



ROLE OF YOGA IN INFERTILITY

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ABSTRACT

Infertility has become a major disorder in present scenario due to the increasing mental stress, lack of exercise and changing lifestyle. It has a strong impact on the psychological and social well-being of the couples. Various treatment modalities like hormonal therapy, assisted reproductive technology are able to give hope to the patients but have unsatisfactory results, huge expenses and lot of side effects. Even the psychological impact of infertility treatment itself can lead to increased stress and anxiety. *Yoga* can prove very beneficial in management of infertility both at physical and mental level. By regular practicing the *Yoga poses* the reproductive organs get strengthen, the neuro-muscular co-ordination is improved and the hormonal imbalance gets corrected. In addition, the relaxation induced by meditation helps to stabilize the autonomic nervous system and thus make a person more resilient to the stress and anxiety. Therefore in the present study a review is presented on stress management through *Yoga* along with description of various *Asanas* important in infertility.

KEYWORDS: Infertility, Stress, Yoga, Asana.

INTRODUCTION

Infertility is great issue of public health importance due to its increasing prevalence, serious psychological, financial and social implications. There are a number of factors that can cause infertility. The most common is the stress we go through everyday life. As it is already known and proven by researches that stress acts as a major hindrance in a person's fertility. It is estimated that one in six couples face difficulties in conceiving. The stress arises due to various responsibilities from career, home, partner and other commitments. Further, not having a baby after a long time bears a stigma, a degree of rejection in social groups which may cause extreme anxiety and disappointment. Stress affects our body so much that it creates various hormonal imbalances that result to different diseases. It's the turn of *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* to give solution and active conception by natural method to give healthy offspring. *Yoga* is one among oldest system of health care in the world which uniquely perceived an intimate relationship between lifestyle of an individual to its health and disease. In *Yogasutra*, *Acharya Patanjali* explained various *Asanas* (*Yoga* poses). These *Asanas* are very helpful in controlling the mind as well as other element of the body. *Yoga* is not just an exercise or gymnastic postures but a scientific system of altering the brain and body chemistry to support a heightened state of sensitivity and clarity.^[1] Various *Yogic* practices includes *Yama* (restraints), *Niyama* (observances), *Asanas* (Poses), *Pranayama*

(breathing techniques), *Pratyahara* (dissociation of one's consciousness from the senses), *Dharana* (concentration), *Dhyanana* (meditation), *Samadhi* (integration), *Shatkarma*, *Mudra*, *Bandha*, *Mantra-japa* etc. The exercise and postures in *Yoga* have a unique role in bringing the body in a relaxed state. Studies have shown that mediation can literally change our brain cells. The negative thought pattern of infertility can be changed to ease the whole process. Due to the psychological effects of infertility and its modern treatment approaches, a patient's stress level increases and ability to handle the daily challenges becomes a quality of life issue. But the process of synchronization attained through *Yoga* and meditation directly addresses this issue and thereby helps in curing infertility.

Some general *Yoga* benefits

- Increases flexibility, strength and overall energy level
- Improves balance, posture and sleep.
- Maintains health of joints and spinal discs
- Increases circulation to all body systems including the organs
- Supports the lymphatic system, which is responsible for removal of toxins
- Regulates the endocrine system and boosts the immune system
- Reduces stress and calms the central nervous system

- Clears the brain, improves memory and the ability to concentrate
- Improves the efficiency and health of the respiratory system
- Increases oxygen to cells and increases red blood cell count
- Slows the aging process due to improved oxygenation of the blood, and detoxification of all systems
- Helps prevent osteoporosis by increasing strength, reducing cortisol levels in the blood stream and stemming the loss of calcium
- Improves metabolic efficiency, which helps with weight control
- Boosts libido and improves sexual performance
- Improves mood, reduces anxiety, and alleviates depression
- Reduces blood pressure and cholesterol levels

Types of *Yoga* beneficial for conception^[2]

Hatha yoga is considered to be very ideal for fertility as it involves slower and flowing movements. The deep and slow breathing involved in this *Yoga* calms the mind and allows the focus and concentration to set in. The various holding poses called *Asanas* improves blood circulation as the mind reaches in a state of peace. While holding a certain pose, the person has to imagine in the mind that a vital energy is flowing into the genital area. These productive mind associations actually trigger the feeling of well-being and energy to the affected area.

Yoga Asanas (poses) effective in fertility^[3-5]

- ***Paschimottanasana* (Seated forward bend):** The *Paschimottanasana* stimulates the ovaries and uterus. The forward bend stretches the muscles at the lower back, hips and hamstrings. This particular yoga for fertility relieves stress, depression and it will gradually improve fertility levels.
- ***Hastapadasana* (Standing forward bend):** In *Hastapadasana* you have to bend forward touching the hand to the feet. It stretches all the important muscles of the back and this will improve the blood supply to the pelvic region and nervous system. This bend helps relieve stress from the abdomen region and make the spinal cord more flexible.
- ***Janu Shirasana* (One-Legged Forward Bend):** *Janu Shirasana* will be very useful during pregnancy as it will strengthen your lower back muscles. When properly executed, this yoga pose is very relaxing and releases tension from the lower back. It effectively stretches the calves and the hamstrings, making them very supple.
- ***Baddha Konasana* (Butterfly Pose):** The *Baddha Konasana* improves the flexibility of private part and hip regions, as it stretches the inner thighs, genital and knees. It helps release any toxins and negative energy in the areas of hip and groin. The pelvis, abdomen and back are stimulated by plentiful blood supply. The flapping of thighs also increases sperm count in men. For women, coupled with *Sarvangasana*, it aids the ovaries to function properly and appropriating irregular menses. This pose not only increases fertility levels but also ensures a smoother delivery, if practiced till late pregnancy.
- ***Viparita Karani* (Legs up the wall Pose):** This position, *Viparita Karani*, relieves backache and improves the flow of blood to the pelvic region. As this pose stretches the back of the neck, front torso and back of the legs, it easily helps in relaxing your feet and tired legs. Even with a decent fertility rate, one can increase the chances of conception by relaxing in this posture after sex.
- ***Balasana* (Child's Pose):** In this pose, the muscles of hips, thighs and ankles are stretched and strengthened. It calms the brain and helps relieve stress and fatigue, and in better alignment of pelvis and increase blood flow, which is important to increase fertility rate in the body.
- ***Kapalbhati Pranayama* (Rhythmic Rapid Breathing):** Blood cells get purified with this Pranayama further enhancing the quality and quantity of reproductive cells. *Kapalbhati* cures almost all diseases, as it balances hormone levels of the body. In the process, brain gets influenced in a good manner and hence the whole body is cleansed.
- ***Nadi Shodhan Pranayama* (Alternate Nostril Breathing):** This simple breathing technique helps calm the mind and body by releasing the accumulated stress. It also helps purify the *nadis* (subtle energy channels), thus enabling smooth flow of *prana*. By de-stressing the mind and body, this pranayama lets one to relax, making the body more fertile and approach the process of conception with a fresh perspective.
- ***Bhramari Pranayama* (Bee breath):** The Bee breath instantly relieves the body from tension, anger and anxiety. The chances of conception are better with a more relaxed body and mind. The humming vibrations of the *Bhramari Pranayam* activate the pituitary gland, which is one of the major glands in the body. This is the master gland that controls all major glands in the body, including those that secrete sexual hormones.
- **Supported Head Stand:** Also called as mother of all poses, this asana is one of the most challenging poses. Inverting the body and balancing on head will ease the pressure on heart muscle. The stimulation of head causes hypothalamus to release more hormones. This pose requires intense concentration. Hold the asana for about 5 to 7 seconds as a person breathe.
- **Supported Shoulder Stand:** This pose requires balancing the body weight on the shoulders. The pose is said to trigger the thyroid gland when the sternum presses on the thyroid area. It is important to relax the tongue and throat. This pose also

increases the blood flow to the uterus after relaxing the pelvis.

- **Bridge Pose:** This is a tough yogic pose. This asana requires lifting the pelvic region up while keeping the buttock muscles firm. When the pelvic area is thrust upwards, both the energy and blood flow get circulated to the uterus and ovaries. Try to stay in the pose for at least 30 seconds before coming back into normal state.
- **Shavasana (Yogic sleep):** *Shavasana* or corpse pose is helpful to induce a conscious yogic sleep called *Yoga Nidra*. It aids in attaining equilibrium in the body and mind. This pose is very simple yet powerful amongst other fertility yoga poses for women, as it helps in uplifting the state of mind and making one more optimistic in their approach. Since mental health is also equally important, this meditative state of sleep does not improve the level of fertility directly, but it certainly sets a person at ease and is very useful for couples who wish to start a family. Do *Shavasana* after finishing all the yoga poses for fertility.

CONCLUSION

It needs patience to practice *Yoga* and bring it to perfection. Along with *Yoga* poses, it is recommended to practice meditation, additionally. As *Yogasanas* are exercises to the physical body, meditation is an exercise to mind. When both mind and body are balanced, body hormones will function well and thereby helps in maintaining a healthy body. *Ayurveda* is also beneficial along with *Yoga*. But first it is advised to practice *Yoga* alone for 3 to 4 months before taking any *Ayurvedic* medicines. *Yoga* can cure infertility for sure but it takes time to get in alignment with nature.

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