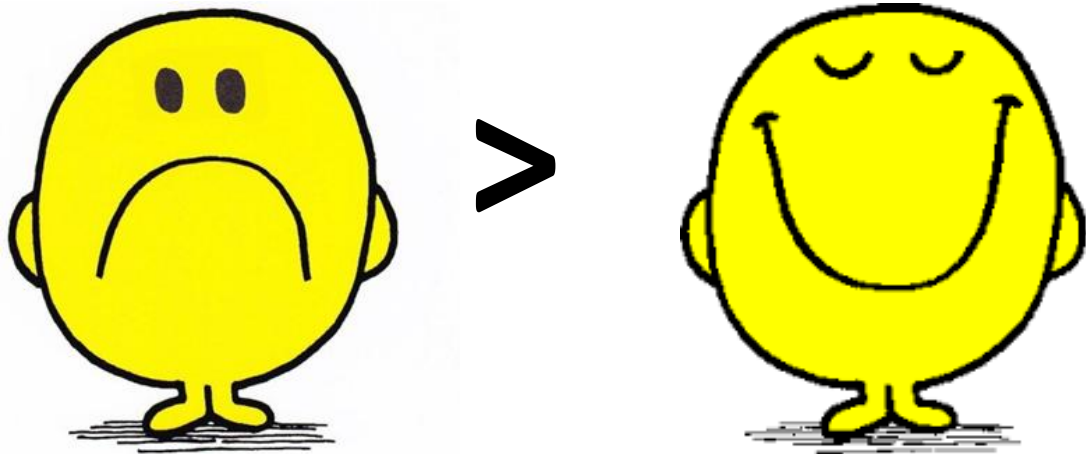


Yoga for Depression



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1. Introduction

In this report we will look at ways in which yoga can help someone suffering with depression.

Depression is a disease of the mind, but as mind/body are intrinsically linked, depression can manifest itself in many physical bodily ailments. In its most severe cases, it can lead one to self-harm and even to suicide. When treating with yoga, we are primarily concerned with activating the heat (or Pingala) properties of the pranic body to eliminate imbalance.

What is the Definition?

The World Health Organisation defines depression as a mental disorder characterised by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness and poor concentration.

Why is it important?

In his opening class, the Doctor Kumadescribed how, in western cultures, cases of depression are rising very quickly, and that it will soon be the most common disease in these parts. As eastern cultures adopt western dietary, social and working practices, it is reasonable to predict that depression will one day be the most common disease in world, unless suitable efforts are made to tackle the causes.

What are the causes?

The causes are plentiful and can be sub-divided into the following categories;

- *Life events*; such as Loss/bereavement, serious physical injury, financial problems, problems in the workplace, bullying, child-birth, menopause, relationship trouble or separation, changes in body image, and as a side effect of drug intake (legal & illegal) / medical treatments.
- *Non-Psychiatric Illnesses*; Infectious diseases, neurological conditions, physiological problems, e.g. Multiple Scoliosis, cancer, hypothyroidism.
- *Psychiatric Syndromes*; Feelings of depression may also itself be a symptom of a deeper mood disorder, such as Major Depression Disorder (Clinical Depression), bipolar disorder or Season Affective Disorder (S.A.D.)

But why are cases of depression on the increase so sharply?

The pace of change in our societies has to be a contributing factor. Our species has evolved gradually over 100,000's years, in harmony with the surrounding environment. However, the changes in agricultural farming brought about by the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th Century, together with continual advances in science and technology have dramatically changed how and where our time is spent (both in work and social activities), and how we communicate with each other. So great is the rate of change that our lives are very different to that of even our closest ancestors. This results in negative characteristics as our species struggles to balance ("adapt, adjust and accommodate") significant changes in a short duration. *For consideration; The rise of the ego. The destruction of the environment/planet. Our disconnection from nature.*

2. Signs and Symptoms

Depression is an affliction of the mind. However yoga teaches us that mind and body are intrinsically linked. When the mind is disturbed, the body too will suffer. Just as there are many causes of depression, so too there are many symptoms which can be sub-divided into 2 components; affective (mood) and physical.

Affective (Mood) Components: Irritability, indecisiveness, pessimism, self-criticism, feelings of guilt, suicide thoughts.

Physical Components: Eating too much, or too little (Resulting in weight gain/loss), Sleeping too much, or too little. (Resulting in reduced energy/fatigue), Digestion problems, Tension headaches, Lack of interest in sex.

3. Diagnoses

Beyond the physical ailments that manifest in the body, depression may only be apparent in a person's mood or actions (or lack of them). And since a depressed person may have a tendency to become withdrawn, this makes diagnoses of mild sufferers difficult.

In the case of a Major Depression Disorder (Clinical Depression) the Beck Depression Inventory (B.D.I.) is a questionnaire used to determine the severity of depression in a patient (over 13 years old). The results of this questionnaire can be used to judge the most effective course of treatment.

Treatments

In western medicine, anti-depressant medication is not now advised to treat depression because of several side effects which are considered to complicate the situation. Most notably is a patient's tendency to become reliant on the medication in the long-term.

Therapy sessions (e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy –C.B.T.) is a preferable course of action. However, a survey of Doctors found that most would recommend exercise as an initial way to treat depression.

4. Complications

A depressed person may lack of enthusiasm to become active for the following reasons;

- A poor diet; unhealthy foods (resorting to comfort eating), erratic eating times, OR a reduction in food intake.
- Sleeping - Over/under sleeping resulting in lethargic lifestyle or lack of energy.
- Mind & Attitude – withdrawn. Non-inclusive. (may struggle in group environment).

Furthermore, once we engage a depressed person in yoga for the first time, we also face the challenge of keeping them engaged so that they are enthusiastic to return to the next class, and the next, and so on.

We must be mindful of our own actions and words during each session. A depressed person may lack the confidence to ask questions about queries that they have with regard to the practice (which would result in a lack of understanding). And things which we might otherwise say to a student in the normal process of building a relationship may be misconstrued and dwelt on after the practice has concluded.

Some suggestions;

A yoga workshop to explain the key points of yoga, what they can expect, and demonstrating a few gentle positions to raise awareness.

A private lesson 1-on-1, preferable in a location where they will feel comfortable but away from the source of their depressed feelings (being mindful that it might be linked to a problem at home).

Practise in a location close to nature to rekindle a connection with mother earth. Whilst yoga advises us to avoid direct sunlight and a drafty environment, the sounds of nature (moving water, birds singing), can be a powerful way of reminding us that we are a part of nature, not separate from it. In our modern lives, living, as most of us do in cities, surrounded by concrete and polluted air, the effects of this change in the environment can be dramatic in lifting the spirits.

The final suggestion is that we, as a teacher, need to create an environment of trust. The changes within that can occur with yoga may result in an emotional release, which may happen at any point and it is therefore of paramount importance that the student knows that they have the trust and confidentiality of the teacher.

5. Developing a Yoga Programme

To strengthen the body and mind, we will focus primarily on;

- Asanas that involve balancing and back bending exercises to;
 - activate and strengthen the systems of the body and to
 - stimulate the lower chakras (particularly Mooladhaara) to promote pranic energy to rise. In particular, we will use the MoolaBandha (slight contraction of the perineum) and an uplifted spine throughout the practices to engage the neuro-muscular system.
- Breathing exercises to increase the Pingala (heat/Sun) prana within the body to bring balance.

Specifically, we shall seek to **avoid forward bending asanas** (where the mind can wander) **and breathing exercises that work heavily on the Ida** (cooling/Moon) **prana**. Practices which withdraw the senses (e.g. shanmukhi mudra) are also advised against.

Case Studies

Two methodologies are prepared here. Both practices should take around 30 minutes. It is recommended that the practices are performed three times daily, before each of the main meals. The stomach should always be empty.

It is assumed that the students are in good physical health and that there are limiting factors are present (e.g. menstruation) except those stated below. If additional limiting factors are present, please follow the advice offered by Indea Yoga® for each specific practice.

Practice A: INDEA® Therapy Series (refer Appendix A)

Case Analysis: 60 year old; suffering with depression due to bereavement. They have irregular and disturbed sleeping patterns. Their fatigue is exacerbating their depressive mood.

The entire Therapy series is suitable for practice as they focus on balancing and back-bending asanas. Expanding/opening the chest region is also beneficial to release tension. A full round may take up to an hour and so individual postures can be selected from the series to create variation. (In the initial stages, it is important to encourage the uptake of regular exercise and this may be more successful if the demands of practicing are not high). Start with slow motions. When the body and mind are ready to accept the changes, then you can proceed with more pace.

Practice B: INDEA® Foundation/Vinyasa Series (refer Appendix B)

Case Analysis: 30 year old; suffering with depression due to financial problems. They have been eating excessively and putting on weight. The recent change in body image is also contributing to the depressive mood.

Begin with the 12-step Surya Namaskara (progressing to 5 rounds of both Vinyasa A and B with practice) to generate heat and movement in the body.

Follow this with a selection balancing and backbending postures from the INDEA® Foundation series. Incorporating some twisting motions to stimulate lower organs/chakras (earth, water, fire).

6. For Further Consideration – Yoga as a way of life:

Cultivating awareness of the following lifestyle choices will assist in a person's state of mind.

Diet: The Bhagavad Gita states, “abandoning Tasamic foods needs to be among the first positive lifestyle changes you make.” Advise the student on the types of Sattvic, Rajasic and Tasamic foods and eating with mindfulness. Eating at regular meal times (breakfast, lunch and dinner) is also advisable.

Sleep: If a student has irregular sleep patterns or insomnia, consider offering advice on consumption of stimulating foods/drinks and activities. Regular sleep patterns will promote good health and assist in the regular routine of practice sessions.

Hydration: Lack of fluid in the body causes headaches, tension and stress. Always ensure a student is mindful of their water intake, especially before and after practice.

Pranic Energy: Stimulating the pranic energy within the body will help to alleviate the depressed mood. The following practices may be adopted under guidance of a trained teacher;

Pranayama:

- Suryabhedana- works on Pingala, with Nasika mudra
- Kapalabhati breathing (also a Kriya)
- Bastrika

Bandhas :

- Uddiyana Bandha (also a Kriya)

Mudras:

- Prana [fire/earth/water] – works on the lower chakras
- Ganesha [Fingers interlocked]- opens the chest region

7. References

Books: Bhagavad Gita
 Aananda Yoga India Teacher Training Course Documents (Levels 1 & 2)

Websites: www.who.int
 www.nhs.uk
 www.yogawiz.com
 www.wikipedia.org
 www.indeayoga.com

Appendix A: PRACTICE A (INDEA® Therapy Series)

Suggested practice time: 30mins, (3 x per day)

A selection of asanas from the series are proposed here to formulate a lesson guide. The numbers relate to the published series guide. See more at: www.indeayoga.com

Joint Movement	Time (mins)	Benefits
1. Movement of toes 2. Ankle rotation 3. Knee rotation 4. Waist rotation 5. Finger movement 6. Wrist rotation 7. Elbow movement 8. Shoulder rotation 9. Neck movement 10. Shitali Tāḍāsanā	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	Balancing And Creating Awareness Of Body
Standing Breathing		
2. Hands In And Out Breathing 3. Hands Stretching Breathing 4. Front And Back Bending 8. Shitali Tāḍāsanā	1 1 1 2	Expanding The Chest Region
Back Movements		
1. Vagra Swasa (tiger) Breathing 2. Śāśhankāsana 3. Bhujaṅgāsana (cobra) Breathing	2 2 2	Backbending with Breathing
Supine Practice		
2. Setubandhāsana (bridge) Breathing 5. Jaṭṭharaparivṛttāsana (abdominal twist)	2 2	Backbending Expanding Chest
Śāvāsana	5	
Total Practice Time	30	

Additional Note.

Moolabandhaengaged (slight contraction of the perineum) and spine uplifted to work on the neuro-muscular system and enable pranic energy to rise in the body.

Appendix B: PRACTICE B (INDEA® Foundation/Vinyasa Series)

Suggested practice time: 30mins, (3 x per day)

A selection of asanas from the series are proposed here to formulate a lesson guide. The numbers relate to the published series guide. See more at: www.indeayoga.com

Surya Namaskara Series	Time (mins)	Benefits
Steps 1. - 12. (x 6 rounds)	7	<i>See Appendix C</i>
Vrksasānā Series		
3. Vrksasānā 8. ArdhaCakrāsana	2 2	Balancing Expanding the Chest
Trikoṇāsana Series		
3. Trikoṇāsana Classical 5. PārśvaKoṇāsana 8. Virābhādrasanā A	2 2 2	Balancing Expanding the Chest Twisting
Cakrāsana Series		
1. Bhujāṅgāsana 12. Setubandhāsana 15. JaṭharaParivartanāsana	2 2 2	Backbending Backbending Expanding the Chest
Ardhamatsyendrāsana Series		
1. Bharadvājāsana A	2	Twisting
Śavāsana	5	
Total Practice Time	30	

Additional Notes.

Moolabandha engaged (slight contraction of the perineum) and spine uplifted to work on the neuro-muscular system and enable pranic energy to rise in the body.

When comfortable with Surya Namaskara, practice 5 x Vinyasa A followed by 5 x Vinyasa B series.

Appendix C: Surya Namaskara

The 12 step Surya Namaskara is a beautiful combination of asana, breath control (pranayama), bandhas, kriyas and mudras. 6 -12 rounds of this can be practiced.

Count	Asana	Breathing
Ekam	Namaskarasana	Inhale + Exhale
Dve	UrdhvaHastasana	Inhale
Trini	Padahastasana	Exhale
Chatwari	EkaPadaPrasarasana	Inhale
Pancha	DwiPadaPrasarasana	Exhale
Sata	SashtangaNamaskarasana	Hold breath out
Sapta	Bhujangasana	Inhale
Asta	Budarasana	Exhale
Nava	EkaPadaPrasarasana	Inhale
Dasha	Padahastasana	Exhale
Ekadasha	UrdhvaHastasana	Inhale
Dwdasha	Tadasana	Exhale