

Attaining Mental Health Through Lifestyle Management

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Abstract: Mental health refers to the proper and balanced intake of intellect, creativity, reasoning, emotionality, mindfulness, initiative. It includes maintenance of mutually rewarding social relationships, and the ability to face challenges and problems without either losing patience or feeling stressed. To ward off any stress related issues leading to mental health, certain measures need to be followed. Either a curative strategy leading to medical prescription works, or else a preventive strategy is employed, wherein yoga therapy, meditation, religiosity and correct dietary intake are suggested in order to improve upon mental health. Yoga therapy is a spiritual discipline, which involves postures and integration of the body movement with breath. Within meditation, the mind is trained to focus on positivity. Religiosity is yet another mechanism to provide inner strength. Within dietary management, focus is upon intake of stress relieving foods such as the ones containing omega3 fatty acids, vitamin B6 and B12. This paper deals with ways and methods of lifestyle management so as to relieve stress and anxiety, and achieve a condition of good mental health in order to cope with life events more effectively.

Keywords: lifestyle management, yoga therapy, meditation, religiosity, dietary intake

I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a state of well being in which an individual realizes his or her own potential in order to cope with normal stress situations of life, and work productively. To attain this goal, a state of wellness is required.

Wellness means taking control of our lives. It asks for a balance between mind, soul and body. Internal well being asks for health, peace and happiness which are attainable by these. Conscious efforts need to be made to attain a stress free lifestyle. This is so because most of the lifestyle disorders are stress related. With a significant increase in the number of working people in private sector and a routine woven with deadlines, stress and strain have become common issues.

Stress is a non specific response of the body to any demand (Selye 1956). It is an individual's response to work related environment. As understood by arousal theory given by Duffy, optimum level of stress is essential for efficient performance, which forms the basis for hectic lifestyles in business houses. At the same time, continuous stressful situations lead to various behavioral and physiological problems such as increased breathing, heart rate and blood pressure, contraction of spleen, peptic ulcer, increased

cholesterol level, and asthma, perspiration, poor digestion, clot formation etc. Psychological problems such as restlessness, fear, anxiety, depression, erratic behavior occur. Stress also leads to hair loss, skin disorders and hastens the process of ageing. Therefore stress not only effects our bodies, but also our personalities. It culminates into depression and a feeling of helplessness. This is a far cry from the state of well being and affects the mind and body.

Here a need arises to cope up with stress and mental ill health. As Pestonjee has given two methods of coping with stress and mental ill health, the first method involves a curative strategy and an intake of medicine and a prescription by a physician, surgeon or a psychiatrist.

The second method involves a preventive as well as a curative strategy of improving the lifestyle through self management.

This can be done by using the following methods:

YOGA THERAPY. This is a perfect lifestyle module to release pent up stress. It steadies the entire body through physical postures and integrates body movement with breath. It is a spiritual discipline and is based on extremely subtle science which brings about harmony between mind and body in order to prevent disease and disorders. It does so by

cleansing the body of toxins and creates antioxidant enhancement. In the process the mind is made to focus positively on activities being done, thus helping the flow of energy. Ultimately a calm internal environment is created which relaxes the body and mind, besides providing self confidence and restoration of normalcy in all systems of human body.

To achieve this state of union of the individual with the supreme self, many a methods have been propounded:

- ✓ Hatha yoga -method of the body.
- ✓ Raja yoga - method of psyche
- ✓ Karma yoga - method of work.
- ✓ Gyan yoga - method of intellect.
- ✓ Bhakti yoga - method of devotion.
- ✓ Mantra yoga - method of phonetics.
- ✓ Tantra yoga - method of psycholinguistics.
- ✓ Laya/Kundali yoga - method of assimilation.

For practicing yoga some techniques are adopted such as asanas, pranayama, yogaAnidra etc. which have immense effects on the personality of the individual.

Here it is seen that yoga therapy functions with three objectives namely promotive, preventive and curative roles. In its promotive role, it can be seen to promote healthy personality development. Personality correlates like self actualization, decreased anxiety and depression, better interpersonal relationships, increase internal locus of control etc. have been reported to be associated with the practice of yoga and meditation. Practitioners of Raj Yoga showed better adjustment and personality organization. Similarly practice of transcendental meditation and TM sidhi programme (followed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi) has shown results of reduced ergic tension, inner directedness, flexibility and a relaxed persona, thus promoting the yoga therapy.

According to Swami Niranjanand Saraswati (1998), yoga deals with the development of human personality which in turn leads to awakening of untapped energy sources within the brain and mind. Yogic techniques help to develop the ability to relax in any situation and under any condition. There are situations when people find it difficult to handle excitement, happiness, depression, sorrow and stress. Under many circumstances lack of harmony and coordination is felt between different faculties of personality. The imbalances in the mind create conflicts which further create psychological problems. Yogic techniques help to relax in such situations. The practice of asanas help in the management of body and health, providing physical balance and harmony. Pranayam mudra and Bandhas are ways in yoga which help to channel the physical forces, providing the opportunity to deal with the manifest mind.

In its preventive role, yoga takes into consideration, both the positive and negative aspects of well being. Providing physical fitness, satisfaction, peace of mind, self efficacy, ego strength, emotional stability and an overall satisfaction are some positive contributors to mental health. Alongside, taking into consideration the negative side of well being implies to physical illness, psychological distresses like anxiety, stress, conflict, insecurity alienation, loneliness and problems related to mental disorders like neurosis and psychosis which are also treated and reduced through yoga therapy.

Focusing upon the curative role of yoga therapy, it is seen that yogic practices are very useful in the treatment of psychoneurosis and psychosomatic illness. It is understood as superior to drug therapy in controlling headaches. Here transcendental meditation a form of silent mantra meditation was seen to record improved health, psychological well being, reduced stress and freedom from painful neuromuscular symptoms. Various problems related to mental ill health such as phobias, tensions, stress, anxiety hypersensitivity etc. were noted to get cured.

Practice of yoga nindra also gave favourable results (Kamakhya, 2004) on P.G. students. It substantially increased the level of sattva guna amongst students. Anulom Vilom pranayama, a practice of alternate nostril breathing also reduced anxiety and depression, thus attaining positive mental health.

Here a special emphasis is required on laughter yoga. It is a natural and fun way to move towards good health and experience feeling of joyfulness. It has the power to unwind the negative symptoms of stress. The secret of laughter yoga is that the body is hardwired with natural reactions, and this leads to hearty laughter releasing hormones and chemicals. Thus several studies confirmed the importance of yogic practices and their usefulness in daily life. A one hour yogic practice was seen to reduce academic stress of students, as it involved various yogasanas, breathing exercises and meditation techniques.

MEDITATION. This is another technique of self management where the mind is focussed on positivity. It is a mind body complementary medicine and creates a deep state of relaxation besides giving a tranquil mind. It helps eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that crowd and cross the mind, causing stress. This not only results in enhanced physical and emotional well being but also gives a new perspective on stressful situations. It builds skills to manage stress, increases self awareness and reduces negative emotions.

Le's Ko (2000) reported that the mental and emotional changes were also witnessed in people practising zen meditation, a therapy to provide peaceful and relaxing experience. It is a Buddhist practise that focuses on awareness through the practice of mediation.

Preksha meditation was also reported to increase ego strength, confidence, self assurance and emotional stability. It is a Jain practice of purifying the emotions and conscious, alongwith realizing own self. Shakti path meditation a process of transmitting spiritual energy from one person to another via touch, word, thought, was seen to reduce anxiety level and even improve emotional stability among B.Ed. students in all socio-economic classes (Singh and Kaur, 2007).

Some studies done with Vipasana meditation, another Buddhist tradition to solve illness showed improved results in psychological parameters like depression, anxiety, coping with stress, personality functioning and emotional stability.

RELIGIOSITY Another coping mechanism is religious faith and belief. It proves to be a means to provide inner strength, hope, happiness, significance and meaningfulness to life (Apgar and Callahan, 1982). It also acts as a protecting cover leading us away from nervous breakdown. It has been observed time and again that often people turn religious when

coping with stressful events. It makes them feel more protected and shielded against difficulties.

Even walking, exercise, deep breathing, pet care and massages help relieve Stress. It is noteworthy that creative expression of dancing, painting, singing help in management of stress.

DIETARY INTAKE. A healthy nutrient intake of stress relieving nutrients such as iron, magnesium, carbohydrates, folic acid, vitamin C, E and B12, potassium, zinc, and omega 3 fatty acids is most helpful. These can be found in the following food stuffs:

- ✓ Yoghurt-It is rich in tyrosine and provides protein and thus increases the neurohormone in the brain which eases stressed nerves.
- ✓ Dark chocolates lowers the stress hormones levels and improves stress related biomedical imbalance.
- ✓ Citrus fruits having natural sugar helps in distressing the mind and add to the energy level.
- ✓ Almonds packed with vitamin B12, vitamin E, magnesium and zinc produce serotonin which helps to regulate mood and relieve stress.
- ✓ Herbal tea. This acts as a relaxant by calming and relaxing our mind.
- ✓ Fish-An abundant source of omega 3 fatty acids, fish, contains important B vitamins such as Vitamin B6 and Vitamin B12. It is noteworthy here that deficiency of Vitamin B12 is also seen to lead to depression. B12 is also one of the most important vitamins involved in the synthesis of happy brain chemical serotonin.
- ✓ Broccoli-It includes folic acid which helps to relieve stress, anxiety, panic and even depression. It is also enriched with fiber content and helpful in treating constipation, which is another side effect of stress.
- ✓ Garlic-Garlic also eases tension and stress and reduces the glucose level in the body. It is a rich antioxidant and helps to restore these antioxidants which in turn soothe our stress levels.

Besides green leafy vegetables, blueberries, bananas, Pistachios, cashewnuts, avocado, milk, flaxseed and starch

rich foods are helpful stress busters. They mimic the effect of fasting and even counterbalance the effect of junk food.

The mind and the body are intrinsically linked. Improvement in physical health will automatically improve mental and emotional well being. Thus it can be concluded that these meaningful activities such as correct dietary intake, along with lifestyle management and inclusion of yoga, laughter, therapy, meditation, creative expressions and religiosity can prove helpful in combating stress and improve mental health in everyday situations.

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