

Yogic Treatment of Insomnia : An Experimental Study.

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Introduction :

In the conflict-torn world of today, most of us are under constant strain caused by insecurity, uncertainty, disappointment, hurry and worry. When this strain assumes unmanageable proportions it gives rise to some psycho-somatic disorders such as hypertension, insomnia, acidity, rheumatoid arthritis, gastric ulcer, and so on. Drug treatment for these disorders is effective only temporarily. Moreover, the drugs have undesirable side-effects.

Yoga techniques like asanas, pranayama and meditation are based on the principle that the body acts on the mind and vice-versa. So these techniques should be naturally and ideally suited to the treatment of psycho-somatic disorders which are very much on the increase in the world of today. The present study was undertaken to test this supposition experimentally in respect of the disorder of insomnia.

Methodology :

Twenty persons were included in the experiment. They comprised sixteen males and four females. Their age ranged from 36 to 70, the average age of the group being 54.4 years. Answers to a questionnaire supplied to them revealed some cause for anxiety in each case, the problem usually being of adjustment. The patients were advised to moderate their diet. Six of the male and one of the female patients were non-vegetarian. They were not asked to

change their food habits, but over-eating was to be avoided. The evening meal was taken rather early in the evening. The treatment was given everyday in the evening for nearly sixty minutes. Extent of sleep during the night was measured in the beginning of the experiment and also at the end of a period of one month during which treatment was continued. The treatment consisted of the following techniques of yoga. : 1. Yoga postures 20 minutes. 2. Guided relaxation 15 minutes. 3. Deep breathing through alternate nostrils 10 minutes. 4. Meditation (hamsajapa) 10 minutes.

The patients came for treatment with an empty stomach, in the evening everyday. They first practised yoga postures which were so designed as to give exercise to all the parts of the body. The following yoga postures were practised by each patient : Bhadrasana, Uttanamandukasana, Gomukhasana, Yogamudra, Matsyasana, Viparita-karni, Halasana, Bhujangasana, Shalabhasana, and Dhanurasana. This was followed by two rounds of agnisars and two rounds of Uddiyana-bandha in a standing position. Then guided relaxation was done for 15 minutes in which the patients were given guidance as how to relax deeply. Then the patients did deep breathing without kumbhaka through alternate nostrils, making every inhalation and exhalation as deep and prolonged as possible without sacrificing smoothness and uniformity of the flow of air in each breath. This was followed by Hamsajapa in Swastikasana or Vajrasana in which each patient was asked to be just aware of the sound 'hum' with the outgoing breath and the sound 'so' with each incoming breath, without uttering the word and without moving the lips or the tongue.

Measurement of the extent of sleep :

For measuring how long one slept during the night, a method involving the least disturbance of sleep was introduced. In a bowl near the pillow 18 pencil erasers were kept. In the room there was a wall clock which made sound every half an hour, indicating time. Between 9 a. m. and 6 a. m. the clock struck eighteen times. Whenever a sound was heard by the patient one eraser was taken out from the bowl. In the morning the number of erasers left in the bowl was counted. This was taken to indicate the extent of sleep.

Results and Discussion :

In the beginning of the experiment the no. of erasers left in the bowl in the 20 cases ranged from 8 to 14, the average being 10.7. After one month of yogic treatment, the range was 12 to 16, and the average was 14.1. The average gain of sleep was 3.4, or nearly 30%. The results were statistically analysed and were found to be highly significant. The results as statistically analysed were as follows :-

Number of erasers left in the bowl :-

Before	After	S. D. of means	T. Value
10.7	14.1	0.36	7.78

The present study does not indicate the relative merit of the various techniques used. We also do not know from it whether the practices are to be continued for ever. It is being continued further for studying these problems.

