

HEALING THE MIND AND HEART THROUGH BREATH AND MOVEMENT

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➤ **ABSTRACT**

Mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and emotional ups and downs are increasingly common in today's busy lifestyle. Yoga, an ancient mind-body practice, offers a natural and effective way to bring calm, clarity, and emotional balance. This article explores how yoga helps improve mental well-being through its physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation practices.^[1]

➤ **KEYWORDS:** Yoga, mental health, emotional healing, anxiety, depression, pranayama, meditation, mindfulness, stress relief.

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

We all go through emotional highs and lows. Sometimes, stress becomes too much, or sadness lingers longer than it should. In such times, we look for peace, clarity, and comfort. Yoga offers exactly that—not just physical flexibility, but also inner strength and calmness.

Yoga is not only about bending the body, it's about unbending the mind—releasing stress, processing emotions, and returning to a peaceful state. With regular practice, yoga helps individuals manage emotions, feel more stable, and improve overall mental well-being.

➤ **Cause of mental Illness**

Mental illness doesn't have a single cause. It's often the result of many different factors working together — including your life story, family background, emotional experiences, and physical health. Let's explore the common causes of mental illness in simple, human language.

1. Stressful Life Events

Trauma, loss, abuse, heartbreak, or big life changes (like exams, job pressure, or divorce) can deeply affect our mental health.

“When I lost someone I loved, it felt like my world broke — and I couldn't bounce back.”

2. Family History (Genetics)

Mental illness can run in families. If your parents or close relatives had depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder, you may be more likely to have it too.

“It's like diabetes — if it's in the family, you may need to take extra care.”

3. Childhood Experiences

Neglect, bullying, lack of love, or growing up in a toxic home can silently leave emotional scars — which show up later in life as anxiety, fear, or depression.

“I grew up feeling unsafe — now I panic over small things.

4. Chemical Imbalance in the Brain

Our brain has natural chemicals (like serotonin, dopamine, and GABA) that affect mood. If these

chemicals get out of balance, it can lead to mental health issues.

“It’s not just in the mind — sometimes the brain’s wiring needs support too.”

5. Loneliness and Isolation

Humans are social beings. When we feel disconnected, unsupported, or alone for long periods, it can lead to sadness, anxiety, or worse.

“Even though I was surrounded by people, I felt like nobody really saw me.”

6. Addiction and Substance Abuse

Alcohol, drugs, or even excessive screen time can change brain function and worsen or trigger mental illness.

“I started using it to feel better — but slowly, it started controlling me.”

7. Chronic Physical Illness or Pain

Long-term diseases like cancer, diabetes, or chronic pain can wear down your emotional strength, leading to depression or anxiety.

“Fighting pain every day also drains your spirit.”

8. Lack of Sleep and Poor Lifestyle

Skipping sleep, unhealthy eating, no exercise, and digital overload all affect how we think and feel. Over time, it can lead to mood swings, stress, and burnout.

“I thought I was just tired — but I was actually mentally exhausted.”

➤ Types of Mental Illnesses

Mental illnesses are health conditions that affect how a person thinks, feels, behaves, or interacts with others. They are just as real and serious as physical illnesses, and they can be treated and managed with proper support. Below are the major types of mental illnesses, explained in simple, human language.

1. Anxiety Disorders

People with anxiety disorders feel excessive fear, worry, or nervousness, even in everyday situations. Common types: Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, and Phobias.

“Even simple things like going to a shop feel overwhelming sometimes.”

2. Depressive Disorders

These involve deep, long-lasting sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest in life. Types: Major Depression, Persistent Depressive Disorder, and Seasonal Affective Disorder.

“I feel tired all the time and nothing excites me anymore.”

3. Bipolar Disorders

Causes extreme mood swings, from high-energy (mania) to deep lows (depression).

“Some days I feel unstoppable, and other days I can’t get out of bed.”

4. Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders

Involve distorted thinking, hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren’t real), and delusions.

“I sometimes hear voices no one else hears — it feels scary and confusing.”

5. Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders (OCD)

Involve repetitive thoughts (obsessions) and actions (compulsions), like checking things repeatedly.

“I know it doesn’t make sense, but I feel I have to keep checking if the door is locked.”

6. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Occurs after a traumatic event, causing flashbacks, nightmares, and constant fear.

“Even loud sounds remind me of the trauma — like I’m back there again.”

7. Eating Disorders

Involve unhealthy behaviors related to food and body image, such as anorexia or bulimia.

“I can’t stop thinking about my weight and what I eat.”

8. Personality Disorders

Affect the way a person thinks, feels, and relates to others. Deep-rooted patterns of behavior. Types include Borderline, Narcissistic, and Antisocial Personality Disorders.

“I struggle to keep stable relationships or understand my emotions.”

9. Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Begin in childhood and affect learning, behavior, or social skills.

Examples: ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

“I find it hard to sit still or focus, even when I want to.”

10. Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders

Involve addiction to drugs, alcohol, or activities like gambling, often causing harm.

“I know it’s hurting me, but I can’t stop — I feel trapped. The World Health Organization in its International Classification of Disease (ICD) has classified the major psychological disorders with their signs and symptoms. Table 4, shows this classification as per ICD-11.

Classification of major psychological disorders as per ICD-11

➤ How Yoga Helps the Mind and Emotions

- Reduces Stress and Anxiety: Breathing practices and gentle poses help activate the relaxation response.
- Improves Mood and Confidence: Certain poses and breathwork increase serotonin and dopamine (happy hormones).
- Calms Racing Thoughts: Meditation helps train the mind to stay present and focused.

- Strengthens Emotional Awareness: Yoga increases mindfulness and allows us to observe emotions without reacting impulsively.^[5]

➤ Common Yoga Practices for Mental and Emotional Health

Practice	Emotional/Mental Benefit
Asanas (Postures)	Release physical tension and relax the nervous system
Pranayama (Breathing)	Regulates emotions, calms anxiety, energizes the mind
Meditation	Builds self-awareness, reduces overthinking, brings calm
Chanting/Mantra	Balances vibrations in the body and soothes the mind

➤ Helpful Yoga Poses and Techniques

- Balasana (Child's Pose): Deeply calming and grounding.
- Sukhasana with Deep Breathing: Good for emotional centering.
- Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose): Opens the heart and relieves mild depression.
- Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing): Balances both brain hemispheres.
- Bhramari Pranayama (Humming Bee Breath): Relieves tension, helps with sleep.
- Mindfulness Meditation: Builds emotional strength and reduces overthinking.

➤ How Yoga Improves Mental Health: The Human Side of the Science.

1. Breath Brings You Back to the Present

When we are anxious or stressed, our mind races into the future or clings to the past. Yoga teaches deep breathing (*pranayama*) — which brings our awareness to the present moment. This calms the nervous system and gives a sense of peace.

“When I breathe deeply during yoga, I feel like I’m giving my mind a break from overthinking.”

2. Releases Tension Stored in the Body

We don’t just feel stress in our mind — we feel it in our shoulders, neck, back too. Yoga stretches and relaxes the muscles, releasing physical tension that’s tied to emotional stress.

“After a good yoga session, my body feels lighter — and so does my mood.”

3. Balances Brain Chemicals Naturally

Yoga boosts the feel-good chemicals in the brain: serotonin (lifts mood), GABA (reduces anxiety), and endorphins (natural painkillers and happiness boosters). With regular yoga, your brain slowly starts feeling more

balanced.

“I didn’t need coffee or scrolling through my phone after yoga — I already felt uplifted.”

4. Teaches You to Respond, Not React

Through mindfulness and meditation in yoga, we learn to observe our thoughts and emotions without reacting immediately. This gives us emotional strength — we don’t get triggered as easily.

“Instead of snapping when I’m upset, I now take a breath and respond calmly.”

5. Builds Self-Love and Awareness

Yoga isn’t about comparison — it’s about connection with your own self. It gently teaches you to listen to your body, accept your emotions, and love yourself even on bad days.

“I used to be hard on myself. Now I treat myself with more kindness — like a friend.”

6. Improves Sleep and Rest

Stress, anxiety, and depression often disturb sleep. Yoga helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system — the one responsible for rest and repair. This leads to deeper and more restful sleep.

“Now I don’t just fall asleep faster — I stay asleep peacefully.”

DIET AND NUTRITION FOR MENTAL HEALTH

सुखाहारविहारस्ययुक्तवैष्टस्यकर्मसु।
सुक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्ययोगोभवतिदःखहृत् ।

The one, whose diet and movements are balanced, Whose actions are proper, Whose hours of sleeping and waking up are regular, and Who follows the path of meditation, Is the destroyer of pain and unhappiness.

Kinds of food	Food items	Effects
Satvik food	Fresh vegetables, whole grains, milk, nuts, fruit juice, herbal items, dairy products, seeds	Cheerfulness, will power, peace, optimistic, positivity, good immunity, clarity of thought, bliss
Rajasik food	Spicy, meat, fish, excessive salty or sweet, oily foods, high calorie food, coffee, stimulant foods	Restlessness, anxiety, anger, irritability, impulsiveness, highly energetic, competitiveness, high risk-taking behavior
Tamasik food	Fragmented foods, bakery, sausage, pastry, preserved foods, alcohol or any kind of drink, pickle, jam, ice cream, candy or chocolate	Negativity, dullness, pessimistic, depressed thoughts and mood, poor immunity, low confidence, highly suggestible, irritable

➤ DISCUSSION

Yoga offers much more than just physical flexibility; it is a gentle yet powerful practice that helps us find emotional balance in our busy, often overwhelming lives. Through consistent practice, many people notice they feel calmer, less anxious, and more capable of handling everyday stress. This happens because yoga combines breath, movement, and mindfulness, creating a safe space where we can connect with ourselves and process our emotions without judgement.

While medication and therapy are important for many mental health conditions, yoga can work alongside these treatments to support healing. It helps release tension from the body, slows down racing thoughts, and encourages us to live in the present. Many practitioners have shared that yoga helps them respond to situations more calmly rather than reacting out of fear or frustration. This shift can improve relationships, build resilience, and encourage a kinder attitude towards oneself.^[7]

However, it is important to remember that yoga is not a replacement for medical treatment for mental health disorders. It is a complementary practice that empowers individuals to take an active role in their emotional well-being, promoting self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a deeper sense of inner peace.

➤ CONCLUSION

In today's fast-paced world, mental health challenges are common, but tools like yoga can help us navigate them with more strength and calmness. By using breath, movement, and meditation, yoga supports emotional healing and mental balance in a natural and accessible way. It allows us to build a gentle routine that nurtures both the mind and body, helping us face life's ups and downs with a clearer mind and a steadier heart. As we continue to seek ways to improve mental well-being, yoga stands as a powerful, holistic approach that can benefit people of all ages and backgrounds.

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