

Benefits Of Yogic Breathing For Chronic Lung Disease

WHAT IS YOGA AND YOGIC BREATHING?

Yoga is widely known as a type of exercise focusing on postures and relaxation techniques that aid in stress relief and flexibility. However, it involves more than just physical poses, and was originally developed with the intention of enriching the body, mind and spirit. An important element of yoga is pranayama, or yoga breathing, particularly as yoga considers breath to be the source of our vital life force.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to be a global facilitator of health and wellness through access, education and advancement of Traditional & Complementary Medicine (T&CM). The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that lifestyle-related diseases (or non-communicable diseases) are responsible for more than 70% of deaths worldwide each year.

Knowledge represents empowerment. By sharing this evidence-based, peer-reviewed research, we aim to support everyday people to take ownership of their wellness, by making informed decisions and choices in conjunction with their health professional.

How This Study Could Help You Manage Chronic Lung Disease

The WHO estimates that on average, a person dies as a result of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) every 10 seconds. This study examines the effect of pranayama (breathing exercises used in yoga) on helping people with COPD manage their symptoms, and is titled:

EFFECT OF YOGA BREATHING (PRANAYAMA) ON EXERCISE TOLERANCE IN PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE: A RANDOMIZED, CONTROLLED TRIAL.

You can read the full study here: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5610410/

Why Is This Study Important?

Worldwide, it is estimated that almost one-third of a billion people suffer from COPD, with low-income populations being among the worst-affected. There is no cure for COPD, but the default medical treatment is by using bronchodilators, a type of pharmaceutical medication. Bronchodilator therapy is not effective for all patients, as well as being costly and potentially causing side-effects.

Typical symptoms of COPD include breathlessness and difficulty with physical exertion, often described as 'exercise intolerance'. Pulmonary rehabilitation, which involves therapeutic techniques to improve exercise tolerance, is a reliable drug-free approach to reduce symptoms. However the cost of medication, the expense of structured rehabilitation programs, as well as accessibility and other reasons, make such rehabilitation impractical for many people suffering from COPD.

This makes it desirable to find a simple yet effective alternative to pulmonary rehabilitation, which can provide practical benefits for people suffering from COPD. Besides having a verifiable therapeutic effect, such an alternative would need to be easily and inexpensively taught by people without extensive medical training.

What Does This Mean For My Wellness?

The results of this study suggest that pranayama exercises alone may have significant benefits for people suffering from COPD. This means people who are unable to participate in a pulmonary rehabilitation program, or for whom other forms of yoga and exercise are too strenuous, may still have a non-pharmaceutical option for managing their COPD symptoms.

Although quality of life was not the focus of this study, the participants reported improvements in their general sense of wellbeing, and were more physically active. These results suggest that regular pranayama practice may possibly have additional wellness benefits for people with COPD, beyond improvements in lung function.



How Does This Relate to Yoga?

Pranayama can be easily practised by people in their own homes, without the associated cost and complexity of a pulmonary rehabilitation program. Unlike some of the other exercises taught as part of pulmonary rehabilitation, pranayama techniques incorporate conscious relaxation, which may also have beneficial effects on anxiety related to COPD.

In 2017, researchers affiliated with the University of Vermont in the US published the results of a randomised, double-blind, controlled pilot study investigating whether pranayama could improve exercise tolerance in 43 people suffering from moderate to severe COPD. The study built on previous research which suggested that pranayama exercises may provide benefits for COPD, but contained limitations in that they did not conclusively show whether pranayama could improve the specific measures these authors were evaluating.

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Key Findings About the Effects of Yogic Breathing on Chronic Lung Disease

- The researchers found that 12 weeks of pranayama, practised an average of 12 minutes a day by the participants, may improve the key measure of exercise tolerance they were investigating, which was the maximum distance a person could walk within six minutes. The results of this study also suggested pranayama may offer benefits for other measures of lung function.

- The authors noted an improvement in quality-of-life scores for the people practising pranayama, and found that they were spending more time on physical activity. It was speculated that this additional activity and improved sense of wellbeing attributed to pranayama exercises might have contributed to the improvements in lung function.

- One important finding was that these non-specialised researchers were able to successfully teach the pranayama technique to people with COPD.

Disclaimer: The above does not constitute medical advice, and as with any exercise or wellness program, please consult your medical professional before commencing yoga breathing exercises.

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References

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