

Review Article

Essentials of Yoga Techniques as Immunity Boosters: An Integrated Approach

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A B S T R A C T

In today's scenario of COVID-19 pandemic, when no effective treatment could be made available, the world is continuously in search of other classical regimens and ways to cope with the prevailing pandemic. To save oneself from the fatal diseases, the body's resistance to fight the infections must be strong. There are numerous conventional ways to enhance body's resistance such as immunity in the traditional systems of medicine. According to Unani philosophy, *Tabi'at* (immunity) is the supreme power of the body immensely responsible for all physiological functions. As stated by Buqrat (Hippocrates), who is considered as the father of almost all systems of medicine, says "The physician treats but the *Tabi'at* heals." In fact he is the first person who gave the concepts of *Medicatrix naturae* (Quwate mudabbrah)/ power of self-preservation and Immunity (*Quwat e Mudafiat*). Thus, in Unani system of Medicine, special emphasis is given for the enhancement of *Tabi'at*.

In this article, an emphasis is being given to elaborate many modalities, regimens and techniques of well-accepted conventional systems of medicine and how Yoga as an integrated approach can improve the body's innate power of self-preservation and keep the infections at bay.

Keywords: *Tabi'at*, Immunity, Hippocrates, Yoga

Outline and Definition

Yoga is a spiritual discipline supported by a particularly subtle science which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science for promoting health, restoring wellbeing and prolonging life.

The word "Yoga" springs from the Sanskrit root 'yuj' meaning "to join", "to yoke" or "to unite."¹ Yoga also refers to an inner science comprising diverse methods through which people may enable themselves to amalgamate the body and mind to achieve self-realisation.¹

According to Yogic scriptures, the practice of Yoga results in the union of a private consciousness with the universal consciousness.

According to modern scientists, everything within the universe is simply a manifestation of an equivalent quantum firmament. One who experiences this oneness of existence is claimed to be "in Yoga" and is termed as a yogi who has attained a state of freedom, mentioned as Mukti, Nirvāna, Kaivalya or Mokṣa.¹

The aim of Yoga practice (Sādhana) is to beat all types of sufferings to create a way of freedom in every walk of life with holistic health, happiness and harmony.¹

Historical Facet of Yoga

Yoga is widely considered as an "immortal cultural outcome" of the Indus Saraswati Valley Civilisation - dating back to 2700 BC.¹

Variety of seals and fossil remains with Yogic motifs and figures performing Yoga suggest the presence of Yoga in ancient India. Ancient manuscripts depict that Yoga has roots in folk traditions, Vedic and Upanishadic heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions, Darshanas, epics of Mahabharata including Bhagawadgita and Ramayana, theistic traditions of Shaivas, Vaishnavas and Tantric traditions.

Later, the sage Maharishi Patanjali systematised and codified the pre-Vedic ritual of Yoga, its meaning and its related knowledge through Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.¹

Following Maharishi Patanjali, many sages and Yoga masters contributed significantly to preserve and further develop this arena by documenting these practices and literature. Yoga has spread everywhere in the world by the teachings of eminent Yoga masters from past to this date.¹

International Day of Yoga

The thought of an International Day of Yoga was primarily proposed by the current Prime Minister of India, during his speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), on 27 September 2014, while addressing its 69 session. 21 June was suggested as the date for International Yoga Day because it is the longest day of the year in the hemisphere and shares special significance in many parts of the globe.¹

On December 11, 2014, the 193 member UNGA approved the proposal by consensus with a record 177 co-sponsoring countries a resolution to determine 21 June as "International Day of Yoga." In its resolution, the UNGA recognised that Yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being and emphasized wider dissemination of data about the advantages of practicing Yoga for the health of the world's population. Yoga also brings harmony in all walks of life and, thus, is understood to be helpful for disease prevention, health promotion and management of the many lifestyle-related disorders.²

International Days of Yoga at a glance

First International Day of Yoga

On 21 June, 2015 at Rajpath, New Delhi, the Ministry of AYUSH successfully organised 1st International Day of Yoga (IDY). Two days International Conference on "Yoga for Holistic Health" was also organised. Common Yoga Protocol and Yoga DVDs were prepared to disseminate awareness of Yoga among the masses. Outside India, IDY was celebrated altogether with the UNGA member countries and Ministry of External Affairs in association with Ministry of AYUSH.¹

Second International Day of Yoga

The Ministry of AYUSH organised 2nd International Day of Yoga (IDY) on 21st June, 2016 at the Capitol Complex, Chandigarh. 150 Divyangs (differently abled) performed Yoga Protocol during the International Day of Yoga

celebrations,¹ the theme of the event was to "Connect the Youth." Two days International Conference on "Yoga for Body and beyond" was also organised. As many as 192 United Nation Member States participated in this significant ceremony.¹

Third International Day of Yoga

3rd edition of International Yoga Day was celebrated with the theme 'Yoga for Health' 2017.³

Fourth International Day of Yoga

The theme for Yoga Day 2018 was "Yoga for Peace." Main function was held in Dehradun.⁴

Fifth International Day of Yoga

The theme for 2019 in India is 'Yoga for the heart' emphasising the cardiovascular benefits of Yoga on human health.⁵

Sixth International Yoga Day 2020

The theme was "Yoga for Health - Yoga at Home." Owing to the social distancing measures adopted globally to curb the COVID-19 pandemic Yoga studios and other community spaces shut down and the Yoga practitioners initiated home practice and online Yoga resources. Yoga may soon develop as a powerful technique to keep in check the confusion, uncertainty and isolation, as well as maintain physical well-being. The United Nations offers Yoga resources to its personnel on the Coronavirus portal's section on Wellness. The World Health Organization mentions Yoga as a way to enhance health in its Global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030: more active people for a healthier world.⁶

With schools closed and summer break activities cancelled, parents may find it challenging to make their children physically active. Yoga can help. UNICEF says kids can practice many Yoga poses with no risk and obtain an equivalent benefits that adults do. These benefits include increased flexibility and fitness, mindfulness and relaxation.⁶

The best highlight of the International Yoga Day was a 45-minute Yoga drill supported Common Yoga Protocol (CYP), held in Leh, capital of Ladakh on summer solstice, 2020, as announced by AYUSH Minister Shripad Naik on March 11 during a press meet.⁷

Common Yoga Protocol (CYP)

We all know that the thrust of the IDY observation on 21st June is harmonious mass Yoga demonstrations during which many people participate round the globe, at thousands of venues. When participation of individuals is on such a huge scale, there has got to be some serious planning behind it, if the demonstration is to be consistent and coordinated. A number of the foremost accomplished Yoga gurus of India came together to deal with this issue. They developed the Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) for this purpose, which is

actually a specified sequence of Yoga Asanas of 45 minutes duration.^{1,8}

The Asanas and practices forming a part of the CYP are selected in such a manner to yield the utmost health and wellbeing rewards to a diverse group of individuals from different profiles of health, age, etc. Experts are of the view that beginners can learn CYP in about 15 sessions of one-hour duration each.^{1,8}

The booklet on Yoga released by the Ministry of AYUSH offers a quick overview about Yoga and Yogic practices to direct one towards comprehensive health for a particular individual and therefore the community. Minor modifications are made in the 3rd Edition of Common Yoga Protocol, Published by Director Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India in May 2017. Some Yoga practices e.g. Yogic Sūkṣma Vyāyāma, Yogāsana, and Prāṇāyāma which have been added during this 2nd revised edition also find some corrections. Aside from 45 minutes Common Yoga Protocol, a provision has been made for leading Yoga institutions to include quarter-hour Institutional Yogic practices e.g. Prāṇāyāma, Yoga Nidrā, Dhyāna, Satsaṅg, etc. before Saṅkalpa as deemed fit.¹

Yoga Poses in CYP

Yoga poses in common Yoga protocol at a glance:⁹

I. Prayer

Yogic practice starts with a prayer or prayerful mood to reinforce the advantages of practice. In CYP, the English wordings of prayer from Sanskrit are as follows:

“May you progress in harmony; may you speak in unison; let our mind be Equanimeous like in the beginning; let the divinity manifest in your sacred endeavours.”

Sufism is the esoteric path within Islam, where the goal is to purify oneself and achieve mystical union with the Supreme (named Allah in this tradition). The practitioners of Sufism are called Sufis, and they follow a variety of spiritual practices, many of which were influenced by the tradition of Yoga in India.¹⁰

2. Sadilaja/ Chalana Kriyas/ Loosening Practices

Help to increase microcirculation. These practices can be done while standing and sitting. These postures are in Samasthiti (Alert Posture).¹¹

1. Neck Bending Technique

- Stage - I: (Forward and Backward Bending)
- Stage - II: (Right and Left bending)
- Stage - III: (Right and Left Twisting)
- Stage - IV: Neck Rotation

2. Shoulder's Movement

3. Trunk Movement/ Trunk Twisting (Katishakti Vikasak)

4. Knee Movement Trunk Twisting (Katishakti Vikasak)

3. Yogasanas

A. Standing Postures

Types of Standing Posture	Benefits
Tādāsana (Palm Tree Posture)	Brings stability, good for spine, corrects faulty posture, increases height
Vrikāsana (The Tree Posture)	Improves neuro-muscular coordination, Good for balance and application, Tones up the leg muscles, Beneficial for ligaments
Pāda-Hastāsana (The Hands to Feet Posture)	Spine flexibility, Improves digestion, Prevents constipation, Good for menstrual problems
Ardha Chakrāsana (The Half Wheel Posture)	Spine flexibility, Strengthens the neck muscles, Improves breathing capacity, Helps in cervical spondylitis
Trikonāsana (The Triangle Posture)	Weight loss, Prevents flat foot, Strengthens leg muscles, Spine flexibility, Improves lungs capacity

B. Sitting Postures

Types of Sitting Postures	Benefits
Bhadrāsana (The Firm/Auspicious Posture)	
Vajrāsana/ Veerāsana	Good for stable mind, Keeps the knees and hip joints healthy, Relieves knee pain, Abdominal relaxation, Eases pain in menstruation
Ardha Ustrāsana (Thunderbolt Posture) (for beginners)	Meditative postures, Strengthens thigh and calf muscles, Good for digestion, Healthy spine
Ustrāsana (Camel Posture)	Useful for defective eyesight, Relieves back pain and neck pain, Reduces fat over the abdomen, Helpful in digestive problems
Śāsākāsana (The Hare Posture)	Reduce stress and anger, Tones up reproductive organs, Relieves constipation, Improves digestion

UttānaMandūkāsana (Stretched up-frog posture)	Helpful in backache, Improves lungs capacity
Marichyāsana / Vakrāsana (The Spinal Twist Posture)	Increases spinal flexibility, Eases constipation, Stimulates pancreas

C. Prone Postures

Types of Prone Postures	Benefits
Makarāsana (The Crocodile Posture)	Good for relaxation, Treats back pain, Counter stress and anxiety
Bhujangāsana (The Cobra Posture)	Best for stress management, reduces abdominal fat and alleviates constipation, helps to get rid of backache and bronchial problems
Śalabhāsana (The Locust Posture)	Helps in sciatica and lower backache, Tones the hip muscles, Good for kidney, Helps in weight loss, Good for digestion

D. Supine Postures

Types of Supine Postures	Benefits
Śetubandhāsana (The Bridge Posture)	Relieves depression and anxiety, Strengthens lower back muscles, Improves digestion
Uttānapādāsana (Raised feet posture)	Balances the navel centre, Helpful for abdominal pain and indigestion, Builds abdominal muscles, Overcomes nervousness and anxiety
Ardhahalāsana (Half plough posture)	Beneficial for dyspepsia and constipation, Useful in diabetes and piles, Good for hypertension
Pavanamuktāsana (The Wind Releasing Posture)	Removes constipation, Aids digestion, Tones up the rear muscles
Śavāsana (The body Posture)	Relieve all types of tensions, Relaxes psycho-physiological system, Beneficial within the management of stress and its consequences

4. Kapalabhati

Benefits:

- Helps to beat cough disorders
- Useful in treating cold, rhinitis, sinusitis, asthma and bronchial infections
- Strengthens the systema nervosum

5. Pranayama

Types of Pranayama	Benefits
Nadiśodhana/ Anuloma Viloma Prānāyāma (Alternate Nostril Breathing)	Purifies nadi's; thus nourishes the entire body, Induces tranquillity and helps to enhance concentration. Increases vitality and lowers the extent of stress and anxiety, It elevates cough disorders
Śītalī Prānāyāma	Purifies blood, has cooling effect on body, good just in case of vital sign, relieves indigestion, good for skin and eyes
Bhramari Pranayama	Relives stress; alleviates anxiety, anger and hyperactivity; good for systema nervosum, helps to manage stress, enhances concentration

6. Dhyana

Meditation is an act of continuous contemplation.

Benefits:

- Meditation is the most vital component of Yoga
- Helps to eliminate negative emotions like fear, anger, depression, anxiety, keeps the mind calm and quiet, increases concentration and memory; rejuvenates the entire body and results in self-realisation

7. Sankalpa

8. Santih Patha

Yoga As Exercise

Yoga as exercise is a physical activity which comprises mainly postures, usually connected by flowing sequences, sometimes accompanied by breathing exercises, and frequently ending with relaxation, lying down or meditation.¹²

Relation of Yoga and Exercise: Yoga is a term for a range of traditional systems of physical exercise and meditation in Hinduism. Modified versions of the workout in Hathayoga became popular as a sort of low-impact physical exercise, and are used for therapeutic purposes.¹³

In Unani system of medicine, Riyazat (exercise) is one of the sixteen methods of treatment of regimetal therapy

and is used as a voluntary movement aiming at tanqiya e mawad (removal of excreta), for purification of the body in an individual. It maintains good health and prevents or cures diseases as well.¹⁴

Epidemiological studies show that people who remain physically active get significantly fewer upper respiratory tract infections per year than less-active people. Various studies report that exercise boosts the immune system to function better.¹⁵ Various types of Riyazat are as follows:

1. Riyazat: According to strength three types:¹⁴
 - Riyazat-i-Qaviya shadeeda (strenuous Exercise/Yoga). Vinyasa Yoga
 - Riyazat-i-Motadil (Moderate Yoga).
 - Riyazat-i-Zaeefa (Mild Yoga), bhujangāsana – cobra pose
2. Riyazat: According to duration:
 - Riyazat-i-Kaseera (prolonged Yoga).
 - Riyazat-i-Motadil (moderate duration Yoga).
 - Riyazat-i-Qaleela (short duration Yoga).
3. Riyazat: According to sur'at:
 - Riyazat-i-sariya (rapid and fast Yoga)
 - Riyazat-i-Moatadil (moderate pace Yoga)
 - Riyazat-i-Batiya (slow and delay Yoga)
4. Riyazat: According to strength and Sura'at
 - Riyazat-i-Hasheeha (fast and strenuous Yoga)
 - Riyazat-i-Motadil (Moderate and strenuous Yoga)
 - Riyazat-i-Mutarakhiya (slow and strenuous Yoga)

Yoga for Boosting Immunity

Seasonal diseases are often kept cornered with strong immunity. Yoga postures help strengthen your system by stimulating the thymus. This gland which is found within the thorax region is activated by the chest expansion that happens during the subsequent asanas.¹⁶

Immunity Boosting Yoga Postures

Bhujangasana is the way to boost immunity by practicing Yoga:¹⁶

- Expands the chest
- Improves blood circulation
- Reduces fatigue and stress

In addition to Yoga postures, pranayama or breathing techniques also help in boosting immunity. Moreover, a number of these breathing techniques clear the nasal passage, shielding one from infection.

Nadishodhan Pranayama (Alternate Nostril Breathing Technique):

- Helps open up blocked nose
- Facilitates better flow of oxygen to the lungs
- Practice 7-8 rounds twice or thrice each day to beat cold

Kapalbhati Pranayama (skull shining breathing technique):

- Helps unclog the tract
- Improves blood circulation and uplifts the mind. 2-3 rounds twice each day give renewed energy to assist combat cold.¹⁷

Conclusion

Evidences suggest that many Yoga techniques specifically the Bhujangasana and Pranayama can be beneficial in boosting immunity. Common Yoga Protocol is a humble effort to point out how Yoga can influence our life, attitudes and well-being. In Unani system of medicine also, different types of Riyazat (exercise) can be considered for boosting immunity as prescribed in the classical Unani literature. Today, conviction about Yoga practices towards prevention of diseases, and promotion of health is developing among the masses as well as scientists.

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