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Combating Arthritis through Yoga

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INTRODUCTION

The word “**arthritis**” is often used as though it referred to a single disease - but it is as specific as the word “infection”. If your doctor tells you that you have arthritis he is simply telling you that you have a disease in which your joints are involved. “**ARTHRA**” means **joint** and “**ITIS**” means **inflammation or swelling**. There are over 100 different types of arthritis. They differ enormously in the speed with which they develop, the length of time they last and the extent of damage and crippling they do. The bad news is that most varieties of arthritis are incurable, once the disease has developed it often lasts for life, but the good news is that the symptoms can usually be controlled and the amount of damage and pain they cause can be minimized. Pain in the joints is a common problem which may vary from a minor discomfort to a disabling chronic problem affecting the quality of life to a great extent. Thanks to fascinating advances in medication and biomedical inventions the problem is controlled to a certain extent. There is an intricate feedback loop of connections that point out that many of these common disabling diseases can be traced to the lifestyle that triggers off the underlying genetic tendencies. This Research paper is an **attempt to guide the arthritis patient towards better health and management of the problem by the use of yogic therapy**. The instructions for the practices are very basic and they are best learnt under the guidance of a trained yoga teacher.

TYPES OF ARTHRITIS

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BASIC CATEGORIES OF ARTHRITIS

1. **INFLAMMATORY JOINT DISORDERS:** The synovial membrane becomes red and swollen and as a result the whole joint becomes **red, swollen, painful and feels hot**. If the disease is allowed to continue uncontrolled the joint will eventually be destroyed. The most common of these disorders is **Rheumatoid Arthritis**.

2. **DEGENERATIVE DISEASES:** The disease is caused by ‘**wear and tear**’ in which the cartilage covering the end of the bones wears away, leaving bone rubbing on bone. The joints involved gradually become **stiff, painful and difficult to move**. The most common disorder of this type is **Osteoarthritis** which is more common among the elderly.

3. **PERIARTICULAR DISEASES:** In this type of arthritis the **inflammation** occurs not in or around the synovial membrane but in the area where the **ligaments and tendons join the bones**. **Ankylosing Spondylitis** is the best known serious disease in this category. It is the third commonest type after rheumatoid arthritis

and osteoarthritis. **Tennis elbow** (in which the tendon is damaged) and **housemaid's knee** (in which a bursa- a small fluid filled sac – at the knee joint is damaged and swollen) are other diseases that fall within this group.

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

There is little doubt that rheumatoid arthritis is one of the most common of all crippling long term diseases. It usually affects the smaller joints first particularly those of the hands, wrists and feet. It is much commoner in women than in men. For every 2 male sufferers there are 4-5 female sufferers. Mild rheumatoid arthritis affects probably one in every 50 people while the severe form affects about one in every 200 people.

OSTEOARTHRITIS

Osteoarthritis usually doesn't start before the age of 30 or 40 years and it is more common after the age of 50. It usually affects the large weight bearing joints like knees, hips, ankles and feet.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE JOINT IN OSTEOARTHRITIS?

In a normal synovial joint the synovial fluid automatically becomes more efficient and protective when there is greater pressure on the joint by losing water and becoming thicker. The cartilage grows throughout childhood and in adulthood it can, to a certain extent, heal itself if it is injured or replace itself if it wears away. In osteoarthritis due to age or over use the **cartilage wears down too quickly and the production of synovial fluid becomes sluggish**. The cartilage gradually gets thinner and thinner and eventually the bones end up rubbing on one another as the **joint space becomes narrow**. When the hip is affected in osteoarthritis it gradually changes in shape and the end result can be that the leg on that side may be effectively shorter than the other leg making walking difficult.

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

RELAX YOUR BODY AND MIND: MANAGE STRESS

When you are anxious, nervous or under stress in any way your mind deliberately tenses up the muscles all over your body. Your mind is preparing your body to fight or to run away. But **most modern stresses cannot be dealt with by a physical response** and they persist for long periods – and so muscles remain tense for long periods too. **Tensed muscles commonly produce aches and stiffness**.

- It is important to learn how to avoid unnecessary stress,
- How to build up your resistance to stress,
- How to improve your ability to cope with stress and hence combat muscle tension.
- The more direct way to tackle muscle tension is by deliberately relaxing the tensed muscles. It is usually assumed that stress causes ill health because of the strain of too much work, Aggravation or excitement. But a good deal of **damage is a consequence not of the real problems you may face but of the imaginary consequences your mind creates from those real problems**. Your mind creates major stresses out of minor ones and so it is hardly surprising that the **pains and disablement of arthritis are often made worse due to stress**. Hence it is

also important to relax and control the mind to overcome arthritis. It is indeed sometimes **the best medicine**. **PAIN MANAGEMENT** Apart from drug therapy for pain control, it can be managed by heat applications, ice applications, using the TENS machine, by massage, listening to music and keeping yourself busy. **BALANCE OF REST AND EXERCISE** a balance in the amount of rest and exercise is required to keep joints strong and.

DIET AND WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Stay slim to protect the weight bearing joints.

- Vegetarian diet minimizes symptoms (can have eggs).
- Keep dairy consumption to minimum.
- Have a balanced diet or proteins, carbohydrates and fats.
- Calcium intake should be adequate for bone health..
- Vitamin C is required for health of connective tissue.
- Vitamin D is required for absorbing the calcium

6.10 LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- Balance of work and relaxing activities
- Proper sleeping pattern
- Getting rid of bad habits: tobacco, drugs, alcoholism, excess caffeine
- Balanced Diet and Exercise

YOGIC THERAPY

“Yoga is not an ancient myth buried in oblivion. It is the most valuable inheritance of the present. It is the essential need of today and the culture of tomorrow.” Swami Satyananda Saraswati

WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga is the science of right living and, as such, is intended to be incorporated in daily life. It works on all aspects of the person: the physical, vital, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. The word ‘yoga’ means ‘**unity**’ or ‘**oneness**’ and is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘yuj’, which means ‘**to join**’. This unity or joining is described in spiritual terms as the **union of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness**. On a practical level, yoga is a means of balancing and harmonizing the body, mind and emotions. This must be achieved before union can take place with the higher reality. The science of yoga begins to work on the outermost aspect of the personality, the physical body, which for most people is a practical and familiar starting point. When **imbalance is experienced** at this level, the organs, muscles and nerves no longer function in harmony; rather they act in opposition to each other leading to the **manifestation of disease** (the term literally means ‘**without ease**’). While yoga’s central theme remains the highest goal of the spiritual path, **yogic practices give direct and tangible benefits to everyone regardless of their spiritual aims**. Physical and mental cleansing and strengthening is one of yoga’s most important achievements. It works on the holistic principles of harmony and unification.

While applying yoga as a therapy these effects and the benefits derived from them are considered before prescribing the yogic practices.

YOGIC THERAPY IS PURELY INCIDENTAL

Yoga is a master key to the storehouse of physical, mental and spiritual well being. It is not a miracle. The **journey is from without to within, from gross to subtle, from controllable** (i.e. controllable body reflexes –asana) **to semi-controllable** (i.e. breath -pranayama) **to uncontrollable** (mind – meditation).

Today, Yoga is being used widely for treating many physical and mental disorders. Liberation from sufferings of stress induced diseases appears to be the main aim of practicing yoga today. **But nowhere in the yogic scriptures do we find disease wise information.** Discussions about diseases and remedies occur in yogic scripts only as a passing reference like “**Asanena rujo hanti**” meaning that by practicing asana diseases disappear or “**Pranayama rognashanam**” meaning practice of pranayama abolishes all diseases. This is because **Yoga considers man as an integral whole and disease, whatever the kind it may be, is connected with the**

YOGIC APPROACH FOR HEALING

Yogic Therapy in general is recommended for functional, particularly psycho-somatic diseases and not acute diseases. Yoga believes in the concept of “**Pancha Kosha**” or the **five layers of human existence**. Hence to deal with disease the yogic approach is as follows:

- 1. Physical Practices (Dehasadhana):** They are simple physical practices of Asanas, Kriya, Mudras and Bandhas.
- 2. Breathing Practices (Pranasadhana):** Practice of controlling the breath is essential to control the mind. It is done by Pranayama.
- 3. Emotional Practice (Bhavasadhana):** Emotions, if uncontrolled, can give rise to dis-ease. Culturing of emotions can be done by Japa or chanting of mantras or listening to devotional songs.
- 4. Spiritual Practices (Divyasadhana):** Practice of Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana. Sakshibhavana(a type of Dhyana) develop a sense of self awareness.
- 5. Diet:** it plays an important role in building both body and mind. A satvik and balanced diet can prevent and treat disease.
- 6. Congenial Atmosphere:** A happy, adjusting, peaceful atmosphere at home as well as at working place is conducive to proper healing to prevent disease.
- 7. Counseling:** A trained yoga teacher can develop an attitude of empathy for the suffering of the diseased person.

The **basic trigger being stress** in today’s lifestyle, the integrated approach addresses the problems of all aspects of the stressed fast lifestyle of the individual. According to Yoga stress begins in the mind as **an uncontrolled surge of emotions (Bhavana)** or an amplified reaction as **a response to demanding situations** either real or imagined. **Stress is described as ‘excessive speed’.** Stresses carry enormous power by recycling of thoughts unceasingly in the Manomaya kosha. This **speeded up loop goes out of control** and when suppressed over a long period of time **disturbs the balance of all the five koshas**. In arthritis the inflammation **or degeneration that shows up in the joints is the excessive speed that has percolated from the Manomaya to the Annamaya via the Pranamaya kosha**. Yoga believes that you that you had the full freedom to react or not to react or react.

INTEGRATED APPROACH OF YOGA THERAPY FOR ARTHRITIS (IAYTA) According to Yoga arthritis is classified as two types:

- **Adhij** : Stress Related
- **Anadhij** : Non Stress Related (due to Infection, Injuries)

otherwise in the Manomaya kosha initially when there was a demanding situation. Yoga also believes that the **whole process of disease is reversible** to a major extent. You can start the whole process of reversing by using **three tools namely:**

- slowing down,
- **internal awareness and**
- expansion

These can be achieved by the basic techniques of **Differential Relaxation and Pranadharana.**

AIM OF YOGA IN MANAGEMENT OF ARTHRITIS

- To reduce joint pain, swelling and deformity.
- To build up strength of adjacent muscles to reduce excessive stress on joints.
- To preserve joint movements to maximum and put joints through their full movements and increase their lifespan.
- To work at the level of mind to keep mind healthy and boost any management at physical level.

APPROACH GENERAL APPROACH

1. **STRESS MANAGEMENT:** Relaxation of body and mind

2. **HAVE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE:** Think positively

3. **BUILD UP YOUR SELF CONFIDENCE:**

4. **DEAL POSITIVELY WITH ANGER :**

5. **LEARN TO SHOW FEELINGS : VENT TO EMOTIONS**

6. **LEARN TO LAUGH :**

YOGIC APPROACH

CHAITANYASANA MAKARASANA
All yoga Asanas & Pranayamas have the central effect of creating balance in the nervous and endocrinesystems, thereby leading to relaxation of body & mind & effective stress management.

PRATPAKSHA BHAVANA (Opposite thinking to be practiced when undesirable thoughts capture your mind)

ANULOMA – VILOMA MEDITATION ON MANIPURA CHAKRA (Centre for self assertion & dynamism)

JALANDHAR BANDHA MAHA BANDHA (Relieves frustration & anger)

SAKSHI BHAVANA (Catharsis or purging of the mind)

All yogic practices bring about a sense of well being and give the sadhaka a cheerful disposition

7. PAIN MANAGEMENT : can be through pain killers, physiotherapy etc.

OMKAR CHANTING, DHYANA
(These practices help in relief of pain due to release of endorphins ..(body's natural pain killers). They take the sadhaka to a level beyond that of physical illness)
Different Asanas have local effects on different joints and with regular practice reduce joint pain.

CONCLUSION.

Modern medicine has its limitations in treating psychosomatic disorders while yogic therapy proves very effective because it is a medicine for body and soul. Of course in some cases it is used as a complementary therapy alongside modern medicine. Arthritis is so common that most of us will suffer from at least one sort once in our lives, the most common being the age related osteoarthritis. Hence Yogic Therapy can be used as a preventive.

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