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YOGA FOR GERIATRIC CARE

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ABSTRACT

Geriatric care is the care of elderly population's health to prepare them for healthy ageing. The main objective of the geriatric care is to spread health awareness among the elderly in order to promote healthy ageing. This objective only can achieve by preventing and giving better solutions to manage age related health problems. It is widely documented that regular physical activity in elderly can help in delaying and preventing a wide range of health problems including cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes and ¹some types of cancer.

Yoga is one of the scientific and popular lifestyle practice considered as the integration of mind, body and soul as well as a medium level of body and mind exercise with full awareness. So, it is extremely beneficial for elderly people. Yoga enhances strength, flexibility, immunity and helps to slower down the process of ageing by preventing various diseases. Different yogic texts describe how various yogic kriyas, asanas and pranayamas help to maintain good health even in old age. These texts also say, if one has to follow yama and niyamas as mentioned in the texts strictly and regularly, then he definitely experience an positive impact on his social, emotional and spiritual health in his old age.

So in this paper I have discussed all the aspects of geriatric care through yoga and try to enumerate how healthy ageing in old age can be possible only by incorporating yoga in day to day life.



KEYWORDS : Ageing, Geriatric Care, Yoga, Mind, Medicine, Yoga Therapy.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing is a natural and irreversible phenomenon. Now the world's population is ageing in an increased pace. Virtually every country in the world is experiencing growth in the number and proportion of older persons in their population. According to data from World Population Prospects: The 2019 revision, one among six people in the world will be over age 65 (16%) by the end of 2050. In 2018, for the first time in history, persons aged 65 or above outnumbered children under five years of

¹ World Health Organization. PA for Health. More Active People or a Healthier World: Draft Global Action Plan on PA 2018–2030. 2018. Available online: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf?ua=1> (accessed on 1 March 2019).

age globally. The number of persons aged 80 years or over is projected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050.

Today the whole world is more concerned about the declining health of the aged population due to prevalence of chronic diseases and disabilities among aged population. The decline of bodily function that comes with the ageing process may be delayed through suitable physical activity like exercise, yoga, aerobics or walking. Charak Samhita states that old age begins at 60 years. But due to sedentary life style, faulty food habits and stress, maximum population of the world is going to become a member of grey world. Ayurveda says, "*jarā* (old age) is a *swabhāva bala pravṛttavikāra* (normal process of ageing). With *swasthavṛtta pālana* (adhering perfect healthy life style) it is attained at proper age i.e. *kālaja jarā*. But due to a *parirakṣā kṛta* i.e. improper care and regimen, premature ageing or *akālaja jarā* sets in"². Therefore, the present society is now more concern how to promote healthy ageing among the elderly population. The need of the hour for the society is elderly care, which is known as geriatric care in medical science. It is now treated as a special branch in medicine. The main aim of the geriatric care is to maintain a healthy function of the senior citizens by detecting the diseases at an early stage and developing the awareness to prevent the deteriorated health of the elderly population.

Yogic lifestyle is one of the scientific and popular ways of healthy life. It is a moderate form of exercise of body and mind with full awareness which enhances strength, flexibility, immunity power and helps to slower down the process of ageing by preventing various diseases. So, regular practice of *yogic* disciplines with awareness at the physio-psychological level develops an integration of body, mind and soul. Yoga plays a vital role to prevent most of the age related health problems. Even at higher age, one can remain active by adopting *yogic* way of life in his day to day life. He does not depend on others for his daily care. Our beloved Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi is the best example in this context. It is an ancient discipline designed to bring balance between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the individual. Different *yogic* texts describe how various techniques of *niḥāra karma*, *āsana*s and *prāṇāyāma* help to maintain good health even in old age. Yogaphilosophy says, it is the flexibility of the spine not the number of years that determine the person's age. By adhering to the *yogic* life style in day to day life one can control the aging process. It helps a person to give lustre to the body and remove the tension from the physio-psychological aspects of his existence. It also helps to reduce the wrinkles from the face and skin. One can strengthen the abdominal muscles due to old age, enhance the digestive power and develop the proper blood circulation throughout the body even in the old age. Regular practice of different *yogic* principles develops a positive attitude with graceful and peaceful life during the old age. Maharshi Patanjali states that *yoga* comprises eight aspects or limbs of *yama* (universal ethics), *niyama* (individual ethics), *āsana* (physical postures), *prāṇāyāma* (breath control), *pratyāhāra* (control of the senses), *dhāraṇā* (concentration), *dyāna* (meditation), and *samādhi* (transcendental state of mind). Following step by step all the limbs of *yoga*, one can achieve a blissful, contented life in his old age. Though *yoga* is a spiritual science, now in this modern age it is treated as a complementary therapy to medical science. Yoga therapy aims to promote health and self-awareness for the purpose of enlightenment. It has various influences on health; its greatest particularity is that it is accessible for individuals from all age groups and of different physical levels. Yoga is particularly beneficial in the old age, because it enhances immunities and flexibility and prevents pain and injuries. Increased muscular strength, flexibility, range of motion, energy, relaxation, sense of well-being, decreased pain, improved sleep quality, reduction of stress and control over physiological parameters are the presumed benefits of yoga therapy.

Yoga can address various elderly problems like poor balance, impaired mobility, reduced strength and flexibility. Though *yoga* is an ancient spiritual discipline, it has been now used clinically for therapeutic purpose and recognised as an alternative medicine to manage various physio-psychological disorders. Several research works have been done to know the clinical applications of *yoga* and there are number of publications now available on various research journals. In literature there are many

² ISSN: 2456-0057 IJPNPE 2019; 4(1): 2202-2204 © 2019 IJPNPE, Geriatric healthcare through yoga, Shiv Jakhar

articles on the impact of *yoga* to resolve various conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, breast cancer, low back pain, migraine, epilepsy etc.

There are several physical and subtle factors in the yogic life style that would influence healthy ageing. Calorie restriction is widely accepted as the only method to enhance the longevity by reducing the physical manifestation of ageing. Yogic diet, itself is formulated in such a way that it automatically restricts the intake of calories. In Hatha Pradipikā³ Swatmaram has described that, with regular practice of *mūlabandha*, when *prāṇa* and *apāna* unites, the physiological need for food decreases and urine and stool are decreased with greater awareness. Even an old person becomes young by constant practice of *moolabandha*. Metabolic rate increases with the intake of less quantity of food and the consumption of less calories. It results into less elimination and less degeneration process. There are so many methods and practices prescribed in our ancient *yogic* texts and scriptures that with the regular practice of yogic techniques one can improve vitality and enhance the metabolic rate. It reduces hunger and thirst, improves blood circulation to each and every part of the body and enhances the memory power. Paul Galbraith has described some of the anti-ageing effects of *yoga* in his book on 'Reversing Ageing' as follows:

- Yogic practices have positive influence on all the important factors of long life, i.e., all the endocrine glands, spine, brain, and each and every internal organ in the body.
- It helps to increase the resistance to disease by developing immune power to fight against several diseases from common cold to severe cancer and helps to gain health.
- One can increase vitality, positive energy within the body, by eliminating the energy blockage from the different parts, especially from the joints.
- Feelings of wellbeing takes place by preventing premature ageing and extend sexual vitality to old age.
- Regular practice of inverted postures helps to reverse the effects of the gravity and result is the wrinkle free face, body and naturally glowing look.
- Natural ageing process lowers down daily physical activity for both men and women slowly and gradually. But regular practice of yogic life style boosts mood and energy levels by helping one to become more active.
- There is amazing calmness at the physio-psychological level.

With awareness one has to start the practice of *yogāsanas* from simple to complex body postures. These *āsanas* massage, stretch and squeeze the major muscle groups and simultaneously have an isometric contraction and relaxation effect on various muscles to come to a static posture. Incorporating *yogic* life style in daily life, an elderly person can gain muscle strength, flexibility, and range of motion and cardio-pulmonary endurance. It mainly works on increasing body awareness and breath awareness, which will lead to improvement of balance in older adults.

Various research journal and *yogic* text describe the different benefits of *yoga* on elderly people. Yoga is a combined study of body, breath, mind, intellect, memory and ego. Therefore, by practising *yogic* techniques regularly in the old age one will get a huge benefit for physical health as well as mental health. It allows one to think more clearly and develop a positive outlook. Being an art of right living *yoga* helps one to live in the present moment. Enhancing overall well-being *yoga* allows energy to flow freely throughout the body and gives a sense of positivity as well as a better quality of life. Sage Gheranda has described in the first chapter of Gheranda Samhita that *yoga* has detoxifying qualities and helps a person to achieve firmness, steadiness, calmness and lightness in body and mind.⁴

Yoga works on the holistic principles of harmony and unification. According to medical scientists, yoga therapy is successful because of the balance created in the nervous and endocrine

³Swami Swatmarama, Hatha Yoga Pradipika Chapter 3, Verse 65

⁴Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Gheranda Samhita, p.30

systems which directly influences all the other systems and organs of the body. Regular practice of *āsana* maintains the physical body in an optimum condition and promotes health even in an unhealthy body. Through *āsana* practice, the dormant energy potential is released and experienced as increased confidence in all areas of life⁵. Breathing deeply and slowly the practitioner can have the better use of his lung capacity. It helps him to get more oxygen and expel the carbon sufficiently. *Yoganidrā* and *Śavāsana* help a practitioner to get relaxation and have sound sleep with calmness in mind. In this way on the regular basis one has to practice specific *yogic* techniques to have geriatric health.

Subtle exercises (*sūkṣma vyāyāma*) of anti-rheumatic group of *āsanas* help to remove energy blockage from the joints by reducing stiffness from each and every parts of the body. They develop the awareness of the body's movements and open up all the major joints and relaxes the muscles of the body. Practices of *Padāṅguli Naman* (toe bending) and *Goolf Naman* (ankle bending) develop flexibility in the joints of toes as well as the ankles. *Jānu Naman* (knee crank) rejuvenates the joint by activating the healing energies. *Titāli Āsana* (butterfly pose) develop the flexibility in the hips and remove tiredness due to long hours of standing and walking. *Muṅṅikā Bandhan* (hand clenching) and *Maṅṅibandha Naman* (wrist bending) are beneficial for the related joints by relieving tensions. *Skandha Chakra* (shoulder socket joint movement) and *Greeva Saṅchālana* (neck movement) relieve the tension, heaviness and stiffness in the head, neck and shoulder region. Abdominal group of *āsanas* help to improve digestion by eliminating the energy blockages in the abdominal region. *Pādottānāsana* (legs raised pose), *Pāda Chakrāsana* (leg rotation) and *Pāda Saṅchālana* (cycling) are good for hip and knee joints. Strengthens abdominal and lower back muscles. *Pawanmuktāsana* (leg luck pose) improves digestion by strengthens the abdominal muscles and massages the intestines and internal organs of the digestive system by releasing trapped gases. It strengthens the back muscles and tones the muscles of the arms and the legs. *Naukāśana* (boat pose) stimulates the digestive organs with the whole muscles of the body. It eliminates the nervous tension and bring about a deep relaxation. *Chakki Chalanāsana* (churning the mill) is excellent for toning the nerves and organs of the pelvis and abdomen. Practice of *Śaśāṅkāśana* (moon pose / hare pose) is very effective to relieve of back pain. It also regulates the blood circulation and calm down the nervous system. *Bhujāṅgāsana* (cobra pose) loosens the lower back and develops flexibility by stretching the muscles in the chest, abdomen and shoulders I increases flexibility and strengthens the spine. *Shalabhāsana* (locust pose) gives a massaging effect to the abdominal organs, improve digestion and helps to decrease back pain.

The practice of *Jala Neti* (nasal cleansing with water)⁶ removes mucus and pollution from the nasal passages and sinuses, allowing free flow of the air. It helps prevent and manage respiratory disorders and maintains good health of the ears, eyes and throat. Practice of *Nāṅṅī Śodhana* (psychic network purification) purifies the psychic channels and helps for the balanced flow of breath in both nostrils. It has profound effects by stimulating the calmness and balance throughout the body and mind. *Bhrāmarī Prāṅṅyāma* (humming breath) relieves stress and cerebral tension, and helps in alleviating anger, anxiety and insomnia. It induces a meditative state by harmonizing the mind and directing the awareness inwards and creates a soothing effect on the mind and nervous system.

Yoga Nidrā (psychic sleep) is an effective form of relaxation with the rejuvenation of each and every cell of the body. One hour of *yoganidrā* practice is equivalent to four hours of sleep. It is a sleep with full awareness. During the practice awareness of the subconscious and unconscious dimensions occurs spontaneously. One attains a state of complete relaxation by turning the awareness inwards, away from outer experiences. If the consciousness can be withdrawn from external awareness, it becomes very powerful and can be applied in many ways. It is quite relevant to develop the memory, increase knowledge and creativity or transform one's nature positively. In this way yogic relaxation helps the elderly people to overcome many of the specific psychological difficulties related to old age, i.e., feeling of insecurity, loss of memory, lowered self-esteem, depression, unmet dependency needs, loneliness, boredom. The elderly persons who habitually transform their psychological difficulties into

⁵ Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, pp.5-11

⁶ Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, pp.489-492

physical symptoms and complaints associated with their advancing age need to take the guidance of an experienced *yoga* specialists.

Diet plays an important role to manage various problems during the old age. According to the classical text books it is better to eat natural food and in moderation. Contrary to popular belief, yoga does not say that a vegetarian diet is essential, although in the higher stages of practice it is recommended. At meal times it is advised to half fill the stomach with food, one quarter with water and leave the remaining quarter empty. Eat only to satisfy hunger and not so much that a feeling of heaviness or laziness occurs. Eat to live rather than live to eat⁷. The elderly persons who are observing *yogic* life style with the intake of proper diet on the regular basis are more capable of recognizing and managing their problems, maintaining good health and lead a confident and independent life style.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Dash M et al (2001) found that practising yoga regularly improves hand grip strength in both normal persons and persons with rheumatoid arthritis, though the magnitude of improvement varies with factors such as gender and age.
- The effects of Yoga and Ayurveda on geriatric depression were evaluated by Krishnamurthy MN et al (2007) in 69 persons older than 60 who were living in a residential home. The depression symptom scores of the Yoga Group at both 3 and 6 months decreased significantly. It was recommended that an integrated approach of Yoga including the mental and philosophical aspects in addition to the physical practices was useful for institutionalized older persons.
- A exploratory study on the effects of a gentle Iyengar Yoga program on gait in the found that Yoga practice may improve hip extension, increase stride length, and decrease anterior pelvic tilt in healthy elders, and that Yoga programs tailored to elderly adults may offer a cost-effective means of preventing or reducing age-related changes in these indices of gait function (Di Benedetto M et al 2005).
- A study done by Bharshankar JR et al in 2003 revealed that there is evidence that Yoga reduces the age related deterioration in cardiovascular functions.
- A study done by D. Kadachha, N Soni, A. Parekh found that *yogasana* are effective in improving balance in elderly individuals at the end of six weeks program of *yogasana* practice compared to control group. So, it can be used clinically to improve balance in geriatric population.
- In his study Mangesh A. Bankar et al.2013 stated yoga exercises involve stretching and relaxing of muscles causing significant physical and mental exertion resulting in benefits like improved muscular strength and muscle mass which results in increased exercise capacity. Yoga exercises improve joint flexibility, prevent decline in the physical function, and improve the QOL of elderly people.

CONCLUSION

Yogic life style plays an important role to have a healthy and happy life for the senior citizens. It is easily adaptable to the needs of elderly and, most importantly, maintains balance in life. The effect of ageing process slows down with the development of flexibility, mindfulness and positive awareness, relaxation at the physio-psychological level. The integrated approach of *yoga* can encourage the body, mind and spirit to remain healthy and strong. One can manage the effects of many age-related issues. Old age is not a matter of years but a condition of mind. Yoga may not only help to live long but also may help to live independently with confidence. Therefore, incorporating *yogic* way of living in the life style of elderly person one can add life in their old age.

⁷Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha, p.16

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