

## YOGA FOR PHYSIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

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### Abstract

It has been thoroughly researched and well established that adolescence is a stage of great change, tension and confusion. There is an urgent need for the researchers to devise methods, techniques and strategies to counter the rather turbulent effects of adolescence, more so the Indian researchers, since our country has the majority number of them. In this juncture, an age old system that is of Indian origin, 'Yoga' has been found to be an effective technique in not only countering the negative effects but also in stimulating positive growth during this stage. This paper summarizes some of the numerous benefits of this world renowned and scientifically acknowledged science of Yoga, highlighting the changes at the physical, psychological, social and moral dimensions.

**Keywords: yoga, adolescence, psychological development, physical development**

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## Introduction

Yoga an ancient system originated in India is in fact a way of living! It is a comprehensive methodology evolved by the ancient seers, which embodies physical, psychological, moral and spiritual dimensions of human life. Yoga is an advanced science with the strength of rigorous theoretical framework supported by scientifically proved practical techniques. Its miraculous benefits for health, concentration, will power, stress management, personality development, human values, interpersonal relations and spiritual evolution are being highly appreciated now by all sections of the society at the international level too. Due to recent advances in Science and Technology, the lifestyles of the modern people have drastically changed to such an alarming extent that, this very lifestyle being adopted is leading to innumerable health problems, mental stresses and strains, family problems and social tensions and pressures. These problems/challenges are affecting all sections of the population including children and youth who are the pillars of tomorrow. Teaching children the time tested techniques of yoga will enable them to develop healthy life and integrated personality.

### Adolescence (10-19 years)

India has the highest population of adolescents in the world numbering more than 243 million, who account for almost 20 per cent of the country's population. The *Reproductive and Child Health programme* mentions adolescents as being between 10-19 years of age. Students belonging to 6 to 10 classes are considered as in the period of Early and Middle Adolescence.

Adolescence is defined as a phase of life characterized by rapid physical growth and development, physical, social and psychological changes and maturity, sexual maturity, experimentation, development of adult mental processes and a move from the earlier childhood socio-economic dependence towards relative independence (*Planning Commission*, 2001). In India apart from the regular stress and strain characteristic to this age, there is heavy academic and social pressure on school children that is resulting in negative emotional states and more internalizing problems (Verma, Sharma, & Larson, 2002). This is leading to increase in mental disorders including depression and suicide. Sharma, Grover and Chaturvedi (2008) found that

about 15.8% of adolescents reported having thoughts of attempting suicide, while 5.1% had actually attempted suicide.

Proper adjustment in this period is crucial for leading a healthy and successful adult life. This is also the age during which major *life skills* need to be taught apart from regular teaching in basic and physical sciences and languages. As rightly pointed out by the World Health Organisation: 'one of the most important commitments a country can make for its future economic, social, and political progress and stability is to address the health and development related needs of its adolescents' (WHO, 1997).

### **Yoga for Adolescent School Students**

Adolescence is a unique period in the course of life, as it represents a critical developmental window in terms of implementing healthy behaviour leading to psychosocial adjustment and well-being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004; WHO, 2001). Introducing yoga in this age group will result in control and prevention of several physical and mental ailments.

Recognizing this fact the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) strongly recommended school children's participation in yoga as essential for their physical and psychosocial development and also for improving stamina, fine and gross motor skills and dexterities, self-awareness and control, and coordination. Yoga has thus become an integral part of Health and Physical Education that has been a compulsory subject up to the secondary school stage since 1988 (NCF, 2005). NCF made it clear that as a core part of the curriculum time allocated for games and for yoga must not be reduced, or taken away under any circumstances. (p. 57). Similarly SCERT of Andhra Pradesh in their Position Paper on Health Education and Physical Education highlighted that physical activity including Yoga, contributes not only to the physical development of the child but has positive impact on psycho-social and mental development as well. However yoga is not being given due importance in the school curriculum nor its contribution to the health and overall development of the child been adequately acknowledged.

## Research findings

Yoga contributes to not only the physical development of the child but also has a positive impact on psychosocial, emotional and mental development as well. Yoga practice contributes to the overall development of the child and various studies have shown that it contributes to flexibility and muscular fitness and also corrects postural defects among school children. (Gharote, 1976; Gharote, Ganguly & Moorthy, 1976).

In addition it plays an important role in improving cardio-vascular efficiency and helps to control and reduce excessive body fat while contributing to the overall physical and health related fitness (Bera, 1998; Ganguly, 1989; Govindarajulu, Gannadeepam & Bera, 2003; Mishra, Tripathi & Bera, 2003). Apart from contributing to physical fitness, yoga also contributes to improving learning, memory and dealing with stress and anxieties in children. (Kulkarni, 1997; Ganguly, Bera & Gharote, 2003).

The Yoga components of Asana, Pranayama including mudras and bandhas, Kriyas and Concentration techniques result in balanced *physical* and *psycho-social* development. Pranayama techniques increase brain use and develop sharpness in thinking. The Relaxation and Meditative techniques of yoga instil mental discipline and composure that is essential for stress coping and suicide prevention. The **general benefits of Yoga Practices** in brief are given below:

- Yoga promotes balance, flexibility, fitness coordination, memory, concentration and strength.
- The asanas bring stimulation within the body making their muscles and bones strong which gradually helps in increasing height.
- Yoga uses slow and fluid movements which bring awareness to the muscles that are used in practicing different postures.
- Yoga is also shown to improve children digestion and aid the elimination of toxins and aids blood circulation.
- It improves the power of concentration and focusing by developing brain power, intellect and cognitive abilities.

- It helps them to cope with stress and different emotions by training them to negate the effects of the competitive life the child is forced to live, serving as stress inoculation.
- Develops their creativity, imagination and calmness
- Helps in building their confidence and self esteem

### Specific Benefits of Yoga Practice for Adolescents

- **Attention Improvement** – Early adolescent age group are less focused and easily disturbed. Yoga helps improved attention capacities.
- **Body Flexibility** – Regular yoga practice increases body flexibility keeping it fit and healthy.
- **Concentration Improvement** – Most of the yoga practices result in increased attention levels improving concentration abilities that help in turn improve grasping capacities.
- **Creative and Analytical Thinking** – Pranayama especially aids in stimulation of brain cells that are otherwise underutilized. This results in heightened mental capacities.
- **Hormonal Balance** – Yoga practices have an impact on the endocrinal system of the body resulting in hormonal regulation during this stage of puberty.
- **Human Values Development** – The yogic personality training helps in fostering basic human values for healthy social and moral development.
- **Increased Oxygen Consumption** – Pranayama especially increase oxygen intake and lung capacity.
- **Increased visual health** – Yoga kriyas and concentration techniques help increase eye muscular strength and increase vision.
- **Integrated Personality Development** – Regular practice of yoga asanas, pranayama, kriyas, concentration, and relaxation techniques help develop physical and mental health. Yogic personality training aids in moral and social growth resulting in overall development of the students.
- **Interpersonal Relationships** – Increased levels of tolerance and patience, learning effective communication techniques help in improving interpersonal relationships.
- **Memory Improvement** – Due to heightened concentration and increased coordination between both hemispheres of the brain memory skills are improved.

- **Motor Coordination** – Practicing yoga helps the students to increase body awareness, develop control and gain command over them.
- **Physical and Mental Stamina** – Regular yoga practice increases physical and mental stamina. Dullness, tiredness and fatigue are reduced. Alertness and sharpness is increased.
- **Problem Solving Capacity** – Due to clarity in thinking and lesser conflicts due to stress endurance problem solving capacity is increased.
- **Proportionate Body Growth** – Due to yoga there will be regulation of appetite, sleep, bowel movements and other bodily functions resulting in proportionate body growth.
- **Social Responsibility** – Yogic personality training instills a sense of social responsibility in the students and enable them lead a well adjusted life in the society.
- **Strengthened Immune System** – Yogic kriyas remove impurities in the body which no other system of medicine can do. Due to strong physique and stamina the immune capacity of the body increases.
- **Strengthening of muscles and body parts** – Yoga asanas strengthen the muscles and body parts making them elastic and healthy. The postural defects of the students will also get corrected.
- **Stress Endurance** – Relaxation techniques reduce tension and anxiety levels of the students. As a result the stress is reduced and even during stress provoking situations they can handle with balance and composure.

## Conclusion

To excel in today's competitive world, adolescent student has to learn to leap over the barriers existing in one's physique and mind. Yoga training brings out the excellence in each student, by enabling him or her to leap over these barriers by learning skills that enable the development of an integrated personality and learning the powerful yoga techniques which will enhance their learning capacities! The other benefits of yoga are development of the social and moral fabric of the adolescent who is rather in a turbulent period. Thus regular practice of yoga instills discipline, vitality, sharpens the intellect and aids in transformation of personality by working with both physical and mental imbalances.

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