

## **YOGA: BLESSINGS FOR WOMEN**

<sup>1</sup>Swami Devika, <sup>2</sup>Sharma Anita, <sup>3</sup>Tripathy Sasmita, <sup>4</sup>Pali Vibha

<sup>1</sup>MD Scholar, Department of Swasthvritta and Yoga, N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India,

<sup>2</sup>HOD, Department of Swasthvritta and Yoga, N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer, Department of Swasthvritta and Yoga, N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India.

### **ABSTRACT**

Women have prodigious exquisite and complex body. Women are primary caretakers of children and elders. She performs multiple roles as the daughter, wife, mother, homemaker, wage earner are physically and mentally quite exacting. As a woman she might share some common health related problems with men, such as diabetes, thyroid, hypertension, but because of her special reproductive nature, she is at risk of some distinctly female disorders. There are certain health problems that specifically affect women at different stages in their lives and require special treatment. That special treatment for women can be *yoga*. *Yoga* is not only physical activity, but much more like a science of life. It is the oldest system of science in the world for personal development, where it is necessary to put equal focus on the body, mind and soul. Practicing *yoga* can help to prevent the severity of many ailments that specifically affect women, by providing a form of treatment directed at the basis causes. This article may inspire women and motivates them to practice *yoga* in order to help themselves in all aspects of life.

**Keywords :***Yogasana*, Yoga for women, Hormonal imbalance.

**INTRODUCTION:** Women are pioneers of nation. Indian culture attaches great importance to women. They are the key to sustainable development and quality of life in the family, but the sad thing is that women today are not able to understand themselves as a miracle and so tend to treat themselves rather mechanically, without the deeper knowledge of life. She keeps neglecting her own health. It's a challenge for every woman to decide whether or not she wants to take responsibility for her own well being<sup>[1]</sup>.

According to World Health organization (WHO), here are ten of the main issues regarding women's health, a matter of concern-<sup>[2]</sup>

1. **Cancer-** The latest global figures shows that around half a million women die

from cervical cancer and half a million from breast cancer each year.

2. **Reproductive health-** Responsible for one-third of health issues for women between the ages of 15 to 44 years.

3. **Maternal health-** Almost 300000 women died from complications in pregnancy and childbirth.

4. **HIV**

5. **Sexually transmitted infections**

6. **Violence against women**

7. **Mental health-** Depression is the most common mental health problem for women and suicide a leading cause of death for women under 60.

8. **Non communicable diseases-** In 2012, some 4.7 million women died from non communicable disease like obesity,

harmful use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol and road accidents.

**9. Being young-** About 13 million adolescent ages (under 20) give birth every year. Complications from those pregnancies are a leading cause of death for those young mothers.

#### 10. Getting older

Out of these ten causes, maximum causes can be prevented and cure by the practice of *yoga*.

*Yoga* means *yoke/union*; uniting the individual self (*jiva*) with the divine consciousness (*brahman*). The practice of *yoga* aims at overcoming the limitations of the body<sup>[3]</sup>.

*Yoga* teaches us that the goal of every individual's life is to take the inner journey to the soul. *Yoga* offers both the goal and the means to reach it.

A message by *B.K.S. Iyengar*-<sup>[4]</sup>

"In one way, *yoga* is the golden key for golden health. But health is not just physical fitness. There are seven stages of health: physical, physiological, mental, intellectual, conscious, conscientious and divine. When all seven stages of health are in harmony in a person, then I say he is a worthy human being."

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

1. To spread awareness among women, towards their health.
2. To explain the importance of *yoga asanas*, for women's well being.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS-

The whole article is based on literary review collected from classical textbooks on *Yoga*, modern textbooks and journals. Books by *B.K.S. Iyengar*, have been referred for describing methods and uses of various *asanas*.

#### ***Yoga for women-***

Women have a gift to take care of everything else before they take care of them-

selves and they tend to push things intended for them forward for a later date, but with *yoga* a women will learn to face herself and stay present.

A regular *yoga* practice will make her more flexible, which in the long run may remove back pain, stiffness, depression and simultaneously improve her self-esteem. Her body will get strong and flexible, like a temple where she can age with grace<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### **Menstruation-**

Menstruation is not an ailment, but it can sometimes cause discomfort. When menstruating, inversions and standing poses should be avoided, but forward bending practice can be perform, as they control the flow of blood<sup>[6]</sup>.

The following poses are beneficial-<sup>[7]</sup>

- ***Titliasana (Bound angle pose/butterfly)*** - it opens up the groin and allows the lumbar to rest the areas that usually hurt during menstruation pains.
  - ***Sputa baddha konasana***- It improves the blood circulation and opens up the hips and groins.
  - ***Sputa virasana***- many women have issues with their bowel movements during menstruation. This pose aids the digestion, blood circulation and energizes the legs that tend to feel heavy during the period.
  - ***Shashankasana***- This is a restorative pose that lengthens the lumbar spine. It releases tension in the gluteus muscles, where a lot of tension accumulates during menstruation.
- Other *asanas* that can be helpful during menstruation<sup>[8]</sup>
- *Dandasana*
  - *Adhomukh swastikasana*
  - *Paschimottanasana*
  - *Virasana*
  - *Utthanasana*

- *Setubandhsarvagasana*

## **Menstrual pain-**

Cramps in the pelvic region just before or during menstruation, are caused by contractions of the uterus while it sheds its lining. Following poses should not practice during menstruation; it should be practice only between menstrual periods [9]-

- *Salamba sirshasana*
- *Salamba sarvagasana*
- *Halasana*
- *Vipruttikarni*

## **Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)-**

This is a condition that occurs 3-4 days before menstruation and is relieved by the onset. The symptoms of PMS include mood swings, abdominal cramps, lower backache and aching legs.

- *Shavasana*
- *Makarasana*
- *Balasana*

These are the three simple relaxation postures, which eases the PMS. The gentle inversion of head, neck and torso relaxes the back muscles, thus easing low back pain, a common pre menstrual complaint [10].

Other poses which are beneficial in PMS are- [11]

- *Dhanurasana*
- *Chakrasana*
- *Urdhvamukha shavasana*
- *Padangushthasana*
- *Janushirshasana*

## **Menopause-**

The cessation of the menstrual cycle, usually between the ages of 45-55 years, can occur abruptly or after a series of irregular periods. Menopause triggers hormonal changes and may cause sweating, hot flushes, depression, insomnia and mood swings.

*Yoga* can reduce the hormonal imbalances that occur during menopause. *Yoga* soothes the issues that are often experienced by women during this transitional period [12].

**1. *Svanasana (Downward facing dog)* -** This pose stretches the entire backsides of the legs and the gluteus muscles. The blood flows to the brain and the pose also strengthens the heart by calming the heartbeats. This pose is said to increases self-esteem and to carefully stimulate the nervous system, calms the mind. It counteracts brittleness in the bones in hand, wrists, arms and shoulders and it prevents night sweats and hot flashes.

**2. *Ardha chandrasana (Half moon)* –** This pose rotates the spine, which strengthens the entire spine and increases flexibility. It can correct imbalances in the shoulders and reduce sciatica issues. The uterus is stimulated and the blood circulation in the stomach improves.

**3. *Bhujangasana (Cobra pose)* –** This *asana* strengthens the pelvic floor muscles, stabilizes the spine and increases the circulation in the back muscles. Both the spine and the nervous system are activated positively.

**4. *Upavistha konasana-*** This pose stretches out the backside of the thighs and the hips and it also improves circulations in the hips, strengthens the pelvic floor muscles.

Other *asanas*, beneficial during menopause [13]-

- *Parvatasana*
- *Dandasana*
- *Virbhadrasana*
- *Vrikshasana*
- *Padmasana*

## **Pregnancy-**

*Yoga* can be of great value during pregnancy, even for beginners, who will find most of the practices well within their capacity. For successful pregnancy and delivery emphasis should be placed on the development of the following areas <sup>[14]</sup>—

- **Stomach muscles-** Strength in the abdominal region will ensure that the baby is carried well, assisting proper development. During delivery these muscles are most important in pushing the child from the womb. The important *asanas* for this area are—
  - *Supta vajrasana*
  - *Shashankasana*
  - *Ushtrasana*
  - *Matsyendrasana*
  - *Shakti bandha series*
- **Spine-** A strong, healthy spine is necessary for the proper functioning of the nervous system and general flexibility. A strong spine will prevent the drooping of shoulder often developed during pregnancy because of the extra weight being carried. The practices most recommended for the spine are—
  - *Supta vajrasana*
  - *Marjariasana*
  - *Vyaghrasana*
  - *Ardhamatsyendrasana*
  - *Paschimottasana*
  - *Bhujangasana*
  - *Surya namaskar*
- **Pelvis-** A relaxed, flexible pelvic area makes for easy childbirth. Most useful poses in this respect are—
  - *Marjariasana*
  - *Shashankasana*
  - *Vyaghrasana*
  - *Matsyendrasana*
  - *All squatting poses*
  - *Siddha yoni asana*

• **Back muscles-** The extra weight of the child will also put a great strain on the back muscles and added strength in this area are a great advantage. Beneficial poses for back muscles are—

- *Bhujangasana*
- *Paschimottasana*
- *Halasana*
- *Sarvangasana*
- *Shashankasana*
- *Supta vajrasana*

Sitting in cross legged *asana* such as *Sukhasana*, *swastikasana*, *ardha padmasana*, *padmasana* or *siddha yoni asana* is recommended throughout. These avoid circulation problem in the legs and swelling of the ankles that frequently develops in later pregnancy and after sitting for long periods of time in chairs. In the final months, sitting cross legged helps to reduce the natural sensation of body heaviness.

The beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> month marks the time to stop *asana* involving strenuous upward stretching or violent stomach contractions.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> month both forward bending *asana* (like *paschimottasana*) and extreme backward bending *asana* (like *ushtrasana*) become increasingly difficult. *Supta vajrasana* & *squatting asana* are to be avoided from this time if there is any tendency to premature delivery.

#### **Prolapsed uterus-**

This condition occurs when the muscles and ligaments of the pelvis become weak and results in the uterus slipping out of position. It can be caused by age, obesity or frequent childbirth. The poses which give strength to pelvic floor muscles can be helpful for this condition and they are <sup>[15]</sup>—

- *Salamba sirshasana*
- *Viprilla dandasana*

- *Suptta virasana*
- *Supta padangusthasana*
- *Dandasana*

**Stress:** Studies shows that young women (20-30 years) often feel stressed out and that they put high expectations on themselves to be good at many things. Yoga is a good tool to use to find calm and ease within yourself when it feels like the world is spinning out of control. A little bit of stress might even be stimulating, but prolonged stress can cause psychological and physical damage. Beneficial *asanas* for this condition are<sup>[16]</sup> –

- ***Naukasana (Boat pose)*** – This pose strengthens the back, the legs and the core and it is said to aid digestion and soothe stress.
- ***Markatasana (Spinal twist)*** – Tension in the back, the hips and the shoulders are alleviated in this pose.
- ***Halasana (Plow pose)*** – *Halasana* said to relieve fatigue, stress and stress related headache. Also aids all throat related issues and back problems and aid sleep at night.
- ***Matsyasana (Fish pose)*** – This pose increases blood flow to the face and strengthens lung capacity through the opening of the chest. Fish pose is said to aid stomach issues and to relieve tension in the neck and the shoulders. It is said that in order to become emotionally whole we need to open up our chests and mind.
- ***Gomukhasana (Cow face pose)*** – This pose relieves the tension and facilitates a free flow of *prana* (life force). *Gomukhasana* is also said to stimulate the will and inner power.
- ***Shavasana (Corpse pose)*** – The body is supposed to relax and at the same time your mind is awake. Staying in this resting

pose for 5-10 minutes allows your body to recharge and energize.

**DISCUSSION:** Women naturally experience several periods of hormonal imbalance throughout their lifetime, including during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breast feeding, and menopause. Hormones are chemicals that are produced by glands in the endocrine system. Hormones are important for regulating most major bodily processes, so a hormonal imbalance can affect a wide range of bodily functions. Every woman will experience natural periods of hormonal imbalance and fluctuations at particular points in their life.

Women are at more risk of developing different types of hormonal imbalance disorders than men because they have different endocrine organs and cycles.

Progesterone and estrogen are the main hormones in female body; imbalance in these hormones causes various disorders like Poly cystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), PMS, stress, anxiety, depression, uterus prolapsed, DUB etc.

Specific *yoga* poses can help to balance the hormones. *Yoga* focuses on breathing which has a stimulating and beneficial effect on endocrine system. Proper function of endocrine glands means balanced and maintained level of hormones. So, *yoga* can be a priceless solution for the problems which a woman has to suffer in her whole life. Practice of *yoga* can help a woman in the various challenging stages of her life with repetition and regularity. The practice of *yoga* will be ideal for women at any age. *Yoga* brings balance to the mind and nourishment to the soul. That is why women should not consider *yoga* as another chore on their overloaded schedule but as a necessary activity that will help

them to handle their other obligations optimally.

**CONCLUSION:** A woman has to take care of herself. In *Bhagvad geeta*, it has been described that “*yoga* is the journey of the self, through the self and to the self”. From adolescence to motherhood, menopause and old age, a woman undergoes many changes in her life. *Yogasanas* can offer relief for women from major mood swings that lead to disharmony and imbalance in their lives.

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**Corresponding Author:** Dr Devika Swami, MD Scholar, Department of Swasthvirita and Yoga, N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College, Raipur, C G , India, Email: devikaswamy309@gmail.com

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