



Yoga Therapy for the Adjunctive Treatment of Addiction



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Introduction

The American Society of Addiction defines addiction as “a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors. Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one’s behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.” (ASAM) Addiction is a major health concern not only in the developed countries but also in several developing countries around the world. Common addictions include those to nicotine, recreational substances, and alcohol. It is estimated that 240 million people around the world are alcohol dependent, more than a billion people continue to smoke, and about 15 million people are addicted to injection drugs, such as heroin.

Methods

A comprehensive search on 'yoga and addiction' on PubMed revealed 26 citations dating back to 1988. PMC query revealed 578 full length articles. Other contemporary and complementary medicine databases were also queried and relevant publications were consulted.

Results

Yoga intervention helps decrease the willingness of students to smoke. (Butzer et al, 2016) There is attenuation of cravings to smoke with Hath yoga, (Elibero et al, 2011) and yogic breathing exercises. (Shahab et al, 2013) Yogic breathing exercises have been associated with a reduction in tobacco consumption. (Kochupillai et al, 2005) Yoga practice has also been noted to enhance quitting in smokers. (Bock et al, 2012; Rosen et al, 2016) Mindfulness training has also been effective for smoking cessation. (Brewer et al, 2011) Yoga and mindfulness has shown beneficial results in reducing drug addictions. (Khanna et al, 2013) Hath yoga may help patients with drug addiction as much as traditional psychodynamic group therapy. (Shaffer et al, 1997)

Results (continued)

Yoga practice has helped patients with substance abuse in a pilot program. (Khalsa et al, 2008) Mindfulness programs are also effective in decreasing relapses. (Witkiewitz et al, 2010) Yoga practice may help reduce alcohol dependence. (Subramanyam et al, 1986) A positive effect of yoga on alcohol abuse has been noted, (Reddy et al, 2014) and a decrease in alcohol dependence. (Hallgren et al, 2014)

Conclusions

Although most of the studies reviewed were short term, they suggest that yoga therapy may play an adjunctive therapeutic role in the treatment of various addictions. There remains a need for more randomized controlled trials of yoga therapy in these patients.

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