Stress Management through Ayurveda and Yoga-
A Review Article

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Abstract

Stress is a common condition, a response to a physical threat or psychological distress that generates a host of chemical and hormonal reactions in the body. Stress effect body, mind, behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently. It adversely affects a wide range of health condition. When we are in stress our nervous system respond by releasing a flood of stress hormone. This hormone stimulates the body for emergency action by “fight-flight or freeze” reaction also known as stress response. The agent which causes stress is known as ‘stressors’. Stress cause many harmful effect on the body such as physical impact- Weight gain/loss, Unexpected hair loss, Heart palpitations, High blood pressure, Digestive symptoms (such as dryness of mouth, flatulence, nausea etc). Emotional negative effect includes Mood swing, Anxiety and can lead to depression.

Concepts of Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation, physical exercises and a balanced diet may play an important role in relieving stress effectively. It is like rejuvenation and cleanup process on all levels, physical, mental and emotional. Ayurveda is a holistic system with its concern for prevention & management of stress along with promotion of mental health.

Keywords: Stress, Stress response, Ayurveda, Yoga, Prevention, Management.

Introduction

Stress is the body’s automatic response to any physical or mental demand placed on it. It is subjective and unpleasant feeling of distress. Every one irrespective of age, sex, education, occupation, socio-economic status, whether lives in rural or urban area face stress. Stress effect body, mind, behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently. It adversely affects a wide range of health condition and yoga is the most comprehensive approach to fighting stress1.

When we are in stress our nervous system respond by releasing a flood of stress hormone. This hormone stimulates the body for emergency action by “fight-flight or freeze” reaction also known as stress response and the agent which causes stress is known as ‘stressors’. A stressor is defined as a stimulus or event that provokes a stress response in an organism. Stressors can be categorized as acute or chronic and as external or internal to the organism2.

Stress causes many harmful effect on the body such as weight gain/loss, unexpected
hair loss, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, digestive symptoms (such as dryness of mouth, flatulence, nausea) etc.

Emotional negative effect includes mood swing, anxiety, can lead to depression & unhealthy coping strategies (i.e. alcohol, drugs). All these changes occur because of excess secretion of adrenaline as hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal glands become hyper active under stress.

Ayurveda, the science of life, is the oldest system of medicine which has its mentioning in one of the oldest (about 6,000 years) philosophical texts of the world, the Rig Veda. The Sutrasthana of Charaka Samhita, a much referred Ayurveda text, says; "The three “body, mind and soul” are like a tripod, the world stand by their combination; in them everything abides. It is the subject matter of Ayurveda for which the teachings of Ayurveda have been revealed³. Life is the combination of body, senses, mind and reincarnating soul. Ayurveda is the most sacred science of life, beneficial to humans both in this world and the world beyond⁴.

The study of mind is called as Psychology. The profounder of Ayurveda were probably the first who gave detailed description of mind and body relationship. They clearly stated that, the concept of mind and body are two separate entities. The word Manas is came out from the Dhatus and it forms the meaning of this is through which we are collecting the knowledge and objects that is called as Manas⁵.

It has been observed that yoga improves attention and emotional control as well as affects the nervous system, making the parasympathetic nervous system more dominant and stabilizing the autonomic nervous system to enhance resistance to the effect of stress.

Yoga practices including asana’s, slow breathing, meditation, increases activation of P.N.S. & lead to mental relaxation. Yoga is a way of improving our self & understanding our internal state.

Aims & Objectives

➢ To analyze about stress along with its preventive measures.
➢ To show the importance of Ayurveda and yoga in the management of stress.

Materials & Methods

Material- Relevant literature is referred in samhitas, sangraha granthas and contemporary literature along with personal experience.

Methodology- Review study

Literature related to the title is explored from all reliable Ayurvedic and Yoga journals from internet.

Conclusion has been drawn from systemic analysis and rationale.

Discussion

Today, however, due to changed life-styles, upper and middle class also face stress, commonly psychological stress. The younger generation in particular suffers from achievement oriented stress. This stress differs from stress in situational crisis, as it is brought about by the internal pressure to succeed in goals. Achievement stress often causes work alcoholic habits, including lack of sleep and irregular meals. Stress has been postulated to be involved in the aetiology of a variety of diseases ranging from psychiatric disorders
like depression, anxiety and cognitive dysfunction, immunosuppression, to endocrine disorders including diabetes mellitus, peptic ulcer, hypertension and ulcerative colitis. Modern lifestyle makes us more prone to stress and in turn to stress induced disorders. The routine of tests and treatments is tedious and combined with the economic burden of the disease, causes more stress to the already stressed person. The poor individual is thus trapped in a vicious cycle resulting in the progression of stress induced diseases. Anti-stress agents are therefore, required to break this cycle.

Modern system of medicine is still in want of an effective anti-stress agent. Though drugs like diazepam and fluoxetine are claimed to have anti-stress activity but these drugs do no fulfill the criteria of a true, safe and specific anti-stress agent.

**Stress Management through Yoga**

Yoga is the ancient mantra for sound health and also to retain juvenility to a great extent. It has been practiced by several sages in ancient India and now has become a major concern among the modern genre too. Various techniques in yoga have been documented to help in stress management. These techniques work at an individual level and also at a collective level to ensure that there is significant respite from the condition of extreme stress. They help in relieving the physical as well as the psychological negative effects of the problem by ensuring a healthy and productive response to the stress stimuli. Yoga can have a positive effect on the parasympathetic nervous system and aid in lowering heartbeat and blood pressure. This reduces the demand of the body for oxygen. Yoga can also improve digestion, strengthen immunity, help in effective elimination of toxic wastes and also increase lung capacity. Effective use of this practice can also reduce the chances of stress culminating in anxiety and depression. The practice of yoga involves forming various body postures, slow stretching movements, breathing exercises that can at times lead to progressive relaxation, imagery and meditation.

**Prayana (A breathing technique),** in this technique an individual do slow and steady breathing like inhaling through his one nostril and exhaling through other. Besides there are fast breathing movements like intake of air through nostrils and exhaling through mouth at fast paced, this way air is passed properly through blood capillaries and the person feels himself / herself in light mode i.e. he / she feels that there is no burden over their mind and soul.

**Dhyana (Meditation)** is also a good method of controlling stress, in this part of Yoga a person sits in a posture (usually in relaxing mode) and concentrate his / her mind over one point with eyes closed. The mind is concentrated up to an extent when an individual feels that he / she has no interaction with the surroundings, infact the mind reaches in a neutral stage thereby relieving mental exhaustion. Hence yoga provides the best cure to this serious ailment which is disrupting the life of millions of people daily. Anyone practicing yoga daily is rarely suspected to stress, as yoga creates the mind and body immune to stress.

**Stress Management through Ayurveda**

The fact that ‘prevention is better than cure’ is well recognized in Ayurveda, as its foremost objective is maintenance and
promotion of the health of the healthy. To prevent stress there are two approaches.

- To avoid factors inducing stress &
- To increase the coping capacity of the body.

Rationally the best approach is to hit at the root cause, and this is particularly ideal strategy in the stress management. Stress avoidance has been best appreciated by Charaka who states that in order to protect one’s life one should always avoid over-exerting himself.

The coping capacity of the body can be increased by life style modifications, dietary interventions and / or drug treatment, all these being well organized under the umbrella of rasayana therapy, one of the eight branches of classical Ayurveda.

Rasayana herbs have been demonstrated to have potential as anti-stress agents and the answer to safe and effective anti-stress agents probably lies here. Several rasayana herbs used as anti-stress agents have shown antioxidant, immunomodulator, hepatoprotective, antidepressant and anxiolytic effects in various experimental and clinical studies. Ayurveda classifies herbs with a stabilizing effect on the mind as 'medhya rasayanas'. These herbs promote the intellect and deeply nourish the neurological tissues. They are nervine tonics. These medicines act as specific molecular nutrients for the brain, promoting better mental health that leads to the alleviation of behavioral disorders. The medhya rasayanas enhance biological nourishment of the brain, producing tranquility of mind, concentration and improved memory. There are some special techniques mentioned under the heading of “Panchakarma”. Panchakarma is the detoxification process of Ayurveda which helps to release stress and restore youth.

The panchakarma measures used are:-

**Shirodhara**- Medicated milk or oils are poured on the forehead through a special method for 30 - 45 minutes in oscillation motion.

**Shirovasthi**- Nervous rejuvenation through medicated oils that are retained on the head using an elongated cap.

**Swastik -Shali panda sveda**- Stress relief through full body massage with medicinal rice gruel contained in a pouch or pottali.

**Pizichil**- It is a special type of abhyanga technique where the massage is performed with medicated oils that are poured continuously on the whole body with the help of cloth pieces.

**Abhyanga**- It is a therapy that calms the mind and purifies the body. Warm medicated oil is poured and applied to the body for 90 minutes, which clears the toxins and reduces mental stress.

Some medicinal herbs which has proven role in stress management-

**Jatamansi (Nardostachys jatamansi)**- It contain jatamansic acid, jatamansone, jatamansin etc as major chemical constituents. It shows antioxidant activity both in vitro and in vivo. It attenuates stress induced elevation of biochemical changes. It has potent free radical scavenging action. Due to presence of flavonoids and polyphenols which in turn may be responsible for its anti-stress effect.

**Mandukaparni (Centella asiatica)**- It has centic acid, Asiatic acid, centellic acid, centellose etc as major chemical
constituents. It has potent anti-stress activity. It decreased the acute stress induced adrenal hypertrophy, hyperglycemia and creatin kinase level at lower doses. It has potential role in attenuating the activation of Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis.

**Sankhapuspi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)**- It contain sankha pushpine, kaempferol, n-hexacosanol, β-sitosterol etc as major chemical constituents. It provide significant relief in symptoms besides a quantitative reduction in anxiety level and neuroticism in the cases of anxiety neurosis.

**Asvagandha (Withania somnifera)**- It has withaferin A, withanine, withanolide A to Y, somnitol etc as major chemical constituents. It has proven antidepressant and psychotropic activity. Antistressor properties of aqueous extract of root were found in rats.

**Tagara (Valeriana wallichii)**- It contain hydroxyvaleranone, acctoxyvaleranone, valerosidatum, valtrate as major chemical constituents. Iridoid glucoside-I showed CNS (central nervous system) depressant activity at mice.

**Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri)**- It has ascorbic acid, brahmine, herpestine, alanine, monnierin, bacoside A & B etc as major chemical constituents. Brahmi showed antioxidant property to reduce oxidative stress and it provides neuroprotection.

**Conclusion**

So in conclusion, yes, Ayurveda & Yoga can be a great remedy for stress and can offer some stress relief.

Ayurveda & Yoga can play an important role to control stress. Ayurveda provides a combination of benefits such as Pancha karma and Medya Rasayana. Diet and Physical Exercises can have great benefits in Stress and Health. Yoga is proving itself as “Stress Management Tool” and now a day it is being used in Western world too as a major alternative to the offensive allopathic drugs. The present review summarizes some anti-stress herbs which are already mentioned in Ayurvedic classics and benefits of Yoga which are beneficial for human civilization. So there is need to do further studies for developing new alternatives in the management of Stress.

**References**


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