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Relaxed living: the antidote to stress and tension

Abstract

Stress is a common physiological and psychological response to challenges or demands, often from work pressures, personal conflicts, or environmental factors. Chronic stress can lead to significant health issues, including cardiovascular disease, anxiety disorders, and weakened immunity. Meditation can be a powerful tool for reducing stress and improving our overall health and well-being. Yoga, meditation and relaxed living are effective holistic approaches to manage and alleviate stress. Yoga combines physical postures, controlled breathing, and mindfulness, which helps to reduce tension, lower cortisol levels, and improve health. Meditation focuses the mind, fostering emotional stability and reducing overthinking. Together, these practices encourage a balance between mind and body, offering sustainable relief from stress and enhancing the quality of life. In the current communication, an attempt has been made to study the effect of yoga-meditation and relaxed life to cope with stress.

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Introduction

The stress reaction is a natural response to fear or uncertainty. When we feel anxious, afraid or upset, it prepares our body to fight or flee from danger. Most stress inducing experiences we face today cannot be resolved either by fighting or by flight or by any other physical action and therefore, stress remains unexpressed and unrelieved. Chronic stress is a major challenge today. Stress can pile up, without our notice, each tension feeding others until we become chronically over-stimulated and it becomes either a physical disease or mental disorder. Yoga teaches us to deal with such problems and slow down and diffuse stress. Many non-yogic relaxation techniques fail to do this because the process is blocked by lack of awareness.[1] Body stress is the creation of our mind. Therefore the first thing we should do is to pacify our mind. If we sit for contemplation and meditation, the use of oxygen and metabolic rate goes down and blood pressure is lowered. It has been noticed that those who regularly sit for meditation do not suffer from distress. According to James Hewitt[2] --

> *"Those who embrace yoga practice in its full range- that is Yoga of breathing, Yoga of Posture and Yoga of meditation- will receive maximum body-mind harmony and relaxation."*

In present communication, an attempt has been made to show how yoga and meditation can act as an antidote to reduce the body's stress and tension and relax the mind.

What is stress?

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes us frustrated, angry or nervous.[3]

The actual definition of stress as given in Merriam Webster's Collegiate dictionary is[4] –

> *"A physical, chemical or emotional factor, that causes, bodily or mental tension and maybe a factor in disease causation"*

The World Health Organization (WHO)[5] has defined stress as –

> *"Any type of change that causes, physical, emotional or physiological strain. Stress is body's response to anything that requires action"*

According to http://www.helpguide.org,[6]

> *"Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. When you sense danger, whether it is real or imagined, the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid automatic process known as the 'fight or flight' reaction or the stress response. The stress response is the body's way of protecting us."*

Dr. Herbert Benson[7] in *The Relaxation Response* defined stress as, –

> *"situations leading to continuous behavioral adjustment"*

Dr. Richard Mackarness[7] in his book *Not All in the Mind* defined stress as –

> "*Stress in scientific terms is the wear and tear induced in the body by the adaptive day-to-day struggle of the organism to remain normal in the face of potentially harmful agents, including physical and physiological stressors of all kinds, from bad food to noisy neighbors.*"

The most modern definition of stress[8] is "*A Reaction to a Stressor*". Stressor is defined as,--

> *"Anything, positive or negative, that urges you to make an adjustment or change from what you are currently doing".*

Stress can manifest[5] as fear, worry, inability to relax, increased heart rate, difficulty in breathing, disturbance in sleeping pattern, difficulty in concentrating, worsening of pre-existing health conditions (physical and mental) and increased use of alcohol and tobacco and other drugs. Under normal conditions our mental, emotional and physical health should return to normal once a stressful event has passed.

The symptoms of stress

The following list of symptoms of stress, was compiled by psychologist Michael Antony and colleagues at the University of Miami.[9]

I. Cognitive Symptoms

Anxious Thoughts, fearful anticipation, poor concentration, difficulty with memory.

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II. Emotional Symptoms

Feeling of tension, irritability, restlessness, worries, inability to relax, depression.

III. Behavioral Symptoms

Avoidance of tasks; sleep problem; difficulty in completing work assignments; fidgeting; strained face, clenching fists, crying; changes in food habits or smoking and drinking.

IV. Physiological Symptoms

Stiff or tense muscles, grinding teeth, sweating, tension, headaches, faint feelings, choking feeling, difficulty in swallowing, stomachache, nausea, omitting, loosening of bowels, constipation, frequency and urgency of urination, loss of interest in sex, tiredness, shakiness or tremors, weight loss or gain, awareness of heartbeat.

V. Social Symptoms

Some people in stressful times tend to seek out others to be with. Other people withdraw under stress. Also,the quality of relationships can change when a person is under stress.

Recent research has shown that the precise way in which the stress works on the heart is both varied and complex. Changes triggered by stress, may injure the heart in a number of ways as given below.

I. Some stressors, ranging from mental arithmetic to physical discomfort, can alleviate blood pressure.

II. Mental stress, such as doing complex math can induce sudden constrictions of the coronary arteries for the people with preexisting heart disease.

III. Stress hormones may indirectly increase the blood's tendency to clot, raise the blood cholesterol level, induce sudden constriction of the arteries, which may block the supply of blood to the heart muscle and lead to heart attack.

IV. Under extreme stress or exertion, the brain's control over heart rate may be disrupted. This can lead to sudden death

Behavioral Symptoms of Stress[6]

I. Overeating

II. Sleeping too much or too little

III. Neglecting responsibilities

IV. Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax

V. Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

VI. Using drugs such as relaxation pills

VII. Gambling

Duration of stress

There are two main types of stress[10]

Acute stress- This stress comes for a short time and goes away. It is felt when sudden brakes are applied or when we get down from a steep slope. It also occurs when we do something exciting or new.

Chronic stress- This stress lasts for a longer period of time. A stress which lasts for weeks or months is called chronic stress. It is felt when we have financial problems or unhappy marriage relationships or problems at work. If it is left unmanaged it may create serious health problems.

Chronic stress may lead to long term health problems such as,

I. Cancer

II. Diabetes

III. High Blood pressure

IV. Stroke

V. Cardiovascular disease and hypertension

VI. Skin eruptions such as eczema etc.

VII. Irritable Bowel Syndrome, gastro esophageal reflux disease, gastritis, ulcers and inflammatory bowel disease

VIII. Chronic and recurrent ear infections, cold, sinus infections, sore throat, bronchitis or pneumonia.

IX. Anxiety

X. Depression

XI. Panic Attacks

XII. Sadness

XIII. Insomnia

XIV. Headaches

XV. Suicide

Images of some people under stress

Figure 1

Categories of stress[11]

I. **Physical Stress**: Physical Stress normally arises from lack of sleep, overwork, excessive exercise, physical injury or trauma, surgery, infections, physical disease and chronic pain. Chronic infections are very stressful to the body, such as pneumonia, kidney infection, bronchitis are quite severe and give a lot of stress to the body.

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II. **Emotional and Mental Stress**: This is called Psychological Stress. Various emotions, such as anger, hostility, depression, anxiety and fear can cause chronic emotional stress. Stress is related to financial problems, family issues and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Major reasons for this type of stress are depression, anxiety, frustration, anger, fear and guilt. Family fights, too many commitments and a busy lifestyle can also cause mental and emotional stress.

III. **Chemical Stress**: Chemical stress comes from excessive use of various substances such as excessive sugar, caffeine stimulants, alcohol, cigarette smoking (nicotine), and some food additives. Chemical stress is also related to substances like dust, allergens and toxic chemicals, second hand cigarette smoke and pesticide. A polluted environment can cause allergies like asthma, breathing problems and adrenal fatigue.

IV. **Thermal Stress**: This category of stress is related to being exposed to extreme temperatures, like hot or cold, for prolonged periods of time. Individuals who suffer from heat, exhaustion, heat stroke and hypothermia, sometimes experience severe thermal stress.

Popular but unhealthy ways to cope with stress

Complexity, competitiveness and change have brought much stress in our life. Big or small, happy or sad, unexpected or routine, any of the events just described can trigger stress in our body. Stress is something that cannot be seen, heard or smelt, however one can eventually feel it as anxiety, exhaustion, moodiness, sleep, disturbance, headaches, shortness of breath, a racing heart or a stiff neck. Although we cannot control what stresses us, we can learn how to respond to stress, so that it does not affect us negatively. Since all change causes some degree of stress, stress is an unavoidable part of our lives. The symptoms of stress can impact on all aspects of our lives such as, eating patterns, digestion, mood, sleep, energy, and immunity to diseases. Some ways which have been very popular but yet unsatisfactory for coping with stress and tension are mentioned below, which should never be followed.[12]

Alcohol

Alcoholic drinks may be enjoyed for the pleasure they give, but alcohol is an unsatisfactory solution for coping with stress and tension. Alcohol slows down brain activity. Children born to alcohol drinking mothers have smaller brains and oriental appearance and characteristics. Some of the modern research shows that ethyl alcohol in the body metabolizes into acetaldehyde, a toxic chemical that can damage DNA and prevent your body from repairing it. Damaged DNA can lead to cells growing out of control and forming cancer tumors. The International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies alcoholic beverages as carcinogenic and has linked alcohol consumption to several types of cancer, including head and neck, esophageal, liver, breast and colorectal cancer. Alcohol consumption also leads to dehydration and stomach irritation. It also gives fatigue, headaches and hangovers. It is not a good cure for stress.[12]

Smoking

People smoke cigarettes to gain relief from stress. However tobacco is a stimulant,not a relaxant. It activates increased production of stress hormone, noradrenaline. Smoking raises blood pressure and increases cholesterol. Cigarette smoking contributes to many deaths from cardiovascular disease and lung cancer. Smoking distorts sensory awareness.[12]

Pills

Dr. Peter Parish, said, " *The increase in the prescribing of CNS (Central Nervous System) depressant drugs suggests that general practitioners are blanketing their patients' emotional reactions to an excessive degree and they must ask themselves whether it is right for them to produce a pharmacological leucotomy on their contemporary society.*"[12]

Gambling

Gambling is used by some people to relieve stress. Gambling can cause low self-esteem, stress and depression. Gambling can become an addiction just like drugs or alcohol if it is used compulsively or out of control. It affects the part of our brain that releases dopamine, a 'feel-good' hormone that creates feelings of pleasure and reward. If we get addicted to gambling, other pleasurable activities no longer make us feel good. It is a harmful hobby, and there exists a strong link between gambling problems and suicidal thoughts.[13]

Relaxation

> *"True relaxation is experienced by the body and mind when little or no energy is consumed. It is nature's way of recharging. Since every action, conscious or unconscious, uses stored energy, Relaxation is necessary for good health and peace of mind. Without proper relaxation, the body and mind become overworked and inefficient."*[16]
>
> ***-Yoga Mind & Body***
> ***Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center***

Every physical action puts tension in the muscles. Sometimes we observe tension of our muscles without any reason when we are resting. Every action conscious or unconscious uses up a certain amount of pranic energy. Another way of spending energy without muscular movement is through emotions, such as worries, sorrows, anxieties, anger, and greed. No one is without emotions, and only a few can keep them under control. Uncontrolled emotions can very quickly use up the prana that is stored in the body. A few minutes of anger can cost more energy than a day of physical labor. A person in anger has all muscles tensed, his breathing is irregular, his eyes are red, and all his muscles are tensed. His heart beats fast, blood pressure increases, and digestive system is disturbed. A certain outburst of anger produces a shock in the nervous system. He requires much more energy to restore the various muscles and organs that were cooperating with his emotions. After the anger, he feels a lot of mental fatigue and tension and a lot of his energies are wasted owing to unnecessary activities which tend neither to stop nor to control.

In order to regulate and balance the work of the body and mind, it is necessary to learn to economize the energy produced by our body which is the main purpose of learning how to relax. During relaxation, there is practically no energy or prana consumed, although a little is kept in circulation to keep the body in normal condition. Yoga meditation promotes psychophysical poise and a quiet mind that protects against the stress of modern life, which destroys health and happiness and is a major killer in the society. Yoga meditation cleans the mind, refines and clarifies consciousness, lightens the spirit and fosters mental poise economy. Modern studies have clearly shown that meditation induces more physiological and psychological changes associated with rest and relaxation.[17] Relaxation is a state of being free from tension and anxiety, and it's a skill that can be learned and practiced. It can help us to cope with stress and improve health.[17]

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Relaxation Techniques help with the following conditions:

I. High Cholesterol
II. Diabetes
III. High Blood Pressure
IV. Irritable Bowel Syndrome
V. Pain
VI. Anxiety
VII. Stress

In order to regulate and balance the work of the body and mind, it is necessary to learn to economize the energy produced by our body which is the main purpose of learning how to relax. In order to achieve perfect relaxation, three methods are used by yogis. They are known as physical, mental, and spiritual relaxation.[17]

I. **Physical relaxation:** We all know that every action is the result of thought originated in the mind consciously or subconsciously. Thoughts take form in action and the body reacts to it. When we want to perform an act, the thought generated in the mind is transmitted to the brain and, simultaneously, the brain sends the message through the nerves, and the muscles contract. Just as behind the muscular contraction or tension there is thought, so also behind the relaxation there is again thought vibration. Just as we send a message to contract the muscles, so also another message will bring relaxation to the tired muscles. Yogis use the subconscious mind which controls all the automatic functions of these organs for relaxation.

II. **Mental relaxation:** The constant tension put on the mind owing to unnecessary worries and anxieties takes away more energy than physical tension. During mental tension one should breathe slowly and rhythmically for a few minutes and concentrate on breathing. Slowly the mind will become calm and one is able to feel peace and joy.

III. **Spiritual relaxation:** However one tries to relax the mind, one cannot completely remove all tensions and worries from the mind unless one goes to spiritual relaxation. As long as man identifies himself with the body and the mind there will be worries, sorrows, anxieties, fear, and anger which, in turn, bring tension. Yogi's know that unless man can withdraw himself from the body idea and separate himself from the ego consciousness, there is no way of obtaining complete relaxation. So, from the mental relaxation, he withdraws himself and identifies himself with the all-pervading, all-powerful, all- peaceful and joyful self, or pure consciousness within himself, because all the sources of knowledge, power, peace, and strength are in the soul and not in the body. This stage of relaxation can be obtained by performing Savasana, which is also called corpse pose. It is a restorative pose that involves lying on the back and relaxing for several minutes. Savasana can be challenging mentally and emotionally, even though it is physically the easiest pose. It unites the body in the state of rest.

Savasana is for breath control, mind stilling, and bodily, mental, and spiritual relaxations. One feels calmness in his nerves and more tranquility.

Figure 2 Savasana (Corpse Pose)

Meditation: A Best Way To Reduce Stress

"Through regular meditation, the mind becomes clear and the motives pure. The subconscious mind releases hidden knowledge that allows a better understanding of oneself and our relationship to the world. The limited personality slowly dissolves into an expanded consciousness. Ultimately, the super-conscious or intuitive forces are released leading to a life of wisdom and peace."

-Swami Vishnu-devananda

Yoga is a psycho- somatic- spiritual discipline of achieving union and harmony between our mind, body, and soul and the ultimate union of our individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. During meditation, the distractions of the world around us disappear and the parasympathetic nervous system gently brings a sense of relaxation and equanimity of mind. It slows down the heartbeat, respiratory rate, and relaxes the internal organs, lowering the blood pressure, stress, anxiety, and depression. Yoga meditation provides us with glowing health, increased energy and stamina, shapelier body, relaxation, improved concentration, and peace of mind. The meditator feels more buoyant and youthful. It increases natural relaxation and enhances mental and bodily self-awareness- the key to neuromuscular relaxation and control.

Meditation has a great relaxing effect on the body and mind. During meditation, the muscles have "let go" from tension and there is a feeling of lightness and buoyancy especially just after meditating. Meditation reduces stress- every part of the body, every single cell comes to rest. Meditation keeps the body youthful and prevents early aging. Meditation is a powerful tool to overcome stress and tension. Meditation can give us a sense of calm, peace and balance that can benefit our emotional well- being and our overall health. We also can use it to relax and cope with stress by focusing on something that calms our mind and gives us inner peace.[19] .

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How to meditate?[19]

The Procedure for Meditation and sitting for meditation, that is the place, clothing, cleanliness, eating, drinking and sleeping habits are described in our previous article, "Yoga Meditation: an anti-hypertension agent". The importance of Transcendental Meditation (Meditation done with Mantras), is described.[19] A mantra is a sacred word or phrase which is repeated over and over again to clear the mind. Repetition of mantras produces a change in the mental state of practitioners and creates religious and spiritual feelings. Several mantras have been discussed earlier. It is found that mantras done with the syllable 'Om' are very effective. 'Om' which is the beginning of many vedic mantras and represents the supreme lord of glory, signifies the Absolute. Different meanings of 'Om' are given in Vedas and Upanishads and have been explained earlier. Regular repetition of mantra will purify the mind. After a time, the sound merges with thought, leaving no awareness of external meaning, and takes us to the Transcendental State.

TM- Laboratory Tested[2]

Laboratory research into Transcendental Meditation reveals that during meditation the following physiological changes occur:

I. Heartbeat and breathing rates slow down.

II. Oxygen consumption and metabolic rate falls by twenty percent.

III. The blood lactate level drops. This level goes up with stress and fatigue.

IV. Skin resistance to electric current increases fourfold, a sign of relaxation.

V. EEG readings of brain wave patterns show increased alpha activity- again a sign of relaxation.

VI. TM induces deep relaxation even though the meditator is neither asleep nor in a hypnotic trance.

Yogic breathing to manage stress and relax

Breathing is an unconscious act that our body performs automatically. The quality of breath reflects our emotions and state of mind. When we are stressed, we tend to take rapid shallow breaths. However, there are ways of breathing that can keep us calm and relaxed. Although there is no correct way to breathe, there are ways of breathing that can help us remain calm and relaxed. Examining how we breathe under different circumstances can help us determine when we are stressed, angry, happy, enraged, or tense. Rapid and shallow breaths are associated with feelings of fatigue and stress. If we count the number of breaths we take in one minute and if the number falls between 16 and 20, it indicates that we are breathing rapidly and from our chest and underutilizing our lung capacity. This type of breathing inhibits the uptake of oxygen-the extreme example of this is hyperventilating, which can trigger the stress response.[20]

Relaxed breathing, also known as diaphragmatic or deep breathing, is a simple yet effective way to de-stress and calm the mind. By intentionally slowing our breath, inhaling deeply through the nose to fill the belly, and exhaling fully through the mouth, we activate the body's relaxation response. This helps lower heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and ease tension. Focusing on our breath can shift our attention away from stressors, fostering a sense of mindfulness and tranquility. Practicing this technique for just a few minutes a day can significantly improve our overall well-being. Diaphragmatic breathing, which originates in the belly, helps promote relaxation. It is an excellent de-stressing tool and a great way to relax.

The following are steps to perform diaphragmatic breathing:[20]

I. We should sit down in a quiet room with the hand placed on the abdomen.

II. Then we bring our attention to our breathing and notice if our abdomen fills with air, as we inhale. On the inhalation, our belly should expand slightly on its own. Then we try to relax our abdominal muscles, to get the most effective breath from the relaxed abdomen.

III. The hand that is resting on the abdomen should rise up with our belly as we inhale and go down as we exhale. We should focus on creating this effect, feeling our abdomen expand and our hand rise as we inhale and then feel our abdomen contract and ourhand drops as we exhale.

Mindfulness breathing as relaxation practice

Mindfulness breathing involves consciously focusing on our breath for a specific amount of time. We can do this for short periods of time, at various moments throughout the day, to relax ourselves. We can preferably set aside a designated time and place to regularly practice mindfulness breathing as a part of our stress management program. It also offers a great way to start learning the practice of meditation. Focusing on the breath and breath alone is a common meditative technique.[20]

The following are steps to perform mindfulness Breathing Exercise:[20]

I. We should breathe by taking long inhalations and exhalations. In the beginning we may find it helpful to count to 3 during the inhaled breath and count to 4 during the exhaled breath. This helps us to exhale more slowly,cleanses our lungs and allows us to relax more.

II. After we finish our breathing session, we slowly resume normal breathing and open our eyes.

Relaxation response

Laboratory studies by Dr. Herbert Benson,well-known cardiologist and professor at Harvard Medical School and founder of Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, show that yoga meditation produces what Dr. Benson called it a "relaxation response".[21] According to Dr. Benson, stress evokes fight-or-flight response*. It increases energy metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, and the rate of breathing. It triggers the secretion of adrenaline and noradrenaline, but because of lack of exercise and sleep, the body cannot use these hormones appropriately. Unused adrenaline puts us at risk for a number of diseases and conditions - anxiety, depression, insomnia, heart attacks, strokes, bowel disorders and infertility. He further said that there is a response opposite to stress response known as relaxation response, a physiological set of change that counteracts stress response. One of the best ways to bring relaxation response is meditation. He further said meditation done with the repetition of a word such as "Om", mantras or prayers is very effective and is also called Transcendental Meditation (TM).This brings quietness to mind and decreases heart rate, blood pressure, and rate of breath. This creates specific brain waves and are wonderful in terms of dealing with stress and its consequences. The extent that any ache or pain is being caused by stress, the relaxation response (meditation) takes

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care of it. The benefits of Dr. Benson's relaxation response can be summarized as below, the main physiological features of the response are as follows:

I. The heart rate of meditators decreases by, on average, about three beats per minute

II. The rate of breathing decreases.

III. The body's consumption of oxygen decreases by about 20%. This indicates a marked decrease in the body's metabolic rate.

IV. Blood lactate decreases. Lactate is produced by the metabolism of the skeletal muscles. High levels of lactate in the blood are linked to attacks of anxiety.

V. Blood pressure levels are normalized. Dr. Benson found that meditation reduces blood pressure in individuals who have high blood pressure before starting meditation.

VI. The mediator's skin resistance to an electric current was measured. A fall in skin resistance is a characteristic of anxiety and tension state while a rise indicates increased muscle relaxation.

VII. The brain produces alpha and theta waves. Alpha waves are linked with a state of relaxation, which produces peace and serenity of mind and are good for anxiety, depression, stress, panic attacks, and happiness and confidence. Theta brain waves are connected with advanced problem solving, super creativity, intuition, inspiration, lower cortisol, deep relaxation, and better sleep and emotional intelligence.

Herbert Benson further said that there are four elements basic to most traditional meditation, and these elements are those responsible for meditation's elicitation of the radical physiological changes of the relaxation response.

These elements are:

I. A quiet place to mediate

II. A comfortable of poised posture

III. An object for attention- awareness to dwell upon.

IV. A passive attitude.

*Fight and flight response

A *"flight or fight response" refers to a physiological reaction triggered by the body when it perceives a threat, causing it to either confront the danger ("fight") or quickly escape from it ("flight") - essentially preparing the body to either actively defend itself or flee to safety; it's an automatic response controlled by the sympathetic nervous system, releasing hormones like adrenaline to enable rapid action in stressful situations.[22]

Fight or Flight is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack or threat to survival. The fight response is our body's way of facing any perceived threat aggressively. Flight means our body urges us to run from danger. During fight response, we see a danger our liver releases extra glucose, for quick energy. Our muscles dilate to receive a flood of oxygenated blood and nutrients, our blood pressure increases, our body releases steroids, and stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. During flee response our pupils dilate, enhancing our vision, our sensation of pain becomes muted, and all thoughts that do not concern our immediate safety vanish. Immune response temporarily shuts down in order to conserve and divert every ounce of our energy, so as we fight the threat or run away. This reaction to stress is called fight or flight response. Once we realize that the danger has passed away, our physiology returns to its normal.

Yogic nidra

Yoga nidra, also known as yogic sleep, is a guided meditation practice that helps us to achieve a state of consciousness between sleeping and waking. It involves lying down in a relaxed position called Savasana or 'Corpse Pose'.[23]

The goal of yogic nidra is to achieve a deep state of relaxation while remaining aware of our surroundings. Some benefits of yoga nidra include: Reducing stress and anxiety and Relieving cognitive and physiological symptoms of anxiety.[23]

Yoga nidra is a type of non-sleep deep rest (NSDR), which is a general term for practices that helps us achieve a deep state of relaxation without falling asleep.[23]

The yoga- nidra technique helps to achieve a state of equilibrium and overall welfare. Yoga- nidra also enhances our well- being and encourages our minds to concentrate.[23]

Benefits of Yogic Nidra:

I. Stress reduction: Yoga nidra can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. It can also help reduce the body's stress hormones and fight-flight responses.

II. Improved sleep: Yoga nidra can help with insomnia and sleep deprivation. It can also help people fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.

III. Mental health: Yoga nidra can help improve cognitive function, memory, and concentration. It can also help heal trauma and release stress.

IV. Physical health: Yoga nidra can help lower blood pressure and heart rate, and reduce blood sugar levels and pain and inflammation.

V. Learning: Yoga nidra can help people learn faster and retain information longer.

Power naps

Researchers at Lough Borough University's Sleep Research Laboratory have found that people are designed for two sleeps a day- the main one at night and a nap in the afternoon. Very successful men have been known to nap regularly: Winston Churchill, John F Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Napoleon, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, and George W Bush. Naps restore alertness and enhance performance. A study at NASA on sleepy military pilots and astronauts found that a forty minute nap improved performance by 34 percent and alertness by 100 percent.[24]

Power naps have many benefits, including[24]:

I. Improved mood: Power naps can boost our mood and mental clarity

II. Better memory: Power naps can improve our memory function

III. Reduced Fatigue: Power naps can help relieve fatigue and make us feel more awake

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IV. **Increased Alertness:** Power naps can increase our alertness and attention

V. **Improved Performance:** Power naps can improve our performance, both mentally and physically

VI. **Better Brain Health**: Regular napping can help keep our brain larger and boost its overall health

VII. **Reduced Stress:** Power naps can help reduce stress and anxiety levels.

VIII. **Improved Heart Health**: Power naps can improve our heart health. Power naps are usually 10 to 30 minutes long, but 20 to 30 minutes is ideal.

Yogic posture and deep relaxation

The practice of Yoga, unites techniques of breathing and relaxation through a series of gentle stretching exercises called "poses" and "postures". To have a free and relaxed mind we need a flexible and relaxed body. The various Yoga poses do this by relieving muscle tension and promoting physical and mental wellbeing.[14] We should not force our body and make a smooth transition from one pose to another. Yoga can help us, open the body physically and emotionally, help us sleep better, and even improve our mood.[25]

Benefits of asanas[24]

The practice of asana effects the following aspects of our body:

I. Physical(blood circulation, inner organs, glands, muscles joints and nervous system)

II. Physiological (developing emotional balance and stability, harmony)

III. Mental (improving ability to concentrate, memory)

IV. Consciousness (Purifying and clarifying consciousness/ awareness)

We should not force our body and make a smooth transition from one pose to another. Some poses as recommended by Vivekananda Yoga Therapy and Research Foundation,[15] to relieve stress are given below:

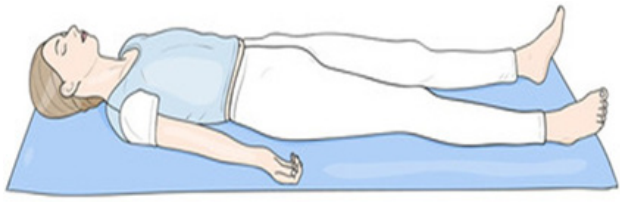

Figure 3A Instant relaxation technique

Savasana; Lie as above with arms by your side Tense all your muscles and Relax

Figure 3B Lateral arc stand up straight

Stretch along your outer side compress and touch your palm on the outer side

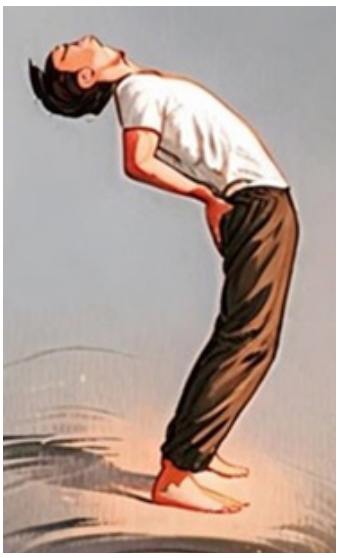

Figure 3C Backward bending asana

Stretch all along the front of your body and hold it for two minutes; come out of the posture slowly noting the flow of blood

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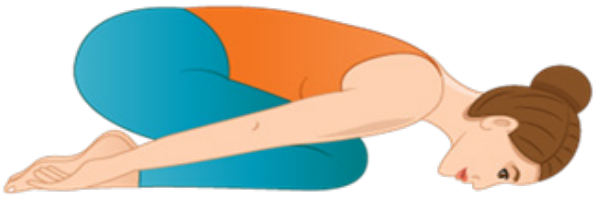

Figure 3D Child's pose

Kneel and sit on your knees. Lean forward, keeping your buttocks on your heels, and rest your forehead on the floor. Move your arms so they're next to your legs palms facing up.

Figure 3E Moon sit up

Sit with your legs straight out in front and put your arms behind you keeping them straight too.

Figure 3F aHands-to-feet pose

Slowly bend forward to hand to Feet pose; Remain in this position for two minutes

Conclusion

Meditation and yogic asanas offer transformative tools for reducing stress and fostering a relaxed, harmonious life. By integrating mindful awareness and controlled breathing, including postures and yogic nidra, in our daily lives, can promote mental clarity, emotional stability, and physiological balance. Regular practice helps lower stress hormones, enhance resilience, and cultivate a sense of inner peace. Power naps increase our performance and alertness tremendously. Embracing yoga and meditation as part of relaxed living helps to combat stress, and promotes a sense of inner peace. Incorporating yoga and meditation into daily routines, one can lead to a more centered, relaxed, and fulfilling life.

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Conflicts of interest

Author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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