

# A STUDY OF STRESS MANAGEMENT USING YOGA

**Mukesh Kumari**

*Research Scholar , CMJ University , Shillong*

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## ABSTRACT

*Stress management is the amelioration of stress and especially chronic stress often for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. Stress produces numerous symptoms which vary according to persons, situations, and severity. These can include physical health decline as well as depression.*

## INTRODUCTION

Walter Cannon and Hans Selye used animal studies to establish the earliest scientific basis for the study of stress. They measured the physiological responses of animals to external pressures, such as heat and cold, prolonged restraint, and surgical procedures, then extrapolated from these studies to human beings.

Subsequent studies of stress in humans by Richard Rahe and others established the view that stress is caused by distinct, measureable life stressors, and further, that these life stressors can be ranked by the median degree of stress they produce (leading to the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale). Thus, stress was traditionally conceptualized to be a result of external insults beyond the control of those experiencing the stress. More recently, however, it has been argued that external circumstances do not have any intrinsic capacity to produce stress, but instead their effect is mediated by the individual's perceptions, capacities, and understanding.

## MODELS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

### Transactional model

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman suggested in 1984 that stress can be thought of as resulting from an –imbalance between demands and resources|| or as occurring when –pressure exceeds one's perceived ability to copel. Stress management was developed and premised on the idea that stress is not a direct response to a stressor but rather one's resources and ability to cope mediate the stress response and are amenable to change, thus allowing stress to be controllable.

In order to develop an effective stress management programme it is first necessary to identify the factors that are central to a person controlling his/her stress, and to identify the intervention methods which effectively target these factors. Lazarus and Folkman's interpretation of stress focuses on the transaction between people and their external environment (known as the Transactional Model). The model conceptualizes stress as a result of how a stressor is appraised and how a person appraises his/her resources to cope with the stressor. The

model breaks the stressor-stress link by proposing that if stressors are perceived as positive or challenging rather than a threat, and if the stressed person is confident that he/she possesses adequate rather than deficient coping strategies, stress may not necessarily follow the presence of a potential stressor. The model proposes that stress can be reduced by helping stressed people change their perceptions of stressors, providing them with strategies to help them cope and improving their confidence in their ability to do so.

### **Health realization/innate health model**

The health realization/innate health model of stress is also founded on the idea that stress does not necessarily follow the presence of a potential stressor. Instead of focusing on the individual's appraisal of so-called stressors in relation to his or her own coping skills (as the transactional model does), the health realization model focuses on the nature of thought, stating that it is ultimately a person's thought processes that determine the response to potentially stressful external circumstances. In this model, stress results from appraising oneself and one's circumstances through a mental filter of insecurity and negativity, whereas a feeling of well-being results from approaching the world with a –quiet mind,|| –inner wisdom,|| and –common sense||.

This model proposes that helping stressed individuals understand the nature of thought—especially providing them with the ability to recognize when they are in the grip of insecure thinking, disengage from it, and access natural positive feelings—will reduce their stress.

## **TECHNIQUES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT**

There are several ways of coping with stress. Some techniques of time management may help a person to control stress. In the face of high demands, effective stress management involves learning to set limits and to say –No|| to some demands that others make. The following techniques have been recently dubbed –Destressitizers|| by The Journal of the Canadian Medical Association. A destressitizer is any process by which an individual can relieve stress. Techniques of stress management will vary according to the theoretical paradigm adhered to, but may include some of the following:

- Autogenic training
- Cognitive therapy
- Conflict resolution
- Exercise
- Getting a hobby
- Meditation
- Deep breathing

- Nootropics
- Relaxation techniques
- Artistic Expression
- Fractional relaxation
- Progressive relaxation
- Spas
- Spending time in nature
- Stress balls
- Natural medicine
- Clinically validated alternative treatments
- Time management
- Listening to certain types of relaxing music, particularly:
  - New Age music
  - Classical music
  - Psychedelic music

## **MEASURING STRESS**

Levels of stress can be measured. One way is through the use of the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale to rate stressful life events. Changes in blood pressure and galvanic skin response can also be measured to test stress levels, and changes in stress levels. A digital thermometer can be used to evaluate changes in skin temperature, which can indicate activation of the fight-or-flight response drawing blood away from the extremities.

Stress management has physiological and immune benefit effects.

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Positive outcomes are observed using a combination of non-drug interventions:

- treatment of anger or hostility,
- autogenic training
- talking therapy (around relationship or existential issues)
- biofeedback
- cognitive therapy for anxiety or clinical depression

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT THROUGH YOGA**

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. All these specific techniques are meant for a specific purpose and they culminate into a higher awareness of what is happening to oneself during stress – emotionally, physically, mentally and energetically. One develops an understanding of each part of the body by being more aware of it. The practice includes paying attention to each and every part and therefore ensures a holistic therapy.

The start of the practice is with becoming aware of what the stressful stimuli is so that one knows what one is fighting. Understanding the enemy is an important factor in combat and similarly in a understanding the factors that cause stress can help you in deciding how it needs to be tackled. Yoga enables and empowers you to control the natural and immediate reactions to a stressor. With practice the psychological responses can also be mastered. This means that the previous reactions that put the body in an alert or alarm mode do not take over as soon as a stressful situation occurs.

And this leads to a situation wherein irrespective of the challenges you face, you remain calm, composed and capable of tackling the situation with a level head. Stresses, almost all are victim of this drastic term. People from all occupations are facing stress in their life in one way or the other. In this article I would like to summarize the causes and cure for stress through natural therapy called –YOGA. But before coming to that point we should have clear understanding of what exactly the stress is. Stress is usually a mental pressure exerted due to fatigue or excessive work. It is also caused from worrying about the work or happenings in the past, present or future. Suppose there is a businessmen exporting his products to several countries, his business is doing fine and growing but somehow a situation comes and he finds his business on decline though there might be some cause for this and it could be short lived making his business to bloom once again, but within this short span the person develops stress which may lead to severe mental hazards.

In the modern world we face stress in every sphere and every step of our life, whether we are in schools, colleges, offices etc. Students face stress due to exams, serviceman face stress due to huge pile of pending work etc. As a result people often practice medications like taking sedatives, narcotics and tranquilizers (medicines to cure anxiety) which calm the mind but in future it creates serious other maladies.

But still there is a therapy which is purely natural and is considered to be the best weapon against stress and that is –YOGA. Yoga is the ancient mantra for sound health and also to retain juvenility to a great extent. It has been practiced by several Rishi-Munis in ancient India and now has become a major concern among the modern genre too.

So back to stress management, Yoga provides a unique way of managing stress through Prayanama (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 pace, 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, in-fact 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.

Finally Yoga has and 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.

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