby, we tend to respond positively under stress. But, when we are compelled into such situations against our will or knowledge, more often than not, we wilt at the face of unknown and imagined threats. For instance, stress may mount when one is coerced into undertaking some work against one's will. Listing the causes of stress is tricky. There can be innumerable stress factors since different individuals react differently to the same stress conditions. Extreme stress situations for an individual may prove to be mild for another, for yet another person the situations might not qualify as stress symptoms at all. Stress is often termed as a twentieth century syndrome, born out of man's race towards modern progress and its ensuing complexities. For that matter, causes such as a simple flight delay to managing a teenage child at home can put you under stress. A stress condition can be real or perceived. Yet, our brain reacts the same way to both causes of stress by releasing stress hormones equal to the degree of stress felt. The brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined stress. It could happen while watching a horror movie or when one is apprehensive of some imminent danger.

## **ATTITUDE**

It is said that life acts and you react. Our attitude is our reaction to what life hands out to us. A significant amount of stress symptoms can be avoided or aroused by the way we relate to stressors. Stress is created by what we think rather than by what has actually happened. For instance, handling adopted children, adolescents, academic failures, retirements, tax audits or sudden loss of money needs a relaxed attitude, focused will and preparedness to face the quirks of life positively. Otherwise one tends to feel stressed and reacts in anger and frustration. With a better control of attention one can feel that the world is a more congenial place to live in. Again, in case of a marital conflict, instead of adopting an accusing and frustrating attitude such as—"You made my life hell" or "You are not meeting my emotional needs," the American clinical psychotherapist Willard F. Harley suggests that accepting—" Yes, we have a problem", helps clear the clouds. Failure in adopting a realistic attitude to events creates symptoms of depression and aggravates stress situations."Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. I am convinced that life is 10 per cent what

happens to me and 90 per cent how I react to it. And so it is with you..." says Charles Swindoll, author and public speaker. A right attitude can make a resilient person out of us in the face of stressful situations.

### **LIFE EVENTS**

Major life events such as a divorce, death, midlife crisis, financial worries, persistent strain of caring for a chronically sick child, nagging health problems or managing a physically or mentally challenged family member can act as potential stressors. Even conditions such as prolonged unemployment or a sudden lay-off from a job can leave you under tremendous stress. One just can't wish away situation. Moreover one has to live through these situations, in the right spirit, to make living a worthwhile experience. Stress also comes from our personal and social contexts and from our psychological and emotional reactions to such conditioning. Here, our mental and emotional disposition, built over the years, decides whether to accept these situations with a fighting or fleeing spirit. Accordingly, we may either be under harmful influences of stressors or be out of it. Children and women subjected to mental or physical abuses are known to suffer from tremendous stress symptoms of depression, constant anxiety and burnout. Though anger, fear and other negative emotional reactions are natural and necessary we need to channel them constructively to create a balanced state in our body and mind.

### **GENES AND EXPERIENCES**

Do "stressed out" parents necessarily have stressed out kids? To this query Dr. Roxanne Dryden-Edwards, a senior Psychiatrist and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at John Hopkins University School of Medicine, answers: "While no parental issue guarantees that the same issue will be duplicated in their children, parental stress certainly places the children at a great risk of becoming stressed as well. Besides being at higher genetic risk for stress, children of stressed parents can also learn the tendency to get stressed out in reaction to life's challenges from their parents." Doctors at Mayo Clinics, USA, opined that situations that create stress are as unique as you are. Your personality, genes and experiences influence how you deal with stressors. A research article published in the British Medical Journal, suggests: "The psychological state of the mother may affect fetal development." It could be caused by stress induced reduced blood flow through the arteries that feed the uterus. It could also create a mental as well as physical predisposition to certain diseases and behavioral patterns in the later life of a child. It's identified that specific genes govern three endorphin groups, which constitute our stress hormones. Hence, our reactions to physical and emotional stress could also be "genetic." In other words, how our parents or great-grandparents responded to stressful situations may in part determine how we handle ourselves today! Children of stressed out parents are more likely to be ill equipped to handle stressors positively. They may suffer from emotional disturbances, depression, aggressive behavior or confusion besides chances of weak physical constitutions, which again can be a source of anxiety.

### **SMOKING**

The relationship between tobacco smoking and stress has long been an area for controversy. The paradox is, although adult smokers state smoking help them feel relaxed, at the same time they report feeling more stressed than nonsmokers. Research shows that nicotine dependency actually increases stress levels in smokers-adults and adolescence alike. Adolescent smokers report increasing levels of stress as they develop regular patterns of smoking. They gradually become

less stressed over a time when they manage to quit smoking. Whatever may be the personal accounts of the smokers, clinical evidence reaffirms that smoking is associated with heightened stress.

### **THE RESEARCH RESULTS ON SMOKING AND STRESS**

- Contrary to the belief that smoking is an aid for mood control; it actually heightens tension, irritability and depression, during nicotine depletion in body. This mood swing arises between smokes or during periods of nicotine abstinence. And dependent smokers need nicotine to remain feeling normal. Studies reveal more than 80 per cent of adult smokers respond positively to statements such as "Smoking relaxes me when I am upset or nervous," and cigarette smoking was "relaxing" or "pleasurable." Interestingly, when nicotine abstinence is monitored in smokers they typically report a pattern of repetitive mood fluctuations, with normal moods during smoke inhalation followed by periods of increasing stress between cigarettes. These mood fluctuations also tend to be strongest in the most dependent smokers. Though smoking briefly restores their stress levels to normal, they soon need another cigarette to forestall abstinence symptoms. The repeated occurrence of stressed moods between smoking means that smokers tend to experience a distinctly above-average levels of daily stress. In the U.K. Health and Lifestyle Survey of 9,003 participants, significantly more smokers than nonsmokers reported feeling constantly under stress and strain. This is also true with adolescent and male shift workers, who are nicotine dependants.
- In an effort to answer why smokers report stress during nicotine abstinence, studies found that smokers may be constitutionally neurotic. Alternatively, their stress may be caused by nicotine dependency. Studies suggested that nicotine helps constitutionally anxious (i.e., neurotic) individuals cope with stress. When adults quit smoking, they become less stressed rather than more stressed. There is no evidence that smokers suffer without tobacco or nicotine (other than during the initial brief period after quitting. There is also no neurochemical rationale for predicting that nicotine should alleviate stress, because it is a cholinergic agonist with sympathomimetic rather than sedative properties.
- The indirect coping strategy of "lighting up" under stress instead of tackling the problem can leave the real problem unresolved. The frequent failure of smokers to tackle problems may provide a further reason why they suffer from more stress than do nonsmokers. The majority of smokers recognize that smoking is physically unhealthy but mistakenly believe, it has positive psychological functions. However, smokers need to become aware of why these beliefs are incorrect.

### **What Laughter Can Do Against Stress And Its Effects?**

- Laughter lowers blood pressure and reduces hypertension.
- It provides good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercise.
- Reduces stress hormones (studies shows, laughter induces reduction of at least four of neuroendocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortisol, dopac, and growth hormone, associated with stress response).
- Laughter cleanses the lungs and body tissues of accumulated stale air as it empties more air than it takes in. It is beneficial for patients suffering from emphysema and other respiratory ailments.

- It increases muscle flexion, relaxation and fluent blood circulation in body.
- Boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting T-cells, disease-fighting proteins called Gamma-interferon and disease-destroying antibodies called B-cells.
- Laughter triggers the release of endorphins—body's natural painkillers.
- Produces a general sense of well-being.

It is well known that either a quick or constant stress can induce risky mind-body disorders. Immediate disorders like dizzy spells, anxiety, tension, sleeplessness, nervousness, muscle cramps can result in chronic health problems when we constantly remain under stress. Besides prescribed drugs, there are extremely effective holistic methods to tackle the impairing influence of stress. Some of them are age-old techniques whereas many lost therapies have been retrieved and being applied in new manners for alleviation of stress and its effects.

## Yoga

Stressed out individuals carry a great deal of physical tension in their bodies. In these cases the natural unblocking effected by yoga postures are helpful. When one rests between postures, abdominal tension is released from the body promoting deep breathing. The benefits of yoga postures (*asana*), breathing (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*) include increased body awareness, release of muscular tension and increased coordination between mind-and body. It helps in better management of stress and ensures an overall feeling of well being. Some custom made yogic techniques include *Sudarshan Kriya* by Sri Sri Ravishankar, *Sahaja Samadhi* by Ma Anandmayee and *Kriya Yoga* by Paramashansa Yogananda—are three widely practiced techniques of yoga devised by three epoch making spiritual gurus. The ancient therapeutic traditions as well as modern medical research speaks about the intimate relationship between our breathing patterns and our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. They have shown how natural healthy respiration not only increases longevity and supports our overall well-being and self-development, but also helps in medical conditions such as asthma, poor digestion, insomnia, low energy, high blood pressure, anxiety, panic attacks, heart ailments, and many other problems.

## How Stress Affects Our Natural Breathing Pattern

With each inhalation, oxygen (pure air) enters into our body and triggers off the transformation of nutrients into fuel. With each exhalation carbon dioxide (toxic air) is eliminated from our body. Presence of oxygen purifies the blood streams and helps invigorate each cell. Sufficient amount of oxygen is required to maintain the vitality of our body organs.

In normal conditions the body follows a natural breathing pattern that is slow and regulated. Under stress when the body shows symptoms such as tightening of muscles, distractions, anxiety, hyperactivity and angry reactions et al, breathing becomes quick and shallow. One tends to hold one's breath, frequently. With restricted breathing inflow of oxygen is restricted. Lungs are unable to exhale the stale airs and residual toxins build up inside the body. Under stress the stiff muscles restrict the circulation of blood. So, even less oxygen comes in and fewer toxins are removed. It affects the healthy regeneration of cells. Medical studies show that the oxygen-starved cells are the major contributing factors in cancer, immunity deficiency, heart disease and strokes. Breathing also affects our state of mind and consequently makes our thinking either confused or clear.



When breathing is slow, deep and full, the lungs work more, the diaphragm moves well, the intercostals, back and abdominal muscle work, drawing in extra oxygen to the blood stream. Increased oxygenation purifies blood and stimulates healthy functioning of cells, glands and muscles.

Hence, a regulated and mindful breathing pattern has been held vital to maintaining the highest level of physical health by yoga. Another positive result of conscious breathing is its calming effect on the emotions, reducing fear and anxiety in the nervous system. Regulated and mindful breathing, dynamic movement of the head, shoulders and arms during the practice of breathing and meditation promote concentration and relaxation.

Yogic *asanas*, meditation and breathing can help stress affected persons in many ways such as:

- Improve muscle tone, flexibility, strength and stamina
- Reduce stress and tension. They help in the cure of depression and obsessive-compulsive disorders. They calm the frenzy, clear mental clutter and allow us to get back in touch with ourselves.
- Mindfulness meditation helps stress reduction, improving physical and mental health. Many patients undergoing yogic stress-cure techniques show dramatic changes in attitudes, beliefs, habits, and behaviors.
- They help boost self esteem in patients, imbuing a sense of purpose in their life. They help in giving us control of ourselves.
- Improve concentration, creativity, and above all a sense of well being and calm.
- Yogic techniques have the potential to cure various stress related diseases and symptoms, as it lowers body fat, improves blood circulation, stimulates the immune system.
- Yoga breathing shows promising results in the treatment of pulmonary and autonomic function in asthma patients.

## CONCLUSIONS

Stress management is the need of the hour. Failure in adopting a realistic attitude to events creates symptoms of depression and aggravates stress situations. Do "stressed out" parents necessarily have stressed out kids? Besides being at higher genetic risk for stress, children of stressed parents can also learn the tendency to get stressed out in reaction to life's challenges from their parents."When adults quit smoking, they become less stressed rather than more stressed. Reduces stress hormones (studies shows, laughter induces reduction of at least four of neuroendocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortisol, dopac, and growth hormone, associated with stress response).It is well known that either a quick or constant stress can induce risky mind-body disorders.Stressed out individuals carry a great deal of physical tension in their bodies.Under stress the stiff muscles restrict the circulation of blood. Yogic asanas, meditation and breathing can help stress affected persons in many ways.

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