



Yoga for Doctors

Doctors suffer from high levels of stress and depression,¹ more so than other workers.²

The proportion of doctors and other health professionals showing above threshold levels of stress is significantly high at around 28%, as compared to around 18% in the general working population.⁷ Many studies show that the quality of patient care can be severely affected by the stress levels of clinical staff, particularly the doctors.³ Stressed doctors may make considerably more errors than those whose sense of well being is high.⁴ This is particularly true if they have insufficient hours of sleep.⁵ Major stressors for doctors are increased work hours, lack of sleep, making mistakes in clinical care, unsupportive family environment, being too self-critical, poor communication and poor team work. Clearly, while some stresses encountered by doctors are intrinsic to the job, others (such as hours worked) may be modified.²

Yoga, a form of holistic mind-body medicine, that includes the use of physical postures (*asanas*), breathing practices (*pranayamas*), meditations, relaxation techniques, and lifestyle changes

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based on ancient yogic philosophy, is simple, cost-effective and easy to practice.⁶ Yoga has become popular as an effective and safe coping strategy to deal with stress. Yoga reduces stress by improving autonomic functions via triggering neuro- hormonal mechanisms that suppress sympathetic activity through down regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis.⁷ A review of studies on cyclic meditation suggests that this technique brings deeper levels of relaxation without hampering the alertness.⁸ Yogic relaxation (*YogaNidra*) is also a successful therapy for managing both recent and long standing psychological distress.⁹

Several yogic practices (performed daily for 60 minutes, for 3 months) may be useful for doctors in managing their stress better. The Integrated Approach of Yoga Therapy (IAYT) practices for doctors are provided in Table 1:



References:

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4. Jones JW, Barge BN, Steffy BD, Fay LM, KRS. LK, et al. Stress and medical malpractice.