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Mountain pose (Parvatāsana)

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Cobra pose (Bhujangāsana)

Mountain pose (Parvatāsana)

Horse riding pose (Ashwa sanchalanāsana)

Hand to feet pose (Pada hastāsana)

Hands raising pose (Hasta utthanāsana)

Hands together in prayer pose (Pranamāsana)

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WHAT IS YOGA THERAPY FOR HEALTH & HEALING: A DAILY PRACTICE

The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word “yug” meaning – union of body-mind-spirit. In yoga practice health is defined as the balance and union of body-mind-spirit. Metaphorically in cyber language the body is hardware, mind is software and spirit is the programmer. The programmer is “I” (“Self”) and I program my mind the software to control my physical body the hardware. I am the cause and I am the cure of all my diseases.

Yoga is a philosophy, the *Patanjali Yoga Sutrā* contains 196 aphorisms, dealing with how to control the mind and a practice, the *Patanjali “ashtanga yoga”* or “eight limbs of yoga”, is a stepwise practice to achieve self-realization or union of body-mind-spirit. During the practice for self-realization, it got infused with *mudrā-s* (hand gestures), *bandha-s* (spiritual locks), *kriyā-s* (the physical cleansing of the body), and acupressure. Yoga also incorporates the philosophy of *Āyurveda* (the science of longevity), particularly its daily routine (*Dinacharyā*) causing some health benefits. All of these elements combined became “*Yoga Chikitsā*” or Yoga Therapy. Yoga Therapy is primarily the adaptation of the yoga practices for patients with various chronic ailments.

A daily practice of yoga will lead to “*Rogir Chikitsā*” (treatment of disease), secondary prevention or therapeutic medicine of a disease and *Swāsthya Rakshma* (maintenance of health), primary prevention or preventive medicine. It also helps in the rehabilitation of a disease with better management of the disease, less pharmaceutical support and better quality of life. In addition to bringing back our health, the practice of yoga therapy causes wellness in all realms: physical-mental-spiritual. Physical wellness provides strength and stamina, but mental and spiritual wellness provides healing.

The therapeutic effects of yoga are achieved through meditation, the seventh limb of yoga, which tames the limbic system or our emotional brain. Meditation quiets the mind, “*chitta vritti nirodha*” (control the chattering of mind). The mind has thousands of thought processes, the majority are repeat thought processes. Meditation enters the gaps in between the thought processes, and slowly starts making the gaps bigger and reduces the repetition of thoughts till they disappear to quiet the mind. To practice meditation, the physical body should be relaxed through holding the *āsana* poses for a long enough time, so it can go through the three stages, namely, like the first stage, *ārambha* or at beginning of an *āsana*, the second, *sthiti* or (stillness), and the third, *visharjan* or (profound relaxation) inducing a state of “*Sthiram* (stillness) *Sukham* (happiness) *Āsanam* (poses)”. In that state the smooth muscles covering bronchioles, the tubes which carry air to the lungs relaxes, so the breathing becomes effortless three-part prolonged breathing, (*Dirgha Shwās*) with exhalation longer than inhalation to quiet the mind.

A daily one-hour practice of yoga therapy consists of 25 minutes of *āsana-s*, 25 minutes of *prānāyāma* and 10 minutes of meditation which will bring all the therapeutic benefits. This DVD includes more than 25 minutes of *āsana-s*, so one can do different *āsana-s* for different days but the practice of *prānāyāma* and meditation remains same for daily practice.

HOW TO PRACTICE YOGA THERAPY

Yoga Therapy for health and healing should be a daily practice.

A set of *āsana-s* (poses) and *prānāyāma-s* (breathing practices) should be done daily to achieve relaxation and flexibility of body and mind followed by specific *āsana* and *prānāyāma* for specific disease.

It should be done on an empty stomach or at least 4 hours after a large meal.

Best time to practice yoga therapy is in the morning, following the morning rituals, which include:

- After waking up, first drink a comfortable amount of water (a half to two glasses), at room temperature, preferably from copper vessel.
- Brush teeth, scrape tongue with a scraper, and wash face.
- Perform Jal Neti (nasal washing) with neti pot
- Proper elimination of urine and stool

Gently relax your body by staying in a pose for an extended period of time with eyes closed and continuing “yogic breathing” (exhalation twice the inhalation). Staying in a pose, during first phase the muscles contract (*ārambha*); in the second phase muscle contractions become steady (*sthiti*) and muscles start relaxing; and in the final phase the muscles surrender (*visharjan*) resulting in profound relaxation. In Yoga Therapy, one needs to continue to stay in a pose through all the three phases.

Stretch in a pose with “comfortable discomfort,” proper stability, and effortless breathing.

Pain, unsteady pose, and breathing difficulty, are signs of over stretching.

Do not overstretch during *āsana* practice.

Do not try for physical alignment initially, it will come with relaxation and flexibility.

Do not compete with others, compete against yourself.

Prānāyāma (breathing practice) should be done seated on the ground or on a chair, keeping the spine straight up, steady mind, and completely relaxed with effortless breathing.

Do not do *prānāyāma* standing up. It causes altered sense of consciousness with unsteady gait.

Prānāyāma should be done with proper method (*vidhi*), timing (*samay*), determination (*sankalpa*) and attainment (*siddhi*).

Over stretching on your own, or with the assistance of another person, or with the use of yogic props, may lead to yoga injuries.

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