

LIVING WITH STRESS WITHOUT DISTRESS THROUGH YOGA

By
Dr. Shrikrishna

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STRESS MANAGEMENT MODERN AND YOGIC PERSPECTIVE

(AN OVERVIEW)

By
Dr. M. V. Rajapurkar

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KAIVALYADHAMA

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THESE NOTES DO NOT CONTAIN THE DETAILED EXPOSITION ON THE TOPIC OF STRESS AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT THROUGH YOGA, BUT BRIEFLY COVER ALL THE POINTS DISCUSSED DURING THE AROGYASHARANAM WORKSHOP.

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YOGA AS A SCIENCE OF HEALTH AND HEALING

When you are suffering from any problems like Backache, High Blood Pressure, Diabetes etc., you would find the approach offered by Yoga as very useful and very appropriate for the management of your problem. In some of you, it would serve as a Complimentary approach to the conventional medical treatment which you might be undergoing. In some others, where the conventional approach does not give the desired relief, it may even serve as the alternative approach.

It is useful where one is seeking cure or control of his/her problem. It is extremely useful during the period of convalescence and recovery and for rehabilitation. But more than this, it is really useful in preventing the continuation and recurrence of the problem in future.

Yoga is a product of the perennial wisdom of India. One can trace the origin of Yoga back to the period of Indus Valley civilization i.e. at least three thousand years before Christ. All through the last five thousand years, it has remained as one of the most important facets of the Indian Culture, remaining vibrant and responsive to the changing times all through this period.

As it came to be developed in India, it came to be associated with the development of Hinduism and its philosophy. But in its essence, it has always remained separate from any religious doctrines or dogmas and never demanded acceptance of any specific belief system. It has always remained as a pathway open for all the people professing different faiths, belonging to different religions and different races. In essence it is a path of spiritual enquiry, awakened by the earnest desire for having a deeper understanding of Life and all the phenomenon associated with it.

The literal meaning of the word Yoga in Sanskrit is: INTEGRATION. In this sense the Yoga represents a process through which one can learn how to live in the most integrated way. It involves, therefore, the process of identification and then elimination of all that would contribute in disintegration. When taken in this sense it becomes a continuous process, requiring constant vigilance and involving all the aspects of life.

In this integrated way of living, the process of identification of all the elements causing Ill-health and the use of appropriate techniques to neutralize their ill-effects became one of the primary concerns of Yoga. Thus, Yoga which essentially is a Science of personal growth for spiritual experiences has simultaneously become a Science of Health and Healing.

THREE COMPONENTS OF YOGIC APPROACH

When Yoga is used as a Science of Health and Healing, all its techniques and methods which are basically meant for the spiritual experiences automatically get geared to do their job for the promotion of Health and for bringing the Healing touch to the body and mind suffering from Ill-health. For this purpose, the approach which Yoga advocates does have three main components:

- (A) First is the practical discipline which involves the practices of Asanas, Pranayama and Meditation.

Asanas involve the increased awareness of various physical and physiological processes influenced by controlled stretching, contraction and relaxation of various muscles, their co-ordination in balancing and during maintenance of Posture etc.

Pranayama practices, similarly involve the manipulation of breathing mechanism alongwith the increased awareness of the pressure changes inside the cavity of chest and abdomen.

Dhyana or the Meditational practices increase the awareness of one's own mental processes including the thoughts, emotions, memory etc. It can make one aware how constant restlessness at the level of mind contributes in the feeling of emotional stress, feeling of constant fear and insecurity. This increased awareness combined with the manipulative techniques of Dhyana practices, gradually restore the psycho-physiological functions back to its healthy, harmonious and balanced state.

- (B) Second component concerns with the regulation of Diet as well as the regulation of Daily Habits involving the pattern of sleep, recreational activities and working habits. This helps in removing all those irritants which are responsible for the imbalance in the functioning of body-mind complex.

- (C) Third component concerns itself with changes in one's attitudes, behavior and life-style which would help in inducing the feeling of sharing, feeling of warmth in friendship and concern, love and respect for the whole beautiful world. This acts as an antidote for the feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and loneliness which may come in the absence of proper relationship with the world around.

Many times when people talk about YOGA : योग, they focus their attention only on the first component involving varieties of Asanas, Pranayama and Meditational techniques. Thus they confine Yoga to a small period of their daily life, as if rest of the day has nothing to do with Yoga.

But really speaking the Yogic way of living in the rest of the day is, not only equally but more important from the healing point of view. Whatever skills one has learnt from the Yogic practices need to be used throughout the day. In this sense the UPAYOGA : उपयोग i.e. the use of the Yogic skills throughout the day needs to be given proper attention. The last two components attend to this Upayoga aspect of Yoga.

If you undertake Yoga in this spirit keeping this broad framework in mind and comply with all the instructions given to you; you would find that Yoga gives you not only relief from your problems but opens up new ways of enjoying your life.

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WHAT IS “STRESS”?

- “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenges and controversy” - Martin Luther King.
- In a moment of comfort and convenience stress is not a problem, but when challenges and controversy stare us in the face, the way in which we react - physically, emotionally and spiritually - is the measure of our success in dealing with stress.
- Stress is a part of our everyday life- living makes constant demands on our body and thus produces stress- stress is something we cannot avoid like water and food.
- Thus the situations giving rise to feelings of stress cannot be avoided but what we can definitely modify is the way we deal with these situations - We can learn how not to feel tense, angry, frustrated or miserable while dealing with the stressful situations.
- Stress can affect people at all levels - Students, Housewives, Businessman, Executives, Professionals, Teachers.
- Stress can lead to depression and anxiety, to alcoholism and drug addiction, and to a breakdown in normal relation with friends, family and colleagues.
- Stress begins with pressure -
 - (a) Pressure is a stimulus external or internal to which we respond-
 - (b) Stress is a result from our perception of a need and our gearing up for the response.
- Nature has endowed us with the remarkable ability to react instantly at the times of danger - this is a response of ‘FIGHT or FLIGHT’ - this is a very powerful, automatic and immediate response. This has played key role in mankind’s survival.
- But this Stress response of ‘Fight or Flight’ though has a great value in a situation which can threaten the biological survival, is rather most inappropriate when the situation does not challenge us physically but psychologically - Then stress gets converted into distress.

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE FEELING OF STRESS

The level of stress felt depends upon

- (A) State of health - when one is healthy one can cope with the stressful situations better - in a state of illness, or in a very sensitive state of adolescence, pregnancy and old age this coping ability gets weakened.
- (B) Significance of stressor - when the situations involve momentous life events like marriage, divorce, promotion, loss of job, serious illness or the death in the family; the feeling of stress is of great order.

Thus when one is suffering from the illness or when the stressor events are of great significance, one can easily become conscious of stress and the distress - but often we suffer from the 'MASKED STRESS' which arise out of our distorted priorities, approaches and attitudes and life style - ambition, perfectionism and dedication to work, all can lead to constant feeling of stress.

WARNING SIGNALS OF STRESS

The human body is superbly equipped to deal with the stress but only upto a certain level. If your adaptive resources become overworked and exhausted, your body ceases to function smoothly. Then it starts giving signals, which you should be prompt enough to notice so that appropriate coping mechanism can be initiated. These signals are:

- (A) Restlessness and unable to Relax.
- (B) Increased irritability and feeling of anger if things do not happen in your way- also increased impatience.
- (C) Prolonged fatigue and feeling of mentally drained
- (D) Concentration and memory difficulty-memory block
- (E) More fussy, gloomy or suspicious
- (F) Lack of ability to feel pleasure or enjoyment
- (G) Impulse to run away and hide from the situation
- (H) Inability to come to decisions

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF STRESS

These effects could be: change of appetite, sleep disturbance, headache, indigestion, palpitation, breathlessness, dry mouth or feeling of dryness in throat, butterflies in stomach, nausea, weakness in muscles, trembling, tiredness, sweating etc.

PERSONALITY AND VULNERABILITY TO STRESS

The effect of Stress is determined by how we view and handle the stressful situation, by how we appraise and adapt to the stressful event.

Our personality - the values, attitudes and behavior pattern that makes up our uniqueness as an individual, makes us more or less vulnerable to stress.

The most deep-rooted component of our personality is our value-system. This reflects on how we rate ourselves in relation to others and how we see the world in general.

If our personality contains following factors, it would make us more prone for the feeling of stress: a strong competitive drive, often with hidden or overt aggression and hostility; intense drive to succeed, often without clearly specified goals; relentless striving for advancement, responsibility, dominance, and recognition; relatively poor ability to delegate authority and to form an identity outside the occupational environment; excessively demanding attitudes toward self and others; striving for perfection, with frustration as the frequent results; oppressive sense of time urgency, with a tendency to do as much as possible in the least amount of time, resulting in over commitment, time pressure, rushed activity, restlessness, irritability, sleeplessness, and even denial of fatigue; strong inner tension manifested by stilted facial expression, gestures and speech; reluctance to allow time for relaxation; excessive need for mastery of the environment, with a fear of losing control over the course of events; generally wasteful utilization of physical and emotional energies in response to an unrealistic assessment of demands.

On the other hand if our personality is more balanced and sober we will have a competitive spirit, but we will be able to express it without exhibiting hostility or aggressiveness. We would be pursuing a well-defined and realistic goals and we would try to achieve them in a calm and deliberate manner.

There would be little active pursuit of dominance and recognition and these will be viewed not as goals but as by-products of success. **The sense of time struggle would be absent and the need for rest and relaxation would be duly acknowledge.** All this would help us to deal with the stressful situations without getting distressed.

Thus even though it would not be possible to change our innate nature we can moderate or modify at least some of the personality traits like hyperactivity, time urgency, excessive ambitiousness and competitive drive and hostile- aggressive reaction to stressful situation or event. We can make some efforts to restructure our value system and learn to cope with the personal, family and occupational challenges with a more detached and calm strategy.

Here it is very pertinent to note that feeling of being under stress is more likely to occur if we find ourselves caught against our will in a certain way of life or if we cannot shape and amend our life-style to suit our needs. Thus our value system which makes us either contented and satisfied or discontented and dissatisfied would have a significant influence on our feeling of being under stress.

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HOW TO DEAL WITH THE STRESS ?

There is no better example of the need for a HOLISTIC approach to health than in the field of stress-related problems. There is no single answer to dealing with the vast range of problems produced by stress, but the most important steps that any of us take along the road coping with stress are : to recognize it, to understand it, to use 'good' stress to our advantage, to deal with 'bad' stress appropriately and above all to help ourselves.

We all have some choice about the way we look, move, speak, and conduct our daily lives and personal relationships. These can make a fundamental difference to the way we see ourselves. The actual process of change involves considerable courage and resolve, and it does not happen instantly.

As the effect of stress is determined by how we view and handle stress, by how we appraise stress; it becomes very important to re-evaluate how and why we consider any situation or the event as a stressful situation. What we perceive as a threatening situation may be entirely or at least to a large extent appear so due to our own faulty perception . If we could correct our perception process, based on proper evaluation of the situation; many of the situations would not cause any anxiety to us. Thus the MANAGEMENT OF PERCEPTION, could be one of the major component of the coping strategy. The whole of the Yogic approach, especially its philosophical aspect emphasizes on this change of outlook towards our circumstances. **It makes us aware that when in any stressful situation it is impossible to choose either 'FIGHT or 'FLIGHT, the best approach is to 'FLOW'.**

The other important component of the coping strategy is the MANAGEMENT OF TIME. Impatience and time pressure are the two most important elements in the life-style of modern man, which lead to feeling of being under stress. The stress of time urgency is entirely self-generated. Worried that there never seems to be enough time to get anything done, people often leave insufficient time to complete tasks, try to cram too many activities into a short period, or do several things at once, darting haphazardly from one to another. The immediate consequence of this type of behavior is: undone job pile up or completed late, deadline looms, tempers are lost and anxiety and panic ensues. Thus it would be very much necessary to learn how to set priorities, how to distribute the work, how to complete the

tasks in the hand before taking up new ones, and how to say 'NO' for the additional tasks when our hands are already full.

The last and the most important component of the coping strategy is the **MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH STATUS**. It has been observed again and again that when you are fit and healthy, your ability to deal with any stressful situation is manifold increased. **On the other hand when you are suffering from illness or your body is in a deconditioned state leading to easy fatiguability, the feeling of being under stress even with trivial things, comes more easily.**

Thus if we want to increase our defence against the feeling of stress, we need to give attention to following things:

- (A) **REST, RECREATION AND RELAXATION:** Many people do not realize how much 'un-relaxed' they are. If you have started to ignore the build-up of strain and tension in your limbs, joints and muscles, and fail to defuse these physical stresses when they begin to affect your mind and body, you will gradually begin to store that tension in various parts of the body. Allowing hidden tension to increase and take hold of your body will inevitably affect the way you feel and how you function, since a tense body is less efficient and less well co-ordinated than a relaxed one. We can learn from the way the animals release the pent-up tension from their bodies or how they ease themselves into action. Thus we have to learn to become aware of the hidden tensions and to eliminate them; and also to take precaution not to do something which will increase or create the new tensions. The Relaxation practices of Yoga along with the application of the concept of 'PAUSE' and 'REGULATED CONSCIOUS ACTION' would help us to know how to deal with these hidden tensions and how not to create new ones. The process of 'INNER AWARENESS' would be the basic process in knowing how to relax.
- (B) **EXERCISES AND BODY MANAGEMENT:** Exercise is the best antidote against the emotional tension and lack of it is an important additional factor in the production of emotional tension. It is difficult to remain worried, angry or anxious while our mind and body are engaged in physical activity. In addition it acts like an outlet for the accumulated tension, bottled up aggression, and frustration, neutralizing mental as well as muscular stress. Recent research shows that powerful brain

chemicals are released during exercises called 'ENDORPHINS' which are associated with the feeling of happiness and well-being . Additional to Yogic practices, it is advisable to do some other physical exercise appropriate to the condition of the body, viz. walking, swimming, gentle Aerobics, Calisthenics etc.

- (C) DIET: The consideration of diet is not confined only to the balance of energy supply and demand for the actions of the body and mind, but it also incorporates the attention as to the quality of the food eaten. **Certain food items like Tea, Coffee, Chocolates, Cola drinks, refined sugars etc. when taken in excess amount are known to increase the vulnerability for the feeling of stress and irritability.** Ample amount of fresh fruit, vegetables and salads in our daily food-intake helps in building up our defence against the feeling of stress. The 'QUANTITY, QUALITY, REGULARITY and THE WAY WE EAT our food can increase or decrease our ability of coping with the stress.

Here it would be pertinent to note that when we talk about Yoga being one of the most appropriate approach for dealing with stress, we do not mean only the practices of ASANAS, PRANAYAMA and DHYANA, but also incorporate into it the regulation of diet, scope for recreational activities and other exercises, attention to adequate and sound sleep apart from the use of the constant inner awareness for judging how the BODY-BREATH-BRAIN activities are going on through out the day. When this is coupled with the healthy, creative outlook towards life and living based on the Yogic Philosophy, our approach becomes one of the most HOLISTIC.

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SOME IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN THE PRACTICAL PROGRAMME OF YOGA

For getting the maximum benefit from the practical programme of Yoga, you should remember the following things:

1. Some of the Yogic practices are common to all and can be done by all irrespective of the cause or the nature of their problems. For example, the technique of Inner Awareness, Relaxation, Regulated breathing and Meditation can be practiced by all without any risk of aggravating their problem. But certain other practices involving the upside-down position of the body, or those which increase the intra-thoracic or intra-abdominal pressures or those involving extremes of movements of spinal column may not be helpful for patients having a weak heart, weak lungs or weak spine. Therefore, the consultation with the specialist who combines the medical knowledge with the knowledge of Yoga is very much essential to chalk out the specific Yogic programme for the patients suffering from some significant organic disorder and dysfunction. Sometimes this programme needs to be altered in the light of response from the patient, which would be constantly monitored by such experts. This way the whole approach of YOGA THERAPY becomes quite SAFE and APPROPRIATE to the patient's need.
2. You should not expect any miraculous results immediately from these practices. As they involve the correction of wrong habits of misuse established over a long period of time; it would similarly take a long time before you could feel the good effect of these practices. It is therefore, necessary that you should practice Yoga DAILY, REGULARLY AND FOR SUFFICIENTLY LONG TIME WITHOUT LOSING PATIENCE.
3. Each day you should keep some time set aside for the practices of these techniques. More than how many different varieties of practices you do; how you do it and how regularly you do it would have a more important bearing on the results you achieve.
4. Apart from YOGA (योग) you should give sufficient attention to UPAYOGA. The increased awareness of how the BODY-BREATH-BRAIN activity is being carried out, which results from the correct performance of Yogic practices, should be constantly applied in daily routine activities throughout the day. You should see that

your POSTURE while working as well as during leisure activities remain appropriate to the task. Your movements are carried out in a non-hasty, un-hurried and relaxed manner. Your BREATHING is FREE and EFFICIENT. Your MIND is able to work in the PRESENCE without getting repeatedly lost in the reflection about the past events or getting absorbed in the projection of the future events. Thus you should become more MINDFUL about the task in hand, the only way to become more efficient and effective in all our actions (of the body, of the speech and of the mind as per the definition of Yoga in Bhagvadgeeta.

5. You should not forget to give proper attention to your FOOD - its QUALITY, QUANTITY and REGULARITY, as well as the WAY IN WHICH YOU EAT IT. Always remember: YOU BECOME, WHAT YOU EAT. If you eat in healthy way, you would remain healthy. In addition to the food, immoderate intake of alcoholic beverages and the use of tobacco in the form of smoking or chewing, also need to be handled properly.
6. Proper attention to Sleep-Recreation-Leisure is equally important. There should be proper balance between your WORK-TIME AND REST TIME. This ensures that the body and mind both remain fresh, regain strength and stamina, and do not lead to the feeling of being overburdened while carrying out daily routine activity.
7. Ultimately it is very important for you to remember all the time that though you are ALONE you should never feel LONELY. The of whole humanity belongs to you. Your life-style should get infused with the feeling of SHARING, CARING and LOVE for the whole of Humanity and the World at large. You should not create walls around you, confining yourself to your exclusive, petty existence. This would reduce the burden of feeling lonely, from your heart and would make you feel instead, more upright and cheerful to face life in company of all those with whom you come in contact.

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BHAGVADGEETA (CH. VI, 16 & 17) SAYS

Yoga is not for him who eats too much or who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much or keeps awake in excess.

He who is moderate in eating and recreation, moderate in his efforts in work, moderate in sleep and wakefulness, his practice of Yoga becomes the destroyer of all misery.

RULES TO BE OBSERVED DURING THE PERFORMANCE OF ASANAS, PRANAYAMA AND MEDITATIONAL PRACTICES

1. All your movements in Asanas should be comfortably slow and well-controlled at every stage. You should avoid sudden, jerky and hasty movements.
2. The final position in any Asana should be such that it could be maintained for some time without any feeling of discomfort. Your motto should be 'Maximum to your capacity but within your limits.' Day by day your capacity would increase, but let it happen naturally and never force yourself to go beyond your present limits.
3. While moving or during maintenance of final position, learn to use your body parts selectively. Allow only those muscles to work which are required in particular movement or for the maintenance of particular pose, but keep the rest of the body completely RELAXED.
4. Breathe normally all through the practice of each Asana. Avoid holding the breath at any stage of the practice as it may increase the tension in the body. While maintaining the final position it is better to breathe 5 to 10 times deeply and slowly. When any particular movement is to be done along with the process of inhalation or exhalation, you would be specifically told so.
5. During the practice of Asanas keep your eyes closed which would help you to keep your attention focused on the correctness of the technique, on free flow of breathing, on proper relaxation of the non-required parts of the muscle groups and on the overall feeling of pleasure generated by being with the activities going on in the inner body-space.
6. While practicing Pranayama, remember that it concerns not only with the breath alone but also with the mind. Awareness of spontaneous breathing (PRANADHARANA), regulating the

breathing pattern to deep and slow abdominal breathing and using it from time to time for healing i.e. cleansing the body parts of all the unwanted, unpleasant and hurtful sensations during exhalation and filling it with relaxing, healing life-giving energy during inhalation (PRANASANYAMAN) and the techniques of Anuloma-Viloma and Ujjayi PRANAYAMA, all require full mental participation.

- 7 In Meditational practices, whatever techniques are used, the effect which is expected is the same. It is HOME-COMING. The wandering mind becomes quiet and silent. It releases the energy which otherwise was getting used for this wandering and for emotional upsets arising out of it. This gives rise to the feeling of tremendous boost to the creative energy of the mind. But do expect the results to vary from day to day and never get easily disheartened when the results are not according to expectations. Never lose patience and keep on trying. Under the spell of old habits, your mind would wander away again and again, but your job would be to come back to the centre or home again and again without losing heart till the old habit gets weakened and fades away.

SOME GENERAL USEFUL HINTS

1. The best time to practice Yoga is early morning before breakfast.
2. Dress during the practice should be minimum, lose-fitting and light so as to allow free movement of the limbs in all directions with no constriction around neck, abdomen, waist or wrists.
3. Remove spectacles and wristwatches during the practice.
4. Before beginning the Yoga session it is better to empty the urinary bladder.
5. It is better to have light stomach during the practice. Do not practice Yoga within three hours after heavy meals, within two hours after breakfast and within half an hour after some liquid intake. Wait for 15-20 min. after Yoga before taking food.
6. During menstrual period in women, it is better to suspend some Asanas which would increase pressure over the pelvic area, but one can continue with practices of relaxation, simple breathing, gentle stretching and meditation.
7. Keep at least half an hour gap between Yoga and other types of exercises like walking, swimming etc.

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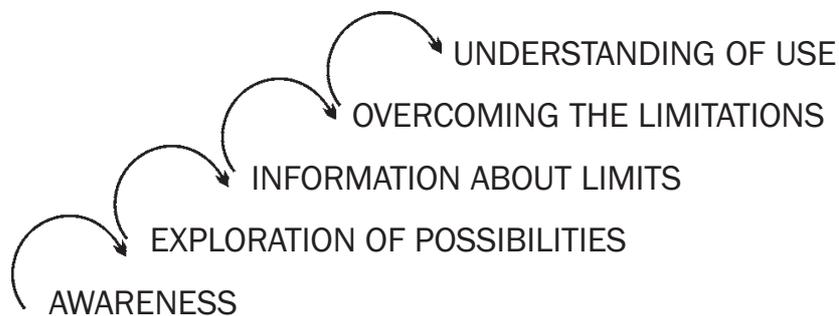
YOGIC PROGRAMME TAUGHT IN THE AROGYASHARANAM WORKSHOP

THE GENERAL APPROACH

The Yogic programme consists of mainly four components:

A. Inner Awareness : DEHADHARANA - awareness of Body space
: PRANADHARANA - awareness of Breath.

B. Movements and Asanas using the five stages of
AEIOU-



C. Breathing and Pranayama : Awareness of natural breathing.
: Conscious - happy-healthy
breathing.
: Anuloma-Viloma & Ujjayi.

D. Meditative State and Inner Silence:

Through the process of Inner
Awareness and Awareness and
chanting of AUM.

PROCESS OF INNER AWARENESS

This is the key element - a common basic ingredient of all the other practices of Yoga. Usually we are aware of our body as it appears to others or to ourselves in the mirror. Through this process we become aware of the space within the body known as ANTARAAKAASH and we become aware of the body as it is felt from within. The process is very simple and once one learns it and masters it, it can be used with advantage to become aware of the body through all our actions.

- (a) Lie down or sit in relaxed but TALL posture - part by part become aware of the space within your body -begin from the Head-Neck-Chest-Right and Left Arm up to finger tips-Abdomen along with the Pelvic floor - Right and Left legs up to toe tips.
- (b) After having become aware of the body space, become aware of the flow of the breath in the space of your head and then through neck-chest-arms-abdomen-legs without manipulating it.
- (c) Make the breath flow slowly and keeping it slow make it deep by using the movement of the diaphragm fully so that chest can expand horizontally in its lower two third area and abdomen comes out fully during inhalation and goes in fully during exhalation.
- (d) Using this “Conscious - Happy - Healthy Breathing” start the process of PRANASANYAMANA. Focus your attention of any specific area e.g. back of the neck and shoulder, back of the chest, back of the abdomen-feel that you are clearing away all the unpleasant, uncomfortable and unwanted feelings from the area focussed during exhalation and feel that you are filling that area with health giving healing energy during inhalation.

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MOVEMENTS AND ASANAS

Once we become used to feeling of the body space from inside through the process of Awareness - Explore to find which movements are possible in different joints-gather the Information about your abilities as well as the limits within which these movements are possible and do not cause any pain and then Overcome these limits and expand the abilities by slowly increasing the movements through controlled stretching of the tight muscles, by strengthening the lax or flabby muscles and by learning the correct posture-this will make it possible for you to know how to use the body in a proper manner-this approach for the movements forms the basis for the Asanas used in the programme.

The following programme is basically an INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMME and includes very simple practices which could commonly be done by all the participants of the workshop. They are also used, to present and develop the concept of how effectively these practices should be performed and how the skill developed from their continuous, long-term performance could be applied in daily routine activities. Many more useful practices left out of this workshop with group teaching approach, are expected to be learnt in regular Yoga Classes run by Kaivalyadhama under personal supervision with individual attention by the teacher.

GROUP I : 1. ARDHA PAVANAMUKTASANA



2. POORNA PAVANAMUKTASANA WITH ASHWINI MUDRA



3. ARDHA HALASANA WITH ONE LEG



GROUP II : 1. RELAX ON THE BACK



RELAX ON THE RIGHT SIDE



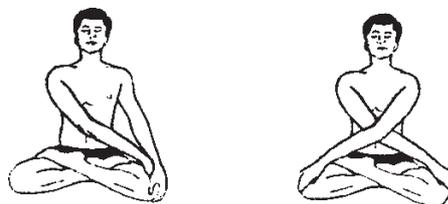
RELAX ON THE ABDOMEN



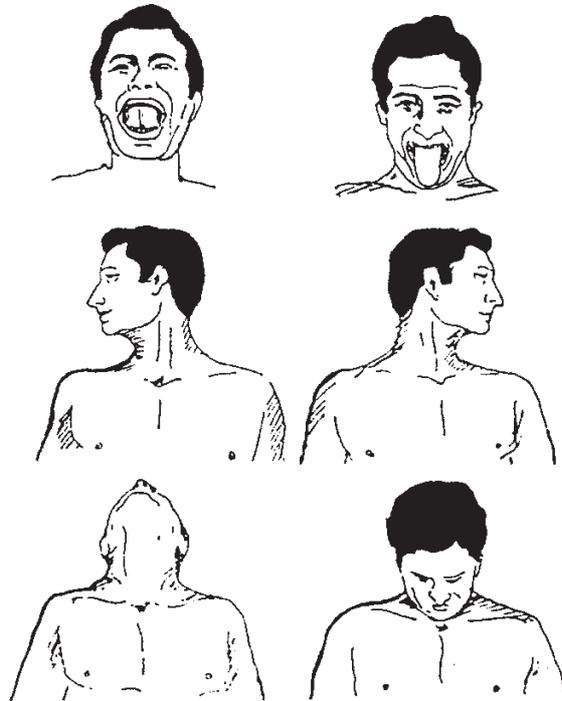
RELAX ON THE LEFT SIDE



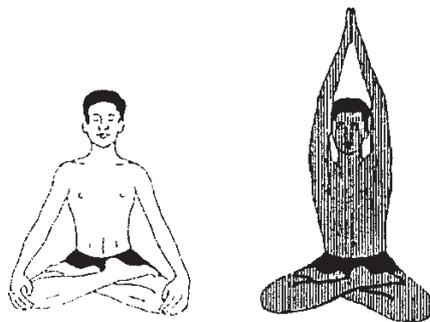
GROUP III : 1. CIRCULAR MOVEMENTS OF ONE AND BOTH SHOULDERS



2. SHADANANA MUDRA : MOVEMENTS OF THE NECK
IN SIX WAYS SEPARATELY AND IN MIXED WAY.

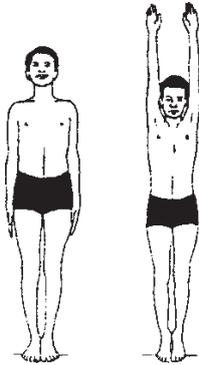


3. PARVATASANA

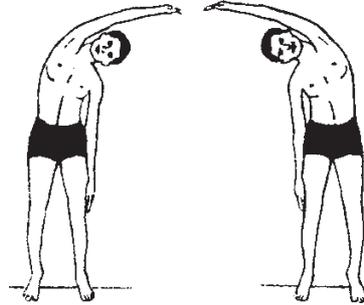


GROUP IV :

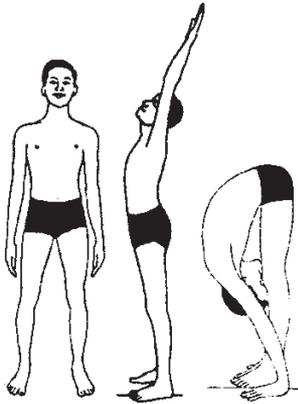
1. TADASANA



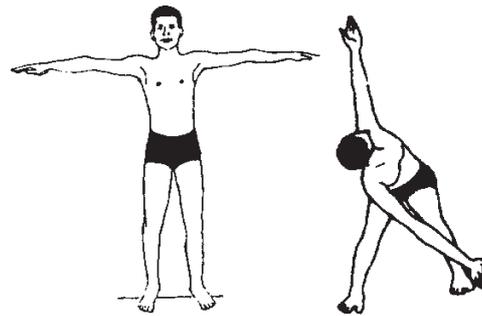
2. CHAKRASANA



3. PADAHASTASANA



4. TRIKONASANA



IN ALL THESE PRACTICES IT IS A MUST THAT ONE SHOULD NEVER HOLD BREATH. RATHER ONE SHOULD BREATHE MORE DEEPLY AND SLOWLY IN A RELAXED MANNER. ALL THE MOVEMENTS SHOULD BE GENTLE AND IN UNHURRIED WAY. FINAL POSITION SHOULD BE COMFORTABLE AND MAINTAINABLE, WHILE REST OF THE BODY PARTS REMAIN COMPLETELY RELAXED. AFTER EACH PRACTICE DO NOT FORGET TO USE THE 'PAUSE'.

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BREATHING AND PRANAYAMA

The main aim in this part is to know how we breath normally and if necessary how to correct it, so that all the functions of the body and mind can go on in an undisturbed way. If we ensure that our posture is proper and we are breathing freely and easily, throughout the day, it would go a long way to improve our physical fitness and mental alertness. The techniques of Pranayama are a great help in this approach apart from their direct effect on the functioning of body and mind. For this purpose one has to go through four stages:

- Stage I** : Become aware of the whole of the body space and the breath which flows through this space in a normal spontaneous way - this is PRANADHARANA.
- Stage II** : Convert this normal spontaneous breath into very deep and very slow breathing pattern involving full use of the chest, diaphragm and abdominal muscles - this is Conscious-happy-healthy-breathing which can be used on and off throughout the day.
- Stage III** : With the selective use of the Abdominal wall and muscles of the Pelvic floor during inhalation and exhalation, retaining the slowness, depth and gentleness of breathing convert it into basic pattern of PRANAYAMIC breathing-Puraka and Rechaka.
- Stage IV** : Then add the element of Uni-nostrilar breathing for converting it into ANULOMA-VILOMA PRANAYAMA or the element of partial contraction of glottis to produce the sound of UJJAYI PRANAYAMA.

MEDITATIVE STATE AND INNER SILENCE

It is essentially a process of silencing the thought process but keeping the attention faculty of the mind intensely active. The chanting of AUM after the Pranayama brings out the complete silence within and without, Once one experiences this INNER SILENCE then all his actions, speech and thoughts would spring from this silence without ever disturbing him. Thus this state ultimately can become the background state for our daily living where whole of our inner creativity will have total freedom to bloom out.

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STRESS MANAGEMENT MODERN AND YOGIC PERSPECTIVE

(AN OVERVIEW)

By

Dr. M. V. Rajapurkar

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of stress is as elusive as it is important. Stress is ubiquitous. No person escapes of some sort or the other in daily life. In this sense people are seen as passive helpless victims of the stress phenomenon. In a sense it is a new generic term for 'cause-effect' relationships.

The aim of every human being is to survive as happily as possible, in an ever changing world and to achieve the highest possible consistent with one's potentialities. It is the gap between achievement and expectation that leads to stress. For the present concept of stress we owe a great deal to the pioneering work of Prof. Hans Selye, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for this work.

What is Stress ?

(a) Definition :

Stress is now formalized to mean - any change within a system induced by external forces. Stress is a demand on our adaptability to evoke a response. In a fast changing world the demands on human adaptability are great and hence, chances of stress being produced are greatly enhanced.

(b) Selye's Concept :

Prof. Selye noted that animals exposed to a wide variety of noxious agents, underwent a somewhat 'stereotypic pattern' of physiological changes. In this sense they were 'non-specific'. He designated this response pattern as 'General Adaptation Syndrome' (GAS) and the stimuli that provoke the syndrome were called 'stresses' or 'stressors'. Derailment of GAS produces 'diseases of adaptation'. In GAS the bodily physiological responses evolve in three stages :

- (a) The 'alarm reaction'
- (b) The 'stage of resistance'
- (c) The 'stage of exhaustion' - implies a decline of defence reactions.

It would be borne in mind that the outcome of GAS is to some extent influenced by the specific nature of the demanding agent. In addition certain factors not connected with stress modify the pattern

of GAS. Such factors are : heredity, diet, pre-existing disease of certain organ systems etc. These are called 'conditioning factors'.

The Defence against stress occurs in two phases. Initially the stressor evokes by way of the hypothalamus a strong 'sympatho-adrenal discharge'. The release of stored catecholamines produces their characteristic cardio vascular and metabolic reactions e.g. rapid heart rate, raise in blood pressure, increase in blood sugar level etc. If the stress is not severe or is of short duration this may restore to normality.

If the stress is severe and long lasting additional defence reactions are called into play. There is a release of cortico-steroids from the adrenal cortex, mediated through the hypothalamus, leading to increased liberation of ACTH and a shift in the balance of pituitary hormones. It is now believed that besides the hypothalamus the limbic and reticular system also come into play to organize the resistive response.

Thus, there is a psychic and emotional contribution in the initiations to stress response and consequent compensatory adjustments. The automatic nervous system (ANS) also plays an important part in expression of emotion as evidenced by blanching or flushing of the skin, cardiac acceleration, pupillary dilation, pilo-erection, sweating etc.

To summarize then it may be said that 'stress' acts on the organism - producing GAS - which acts on the 'Target Organ'. If the stress is long lasting or severe, adaptation is derailed and psychic or somatic disease results.

Conditioning factors modify the stress response.

Two important contributions accrue from Selye's work.

- (a) The understanding of mechanism of stress and that of the defence to stress is through the Nervous mechanism and Hormonal defence. Conditioning factors also determine the outcome of stress.
- (b) There exist a large number of diseases whose causation we do not comprehend or comprehend but dimly. These are what Selye likes to call 'Disease of Adaptation' and may include disorders of psycho-somatic origin. The list is polymorphic. To quote a few:

ulcerative colitis, peptic ulcer, rheumatic disease, hypertension, asthma, arthritis, cardiac disorders, neurosis, depression etc. may be produced by maladaptation.

STRESSORS

Having reviewed briefly Selye's work it is essential to understand stressors and how they relate to the outcome of stress.

Stressors may be :

- (a) Psychological: e.g. loss of love, academic failure, unconscious conflict, death of a near one etc.
- (b) Cultural: e.g. social deprivation.
- (c) Economic : e.g. unemployment, poverty etc.
- (d) Physiological: e.g. bacteriological or physical chemical injury.

Besides these in a rapidly changing world the human being has to adapt to unprecedented challenges. Travel is changing unimaginably. A visit to the moon is possible. Nuclear power, nuclear weapons, genetic engineering, and other research achievements, may leap ahead of our biological ability to adapt.

Besides this there are many minor daily hassles which produce stress. Common events like traffic jams, foul-ups at work, unsympathetic boss, arguments, losing or misplacing things (like car keys, glasses), concern about weight gain, rising prices and many other problems.

Earlier also human beings suffered stress. The 'cave man¹ was afraid of attack by wild animals or dying of hunger, cold or exhaustion. The reaction was simple - 'Fight or Flight'.

Today the stress situations are highly complex like, crash of stock market, world war, environmental pollution, over which the individual has no control and the simple 'Fight or Flight' reaction is no longer the answer.

Man has acquired a brain complex, sense of logic, ethics, a philosophy and these control his impulses and help him to choose consciously how to respond to the demands of life and to the various stressors.

PERCEPTION AND STRESS

Recent work has thrown some new light on outcome of stress response. It is now believed that stress does not result simply from exposure to events in the environment. The way we perceive and appraise the event, the availability and the use of resources to cope with the challenge, have more to do with the outcome than the raw event itself. Stress and its negative impact on health, derive from a mismatch between perceived environmental demands and perceived resources to adapt. The balance of demands and resources is critical. Development of a proper perception to the stressor thus modifies the outcome to stress.

The study of higher levels of mental processes in health and illness is of recent origin. To combat this onslaught on health many newly found psychophysiological techniques are in vogue e.g.

- (a) Biofeed back
- (b) Progressive relaxation
- (c) Autogenic therapy
- (d) Meditation and related procedures.

YOGA AND STRESS

'Yoga' can make very important contributions in stress management through its :

- (a) Action on psyche Higher Mental functional and modulation of function through the hypothalamus and
- (b) Peripheral conditioning through - philosophy of life, code of behaviour and other Yogic practices.

Yoga is one of the important heritages of India.

It is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj'. The most acceptable meaning is ; 'Yuj Samadhau', which means 'Integration' i.e. putting together in a balanced order or to 'harmonies' i.e. put things in their proper order and perspective. Yoga goes a step further and aims at harmonizing the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of personality, with a view to attaining the highest level of consciousness. Yoga discipline thus embraces the whole of operational existence of human beings, from the level of gross body to the level of pure consciousness.

This all embracing new awareness leads to correct understanding of one's own nature, which is a step towards gaining total control over activities in all spheres and at all the levels of one's existence. It ultimately results in making the personality totally integrated and balanced, denoted by the word 'Samadhi'.

It will be appreciated that Yoga considered the human being as a whole-body, mind and spirit together, and not in separate compartments. Such an approach and philosophy is strongly 'anti-stress'. Disintegration of this personality leads to 'stress'.

In Yoga human being is considered not only as a whole but also as part of the 'cosmos'. Human beings carry out their activities through five different levels of energy planes or KOSHAS viz. Annamaya kosha (Physical Body), Pranamayakosha, Manomayakosha, Vijnanamaya-kosha and Anandmayakosha (pure consciousness).

These koshas are supposed to be interdependent and interpenetrating.

The vital force known as Prana enlivens the functioning of the body.

Then there is the concept of 'CHAKRAS'. Each chakra is responsible for different levels of consciousness as well as control by various internal organs. In these centres are represented the concept of hierarchy in the evolution of higher functions. The grosser functions are represented in the lower centres and the more refined in the higher centres.

Thus there is a unitary system of physiological functioning with 'consciousness' (CIT) and चित्तशक्ति as the supreme.

It will be noted that in the ancient system 'consciousness' is supreme and the mind, brain, body are evolutes of the supreme consciousness. In hierarchy mind has great power over the body, this view seems to be gaining favour with eminent western Scientists.

It will thus to be seen that the method and approach to tackling 'stress' will be different.

Although the word 'stress' was not used it is not as tough 'stress' and consequent misery was not known to the Yogis. The aim of Yoga is not only to remove misery, but remove it in a way that it does not recur again - to vanquish it for once and all.

In scriptures human misery has been classified under three main groups :

- (i) Adhyatmika : caused by intrinsic influences, bodily or mental such as predominance of bile or phlegm or desire or anger.
- (ii) Adhibhautic: caused by extrinsic natural influences such as other men, beasts, birds etc.
- (iii) Adhiudaivika : extrinsic supernatural influences e.g. extreme heat, cold, wind, rain, flood etc.

These 'stress-situations' compare favourably with western concepts stated earlier.

STRESSORS

Yoga philosophy looks at stressors in a slightly different way.

'Asmita' is described as a tension or 'Klesa' because it generates a contradiction between the what is, the existential and what it is thought to be - the ideational. The tension comes in as a result of inattention to and hence, unawareness ('avidya') of what from moment to moment actually is. The unawareness ('avidya') is the soil, in which all tensions take root (P.Y.S. II.4). It also upsets man's vision of reality (P.Y.S. II.5).

Kleshas (Tensions) are described in P.Y.S. II 3-9. They are five viz. 'Avidyasmita-raga-dvesabhinivesah klesah'. (II.3) Means to reduce the effects of klesah are also described in P.Y.S. II. 10.11.26 and 27.

It is not relevant here to discuss all these. One technique may be quoted.

ध्यानहेयास्तदवृत्तय (यो. सू. २:११)

'Dhyana - hayas tad - vrttayah' P.Y.S. II.11

Their active modifications are to be suppressed by meditation.'

To my mind 'Antarayah' (P.Y.S. I.30) adequately describe the result of these tensions or 'kleshas.' The 'Antarayas' are : disease, languor doubt, carelessness, laziness, worldly-mindedness, delusion, non-achievement of a stage, instability are causes of distraction of the mind. This adequately defines the effects of stress on human body. These are further elaborated in P.Y.S. I.31, "Mental pain, despair,

nervousness and hard breathing are symptoms of distracted conditions of the mind."

Thus, stress, stress situations, stressors and effect of stress on the body and mind find adequate mention in 'Yoga Sutras'.

The Yoga Techniques to overcome stress are fully described. Yoga has developed an eightfold path of systematic stages, which sequentially lead to highest stage of conscious evolution and help eradicate stress. These include :

1. Yama (P.Y.S. II.30)
2. Niyama (P.Y.S. II.32)

These great vows lay the foundation of a sound moral and ethical way of life and organize the life of a 'Sadhaka¹ for stability and capable of withstanding the rigors of the discipline and ethical way of life. They alongwith philosophical outlook lend a proper perspective to the Raw event.

3. Asanas (P.Y.S. II.46.47.48) Prepare a physical and mental background for an organized life. They aim at establishing proper rhythm in the neuro-muscular tonic impulses and improving the general tone of the muscles.
4. Pranayama (P.Y.S. I.34, II.52.53) Traditionally the practice of Pranayama leads to purification of 'Nadis' through which the currents of 'Pranic-energy' flows. This results in purifying and steadying the mind.
5. Pratyahar (P.Y.S. II.54.55) It is the process of withdrawing the senses from their objects, resulting in mastery over the senses.
6. Dharma
7. Dhyana
8. Samadhi

These three stages together are known as 'Antaranga Yoga' and are adequately described in 'Vibhuti Pada'. (P.Y.S. Ch. III). These stages are sequential and merge smoothly into each other, and have a positive effect in tranquilizing and making the mind one-pointed (Ekagra).

Rationale of Ashtanga Yoga

It will be seen that these practices begin at the physiological level with proper control of reflexes, postures and respiratory functions. It then progresses through techniques of concentration to progressive control of higher mental processes leading to control of the mind. Through proper conditioning by this regimen several autonomic functions are also brought under control. This coordination of thought control with a programme of daily exercises is of interest to physiological-psychology and religious philosophy.

Results of Meditation

The result of Meditation is 'Ekagrata', concentration on a single point and a total censorship of all distractions that dominate our usual consciousness. Meditation controls - 'sense activity' (Indriyas) and the activity of the subconscious (Sanskaras). Thus, Yogic Meditation helps in controlling these two sources of mental whirlwinds (Chittavrittis). In the stage of 'Ekagrata' the 'thought process' in all form ceases. Thought conditions the mind and limits its freedom. Meditation leads ending of thought which opens a different dimension of consciousness which transcends time. In proper meditation knowledge is also not involved, because knowledge controls and distracts thought. Since props of thought and knowledge drop out and the mind becomes free and pure. Ego dissolve and conflict ceases. Since Mind has a great control on body a pure mind will heal body and thus be a strong 'anti-stress' factor.

EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

Meditation (Dhyan) surely leads to a steady and uncluttered mind which is powerful and can concentrate better. Several unwanted thoughts and emotions leave the mind, the level of tension is lessened, conflicts will resolve and thus there will be a positive approach and outlook on life.

Well documented reports show that there are changes in personality and behaviour, which greatly reduce stress and are the goals of psychotherapy.

Herbert Benson (1969), Prof, of Medicine at Harvard University, describes that people doing Meditation have increased energy and efficiency in performing any kind of work, increased calmness, and

decreased physical and mental tension. Increase in creativity, productivity, inventiveness, discrimination, intuitiveness and concentration are reported.

Laboratory studies, experimental observations carried out on individuals practising meditation at Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla. It was seen that Meditation produced physiological responses, which are exactly opposite to those seen in stress. For example, heart rate and respiratory rate is reduced. The respiration becomes regular, blood lactate levels fall, E.M.G. shows deep muscular relaxation. Eye movements are reduced. Finger plethysmography shows vasodilation, the E.E.G. recordings show increased alpha activity, a sign of relaxation and alert awareness. These findings have been confirmed in various recognized laboratories.

Since these findings are exactly opposite to the physiological changes induced by stress, it is reasonable to assume that, Meditation should be of great value in management of stress. Actual clinical observations support this contention. There are encouraging reports of effective, beneficial management of stress disorders e.g. high blood pressure, rehabilitation of cardiac cases, asthma, diabetes mellitus, arthritis, insomnia, migraine, peptic ulcer, anxiety neurosis and mental breakdown. The list is by no means complete. The best controlled studies reported on essential hypertension are by late Dr. K. K. Datey and Dr. C. Patel. Convincing reports of improvement in asthma have been published by Dr. Nagendra.

Summarising thus it will be seen that Yoga psychology and Yogic techniques are very powerful tools in management of stress and stress related disorders. Asanas, Pranayama and Meditation practised regularly and with faith yield wonderful results. This discipline needs no equipment. After initial lessons at the face of a Guru the techniques can be easily carried out by anyone in his home. What is essential is faith and long continued uninterrupted practice (PYS I.4).

In Western Science there is a deep study of regulatory control within the body, the physical sheath. However, it stops there. Yoga insists on considering Man as a whole. The processes which direct and regulate the physiology are transcended and we expand our analysis into subtle energy levels and relate them casually to the more gross material end. Such consideration leads us irrevocably to the 'primacy' and 'irreducibility' of 'consciousness' (CIT) over all

material realities and to accept that Mind is separate from and superior to the body-brain complex.

Recently this view has been supported by many eminent Scientists. To quote Nobel Prize winning scientist Sperry. "Mental events control physical events and that consciousness is an emergent property of the brain, with capacities that are greater than the sum of the capacities of the parts involved." Barbara Brown in her book 'Super-mind' seems to subscribe to a similar view.

The Yogic point of view is that consciousness (CIT) is the source of all manifestation. It is unchanging reality. Consciousness is unlimited - universal consciousness. It is consciousness without an object (Merrel Wolff, 1973) or Transcendental consciousness. It manifests and operates as 'CIT-SHAKTI' through three interactive tendencies - the 'The Gunas' viz. Sattva, Raj and Tamo gunas.

An awareness of this concept of Yoga together with Meditation, and Yogic techniques of Asanas and Pranayama lead to Discriminative knowledge - 'Vivek-khyati'. Such a person has a proper perspective of the raw event and is immune to stress of any origin.

It is submitted on the basis of review of literature and the data produced that Yoga philosophy and Yogic practices are the best and cheapest means to fight stress in all its forms. Faith and endurance are necessary accompaniments.

Before closing I would like to stress the need for a more controlled and systematic research in Yoga philosophy and techniques so that a more convincing foundation is laid for the role of Yoga in management of 'STRESS' in all its aspects. Yoga has a great future in stress management.

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