

## Yoga Interventions in OCD and Depression: A Comprehensive Review

Neelam Mishra<sup>1</sup>, Rashi Garg<sup>2\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This comprehensive review explores the therapeutic potential of yoga in addressing obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression, prevalent psychiatric conditions with significant treatment challenges. Highlighting the global impact and limitations of conventional therapies for OCD, the paper introduces Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), specifically yoga, as a promising solution. Examining various yoga forms, such as Kundalini yoga and Rajyoga meditation, the review cites clinical trials supporting yoga's positive impact on OCD symptoms. Additionally, it explores the efficacy of different yoga forms, including Sudarshankriya, in alleviating depressive symptoms. Emphasizing yoga's stress-reducing properties in anxiety disorders, the paper concludes by highlighting yoga's holistic and individualized nature, offering promising alternatives to traditional treatments for OCD and depression in mental health care.

**Keywords:** *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Depression, Yoga*

**Y**oga means "union" or "to yoke" in Sanskrit. It refers to a way of life that aims to unite an individual's body, mind as well as soul. Although the exact beginnings of yoga remain unknown, the Indian philosopher Patanjali outlined the eight elements of yoga which have been widely practiced by Eastern cultures throughout many thousands of decades. (G F, 1998). Although yoga is commonly considered a type of workout activity in modern society, the practice of yoga has traditionally been multidisciplinary that involves poses as well as exercise, breathing control strategies, along with the regulation of attention along with the improvement of mindful awareness using meditation practice. Traditionally, yoga was a spiritual practice to develop one's spirituality, and all of these practices were designed to establish a perfect state of psychophysiological wellness and maximum physical and mental functioning to encourage meditative states of mind. Nevertheless, in today's world, these yoga techniques are frequently utilised in an increasingly constrained manner for maintaining one's physical health and mental wellness, as well as a form of treatment both psychological and physiological concerns, sometimes known as "yoga therapy," each of which have become more prevalent among everyone around the world (Büssing et al., 2012).

<sup>1</sup>Associate Consultant Rehabilitation Psychologist, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi

<sup>2</sup>Junior Psychologist, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi

\*Corresponding Author

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Research findings on the psychophysiological advantages associated with practicing yoga date back to the early twentieth century as well (Kavalayananda, 1924), and this increasing amount of literature indicates that among the most prevalent reliable and accurate benefits associated with yoga practice involve decreased stress, regulating emotions, improved state of mind and wellness, enhanced mental performance, improved breathing capacity, enhanced mobility, stronger muscles, and neurological and muscular performance. These studies have given some insight into the potential determinants that operate in yoga among groups of patients. Several of these results, particularly that were related to distress and affect, have been linked to critical determinants of various diseases, they are anticipated to be responsible towards a sizable portion of yoga's beneficial value. Nevertheless, some yoga practices are thought to be very effective for certain conditions. This research focuses on the effects of yoga on OCD and depression.

### *OCD and Yoga*

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a prevalent mental illness that affects 1.5% to 2.0% of the population (American Psychological Association, 2013). It is the fourth most prevalent psychiatric condition, and the World Health Organisation places OCD in the top ten most disabling illnesses (Bobes et al., 2001). It is linked to decreased quality of life and poorer social functioning. OCD is among the most debilitating disorder of anxiety that is associated with a "waking nightmare" (Rapoport, 1990). According to researchers, OCD is the fourth most frequent mental condition after phobias, drug misuse, and severe disorders of depression and is twice as frequent as schizophrenia and panic disorder (Rasmussen and Eisen, 1990). Murray and Lopez (1996) identify OCD as being among the leading 10 causes of disabilities globally. OCD is one of the most challenging mental illnesses to treat since it does not respond to typical insight-oriented treatment (Jenike, 1990).

Antidepressant medication, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and exposure response prevention (ERP) are currently the principal treatments. However, there are several issues about their usage, including side effects, partial responses, persistent symptoms, affordability, accessibility, and so on. Many of these can be addressed with complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Yoga, comes within the area of CAM, which has proven to benefit both symptoms and well-being in individuals with OCD (Sarris et al., 2012).

Yoga, including Hatha and Kundalini versions, has demonstrated promise effects on OCD symptoms and general well-being (Balasubramaniam et al., 2012; Cabral et al., 2011; Sathyanarayanan et al., 2019; Varambally et al., 2020). Kundalini yoga, in particular, has been shown to provide both immediate and long-term treatment from OCD symptoms (Shannahoff-Khalsa, 2003). Clinical investigations using Kundalini yoga meditation techniques show benefit in treating OCD, suggesting a viable alternative to established therapy procedures (Shannahoff-Khalsa et al., 1999).

Kundalini yoga, according to Shannahoff-Khalsa (2004), can provide both short-term alleviation and lasting enhancement and remission. Shannahoff-Khalsa (2003) reports a case study of immediate transient alleviation, as well as a review of previous Kundalini yoga experiments. The effectiveness of Kundalini Yoga practices for treating OCD was tested in two year-long clinical trials. The first experiment was carried out in an attempt to assess a technique that yogis said was specifically designed to treat OCD (Shannahoff-Khalsa, 1991). The second trial included a comparison meditation group that used the well-studied Relaxation Response technique (Benson, 1975) as well as the Mindfulness Meditation technique (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

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Bhat et al. (2021) reported a case series from India and emphasized the positive effects of one month of yoga as a complementary therapy in OCD patients. Before and throughout yoga practice, every participant in the trial was on stable drug levels. Pre-post evaluations were performed for the fundamental symptoms of obsession/compulsions, as well as depressed and anxiety symptoms. After one month of yoga, the tests revealed a substantial improvement in Y-BOCS and HAM-D scores.

The incorporation of Kundalini Yoga (KY) practices for treating mental diseases, including OCD, was examined in research by Shannahoff-Khalsa (2005). KY regimen was shown to be effective in treating OCD symptoms, anxiety, and depression in two clinical studies. Specific meditation techniques were used in the KY regimen for OCD, anxiety, poor energy, fear, rage, and negative thoughts. The report also implies that components of the KY regimen might be useful for patients with psycho-oncology.

Mehta et al. (2020) investigated the efficacy of Rajyoga meditation as an addition to first-line therapy in OCD patients. The study discovered that Rajyoga meditation is an effective supplementary therapy for treating obsessions and compulsions in OCD patients. When compared to the non-meditative group, the meditation group exhibited considerably better improvement in OCD symptoms.

Rajyoga, a Brahma Kumari behavioural intervention, emphasises meditation as a tool of self-empowerment. Rajyoga meditation (RM) has been demonstrated to help individuals detach from compulsive thoughts by strengthening the mind (Mehta et al., 2020). Because RM helps to develop the mind, people may discard and separate their consciousness and self-identity from compulsive ideas. The underlying process is thought to be a considerable rise in serotonin levels along with a drop in monoamine oxidase levels, an enzyme that degrades neurotransmitters and cortisol. This reduces anxiety (Turakitwanakan et al., 2013) and increases awareness, resulting in a shift towards parasympathetic nervous system dominance, presumably by direct vagal activation (Innes et al., 2005).

Bhat et al. (2021) investigated the therapeutic benefits of yoga on OCD in a case series and then in a randomised clinical study. The yoga group had 20 patients, whereas the control group had 22. For four weeks, yoga was used as an adjunct to continuous medication therapy. The inclusion of yoga reduced obsessive symptom ratings by approximately 30%. The decrease was minimal in the group that did not get yoga. In OCD, the difference favoured yoga addition.

### ***Depression and Yoga***

Depression is a psychological disorder marked by prolonged sadness and a lack of interest (Salik & Marwah, 2022). Major depression, also called major depressive disorder, has a complicated root cause that involves both hereditary and environmental components. Blood relatives of depressive individuals are 3 times more prone to develop depressive disorders over the population as a whole; however, depression can occur among individuals who have no familial history of depression (Pham & Gardier, 2019). Depressive disorder is the most prevalent cause of disabilities and makes an important addition to the worldwide disease burden. The global prevalence of depression has increased in recent decades (Wang et al., 2017). As reported by the World Health Organisation (WHO), around 280 million individuals globally experience depressive disorder, and approximately 7,00,000 individuals die as a consequence (WHO, 2021). Several meta-analyses and systematic reviews have

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evaluated a variety of yoga therapies utilising various forms of yoga and shown benefits in mental health across a wide spectrum of mental diseases.

According to Javnbakht et al. (2009), yoga is frequently considered as a way to manage stress that can help cure anxiousness and depression. They wanted to see how yoga affected the features of anxiety and depressive disorders in women who were directed to the practice of yoga. The findings showed that participation in a two-month yoga session can result in a substantial reduction in reported levels of anxiety among women with anxiety disorders. It can be incorporated as a treatment method for anxiety and mood disorders. Similarly, Bilderbeck et al. (2013) assessed the benefits of a 10-week yoga course in the jail population in research. Upon comparison, it was found that individuals who practiced yoga showed higher level of positive mood and lower levels of stress.

Other types of yoga, such as Sudarshankriya, can help with depression (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005). Yoga has also been shown to assist people with mild cognitive impairment sleep better (Gangadhar & Porandla, 2015).

Pascoe and Bauer (2015) published a comprehensive evaluation of randomised controlled studies on the impact of yoga on stress. It was found that yoga offers elevated mood benefits, which may be connected to its calming impact on stress in the body and swelling, that are frequently associated with mood disorders. It was noted that yoga improves the functioning of both the sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system, in addition to a decrease in symptoms of anxiety and depression among a variety of populations.

Cramer et al. (2013) found that yoga has more benefits for depression than standard therapy, relaxation, or aerobic exercise in a meta-analysis. Yoga was used as an adjunct therapy in these studies. Yoga, on its own, had considerable benefits and was even similar to normal depression treatment (Prathikanti et al., 2017). A previous randomised controlled experiment (RCT) combining yoga with imipramine and electro-convulsive treatment (ECT) found a similar result (Janakiramaiah et al., 2000). The best outcomes were obtained using ECT. Yoga and imipramine both had equivalent results. Yoga alone generated substantial improvements in depression in a more recent trial, but not in an RCT (Naveen et al., 2016). Yoga has been mentioned as an add-on treatment for depression in one of the treatment guidelines (CANMAT 2016) (Ravindran et al., 2016).

Finally, yoga, as a kind of Complementary and Alternative Medicine, appears to be a beneficial intervention for those suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression. From Kundalini yoga, which provides immediate alleviation, to Rajyoga meditation, which empowers the self, these disciplines provide complete approaches to mental well-being. Yoga's therapeutic advantages go beyond standard therapies, offering clients beneficial options and supplementing existing therapeutic procedures. As research advances, incorporating yoga into mental health care may open the path for more comprehensive and personalised therapy choices for people suffering from OCD and depression.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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