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Concept and role of *Ashtanga Yoga* in health promotion w.s.r. to definition of health by World Health Organization

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ABSTRACT

The World Health Organization's definition of health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." *Ashtanga* actually means "eight limbs." As a system of both physical and spiritual health maintenance, there is an underlying philosophy to *Ashtanga Yoga* that is divided into eight parts. It is a part of *Rajayoga* and *Hathayoga*. These both are part and parcel of each other. In modern era, for all round personality development *Ashtanga Yoga* is very useful. As personality is a characteristic of behavior cognition and emotional pattern it needs to be developed at multidimensional level. According to Bhagwadgita it is said that *Yoga* is a state of balance between mind and body i.e. *Yoga Samatwamuchyate*. According to *Patanjala Yoga Sutra* it is explained as *Yoga Chittavrittinirodha* i.e. Cessation of mental modifications. It has many components that are important to improve social health also. In this article we will try to analyze role of *Ashtanga Yoga* in the three dimension of health told by Who. It also has its significance in women health.

Key words: WHO Health Definition, Ashtang Yoga, Physical and Social Health, Women Health.

INTRODUCTION

Ashtanga Yoga (the eight limbs of *Yoga*) is Patanjali's classification of classical *Yoga*, as set out in his *Yoga Sutras*. He defined the eight limbs as *Yama* (abstinences), *Niyama* (observances), *Asana* (postures), *Pranayama* (breathing), *Pratyahara* (withdrawal), *Dharana* (concentration), *Dhyana* (meditation) and *Samadhi* (absorption). It has 8 limbs of *Yoga*.

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Eight Limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga*^[1]

1. *Yama* (Principles or moral code)
 - *Ahimsa* - A principle of non-violence
 - *Satya* - A principle of Truthfulness
 - *Asteya* - A principle of non stealing
 - *Brahmacharya* - Continence / Celibacy
 - *Aparigraha* - A principle of non-hoarding or non possessiveness
2. *Niyama* (Personal Disciplines)
 - *Shoucha* - Purity
 - *Santosh* - Contentment
 - *Tapa* - Endurance
 - *Swadhyaya* - Self study
 - *Eshwar Pranidhan* - Dedication
3. *Asana* (*Yoga* Positions or Yogic Postures) - A stable and comfortable posture which helps attains mental equilibrium.

4. *Pranayama* (Yogic Breathing) - Extension and control of breath.
5. *Pratyahara* (Withdrawal of Senses) - A mental preparation to increase the power of mind.
6. *Dharana* (Concentration on Object) - Concentration of mind on one object and its field.
7. *Dhyan* (Meditation) - With drawing mind from all external objects and Focusing it on one point and meditating on it.
8. *Samadhi* (Salvation) - State of Super bliss, joy and merging individual consciousness in to universal consciousness. Union between Jivatman and Paramatman. Union of Shiva and Shakti in Sahasrar Chakra (the top of the head). Realizing the Bramhan (pure consciousness) or Realization of God is the ultimate achievement of Human Birth

History of Ashtanga Yoga

Yoga has its roots about 5000 years BC as described in Vedic Philosophy and Tantras. Patanjali, great sage composed this path into a Darshan (Philosophy) in his Book *Patanjal Yoga Sutra*. In which he has formulated *Yoga* as a Eight Limbs or Eight Fold path.

Physical Benefits of Ashtanga Yoga

Ashtanga postures can offer great physical benefits by engaging all areas of your body. Improving flexibility and building muscle are just the start: by incorporating a strong breathing flow into your practice, you are also improving cardiovascular strength and lowering your blood pressure. Building muscle will probably be the first benefit you notice from *Ashtanga Yoga*, as many of the *Asana* feature challenging positions utilizing arm strength to maintain balance. These poses put an emphasis on your upper body strength as well as your core, as they must be engaged when holding these positions.^[2]

Improved flexibility is another wonderful benefit. By putting your body into these strenuous positions, you are also pushing your body to stretch in new ways. *Yoga* pushes the body's flexibility, but *Ashtanga* is particularly challenging. With each class offering a

physically demanding session at least a few times a week, you will notice your flexibility improve in a matter of weeks. If you are someone who has always felt their flexibility was lacking, *Ashtanga Yoga* might be the most efficient and healthy way to achieve improvements.

Breathing plays a central role in *Yoga*-it is the connector between the physical and mental actions being performed in a session. Having a consistent breathing flow gives you a centering point when it comes to meditation, but it also fuels your body with the oxygen needed to perform each posture. During a session, your lungs are constantly working to provide a consistent breathing flow, and this is what makes *Yoga* such a great cardiovascular exercise. By developing a strong breathing technique, you are training your body to efficiently pump blood to all extremities. This has many health benefits such as improving your heart's function, strengthening blood vessels, and lowering blood pressure. These are critical elements of our health that we might not consider unless our doctor has already addressed them as needing improvement. Incorporating *Yoga* into your everyday life is a great way to preemptively improve and maintain your health.^[3]

Mental Benefits of Ashtanga Yoga

It might not be as easy to notice improvements with your mental strength, but this is another fantastic benefit of *Ashtanga Yoga*. Once you have learned the sequence of postures utilized in your *Ashtanga* class and have determined how your body feels in each pose, you can start to focus on the mental aspects of the practice. This is when you truly start to look inward and reap the mental benefits. The patience, attention, and determination developed in the classroom will help you improve your *Ashtanga* practice, but they can also help improve aspects of your everyday life.^[6]

Meditation is the act of stilling the mind. By removing yourself from the external forces present around you, you can focus on yourself. Through meditations you can build many great mental skills, from managing stress and anxiety to developing decision-making

capabilities. The way in which we typically rush through our busy lives does not allow for dedicated time to reflect and focus on ourselves. *Ashtanga Yoga* is a great place for you to incorporate some time for reflection into your life; a place where reflection is not only allowed but encouraged. Stress and anxiety are forces that influence our lives more than we realize. If you let stress and anxiety overcome your life, they can have a lasting influence on your mental and physical health. Whether they inhibit your ability to operate within your own life or they negatively reflect on those around you, the relationship we have with stress and anxiety is something we should spend more time understanding.^[4]

Women and Yoga

A woman's body is unique, for it is associated with transitions of puberty, the fertile years, menopause and post menopause. Through *Yoga* a woman can maintain a balanced and harmonious reproductive system and may lead to greater vitality and radiant wellness. A *Yoga* practice has the potential to support positive transformation through these natural cycles.

Regular practice of certain specific postures provides the body with necessary strength to face the contractions to ease labor, speed recovery and restore energy levels. Post natal practice of *Yoga* helps to restore firmness in the muscles.^[5]

Practicing *Yoga* regularly can prove very beneficial for women. *Yoga* can provide innumerable benefits to women like improving reproductive system, helping in natural child birth, giving complete workout to the body.^[6]

Benefits of Yoga for Women

- Gives complete workout to the body
- Enhances endocrine system
- Helps to adjust reproductive organs
- Improves metabolism
- Helps to care various health disease
- Helps to get rid of stress
- Beneficial for natural child birth

- Fitness and weight management
- Stress reduction and weight management
- Pain management
- Pregnancy
- Start Young - Adolescence age is an ideal time to begin the practice of *Yoga*. It will not only help to develop a healthy and regular menstrual cycle but will also help to deal with psychological changes
- Be careful in your middle ages - Middle age for a woman comes with complexities. *Yoga* plays the role of a healer for a new set of physical changes in women. During the menopausal phase helps to balance hormones keep weight under control, avoid medical complications and maintain healthy digestive system.
- A daily dose is important - A daily *Yoga* routine can be modified and adapted to suit a women's changing needs in each phase of life helping her to achieve peace of mind and bodily poise

CONCLUSION

Ashtanga Yoga teaches patience and persistence, as it may take several years to learn the postures of the Primary Series. Once the Primary Series is mastered, the Intermediate Series is taught one posture at a time.

Ashtanga Yoga is practiced six days a week, excluding Saturday. Practice is also suspended on the New Moon and Full Moon and the first three days of a woman's menstruation.

Ashtanga Yoga is a gateway into the practice of hundreds of *Yoga* postures. Everyone can practice *Ashtanga* and with a regular practice, the benefits are abundant. This potent form of *Yoga* is a transformational experience physically and mentally.

Many people do *Yoga* for physical benefits. However, *Yoga* is a way of life. It is about the union of body, soul, spirit, and mind. If you want to reap all the benefits and achieve that balance, consider practicing one of the oldest forms of *Yoga*, *Ashtanga Yoga* in Poway or neighboring areas.

Ashtanga Yoga focuses on muscle training and develops physical strength. Practicing *Ashtanga* rejuvenates your body, making it stronger, toned, more flexible and controlled.

The opening series includes lots of contortion-esque poses and many of them require core and arm strength. Your stamina and endurance will gradually improve and you'll have stronger core muscles. Another advantage of *Ashtanga* is that you can move through the practice at your own pace and level

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