

Can holistic wellness help treat diabetes, hypertension and other chronic illnesses?



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Yoga and meditation can lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and resting heart rates.
(Source: pixabay)

In trying to protect ourselves from Covid, one of the most important lessons that we have learnt is to not take our health for granted. Focusing on our physical and mental well-being is no longer optional, it is what we need to work on constantly. Since the first wave, as we tried various hacks and tips to boost immunity, many realised how health and fitness are based on much more than undergoing treatment for short-term results. Think of all those government advisories or numerous social media posts by nutritionists and wellness experts who emphasised on holistic and sustainable way of living — from immunity-boosting foods to exercise — to keep illnesses at bay.

There is growing consensus among experts about how holistic wellness can help manage or cure even chronic illnesses, more so amid the pandemic. This involves making tweaks in your diet, working out, sleeping well, taking care of your mental health and so on — all directed towards a balanced and, therefore, healthy lifestyle.

“Rather than focusing on illness or specific parts of the body, this approach considers the whole body and how we interact with our environment. It takes everything into account — from how much sleep you get to how stressed you are, how varied your diet is and

whether you are happy. Any imbalance in one aspect affects you in others and causes illness. This is more important in the current health scenario where an increasing number of health problems are considered psychosomatic in nature or diet and lifestyle-related,” Dr Partap Chauhan, director, Jiva Ayurveda, tells [indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com).

<https://images.indianexpress.com/2020/08/1x1.png>



Stress can be one of the major causes for negatively impacting glucose levels. (Source: getty images)

Treating chronic illnesses from their roots

Chronic illnesses have been on the rise in recent years. A 2019 study published in the journal *Preventive Medicine* found that globally, **one in three adolescents are at the risk of diseases like diabetes and cancer** due to unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity. Again, a 2020 study in the journal *Diabetologia* found that more than **half of the men and nearly two-thirds of women in their 20s in India** could develop diabetes during their lifetime.

According to WHO's 2019 Global Health Estimates, **heart diseases have also taken more lives than ever** in recent years, recording an increase of more than two million since 2000.

The ideal way to combat such diseases is to correct them from the roots, and that is exactly what holistic wellness aims to do, according to Dr Chauhan. “For example, when a person with migraine visits an Ayurvedic doctor to get holistic treatment for his problem, instead of walking out solely with medicines, the doctor will take a detailed look at all the potential factors that may be causing the person migraine headache, such as other health conditions, his diet and sleep habits, stress factor and gut health. The treatment plan will involve personalised medicines to treat the disease from its root along with diet and lifestyle modifications to help prevent the headaches from recurring and improve the overall quality of life.”

Also Read | [Luke Coutinho shares simple tips for holistic immunity.](#)

Interplay of physical and mental health and how yoga can help

Not just physical health, holistic wellness experts lay equal emphasis on boosting one's mental health. For instance, Mindhouse, a digital wellness platform, combines the techniques of yoga, meditation and nutrition to treat chronic illnesses. The company's co-founder, Pooja Khanna says, "Most of the chronic or physical health issues can impact a person's mental health and vice versa – most mental health issues can impact a person's well-being. Take for example diabetes. Stress can be one of the major causes for negatively impacting glucose levels. Similarly, diabetes can be a cause for stress, particularly in the early days when you have been diagnosed. While there is a lot of emphasis on treating physical health, we often tend to overlook the mental health which needs to be brought to the forefront."



Yoga and meditation have been found to help cope with chronic mental illnesses.

(Source: getty images)

Several studies have also analysed the link between physical and mental well-being. A 2019 study in the journal *Health Psychology* found that **women with symptoms of depression** were at an increased risk of multiple chronic diseases like stroke, diabetes and cancer.

According to Khanna, yoga and meditation "play a huge part" in managing chronic illnesses. "Different yoga poses can positively impact different parts of the body helping control specific symptoms related to a medical condition."

Agrees Dr Chauhan. "Clinical effects of meditation impact a broad spectrum of physical and psychological symptoms and syndromes, including reduced anxiety, pain, and depression, enhanced mood and self-esteem and decreased stress. It is also proven to be effective in the management of chronic illnesses such as fibromyalgia, cancer, hypertension, and psoriasis."

Also Read | [Effective lifestyle tweaks to strengthen immunity](#).

It can also help keep heart diseases at bay, says the doctor. “Yoga and meditation can lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and resting heart rates, and help slow the progression of atherosclerosis – all risk factors for heart disease. While almost any exercise is good for the heart, yoga’s meditative component gives it an extra boost by helping to stabilise the endothelium, the lining of the blood vessels which, when irritated, contributes to cardiovascular disease. Since the lining is reactive to stress, and meditation can lower stress hormones, yoga may be causing a cascade of events that could reduce a person’s risk of getting a heart attack or stroke.

“Another example of yoga alleviating chronic problems is for arthritis patients. People with various types of arthritis who practise yoga regularly can reduce joint pain, improve joint flexibility and function, and lower stress and tension to promote better sleep.”



Yoga and meditation can help manage hypertension too. (Source: getty images)
PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome) and diabetes are among other health issues that can be controlled with these practices. “We see a lot of people with **PCOS**, diabetes and hypertension who opt for non-clinical solutions rather than taking medication. This is of course done in consultation with a doctor keeping in mind their specific symptoms,” Khanna states.

Meditation and yoga can aid in chronic mental illnesses as well. Nikita Sulay, psychologist and outreach associate, Mpower -The Foundation, another wellness platform, says, “In illnesses such as schizophrenia, **bipolar disorder** or other neuropsychological issues, we may use yoga and meditation as techniques to help deal with certain emotions, calm the mind, increase awareness and use body as a medium of expression. However, there is no strong scientific evidence that one can be cured with meditation and yoga. Nonetheless, they are very effective to aid medical procedures and other psychotherapies.”

Holistic wellness or medical treatment — what should you opt for? Experts say both go hand in hand. “While surgeries and medicines work on managing the disease symptoms, a little yoga or meditation practice integrated into dincharya (lifestyle) can even keep the illnesses at bay. These practices empower you not to only take care of your physical health but your mental well-being,” Dr Chauhan asserts. “Nowadays, even a lot of surgeons suggest their patients meditate before or after surgery to ease anxiety or post-operative pain, improve the psychological state, and recovery time. Meditation and yoga also benefit those seeking relief from mental and physical stresses encountered during their hospital admission, as seen in Covid patients.”

Sulay adds, “Yoga and meditation are alternative healing therapies which means that they are ways of treatment that are used in tandem with mainstream therapies. For instance, if one suffers from a knee injury the main therapy would be physiotherapy and yoga can be used along with it.”

Holistic wellness in India

Dr Chauhan says a “paradigm shift” has been noticed in people in India, especially between the ages 20 and 50, when it comes to holistic wellness. “People are eating consciously, indulging in physical activities, sleeping on time to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The government is also introducing programmes to promote the wellness industry in India.”

Khanna, however, adds that this “ever-increasing demand” in the wellness industry is met with a “fairly unstructured supply”. “There is no one place for people to turn to for all wellness solutions that are suited to their needs. That is why we are looking to create a platform offering yoga, meditation, nutrition, counselling, supplements, Ayurveda, and more, to help people,” she says.

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