

Sahaja Yoga Meditation: A Simple, Fast Way to Reduce Stress and Enhance Well-being

Sandeep Rai, Madhur Rai

“The art of healing comes from nature, not from the physician”

–Paracelsus

ABSTRACT

STRESS—We all have it. Medical institutions such as Stanford University Hospitals and Mayo Clinic estimate that 90% of all preventable disease is caused by stress. We are up to the eyebrows with stress and are assaulted on all sides, every day with job stress, anxious news reports, TV with murder and mayhem, etc. Think of a recent time you felt stressed. Maybe it was during an argument with your boss, or a meltdown with your kids, whatever the cause, your body and brain were almost certainly experiencing the same thing: boiling blood pressure, a churning stomach, tight muscles and a racing mind. It may not be an easy task to change the present day stressors but certainly a change can be brought in an individual’s perceptions and coping abilities. In fact, new research reveals that simple 20 minutes of *Sahaja Yoga* meditation (SYM) a day now can keep you free of stress.

INTRODUCTION

When stress takes hold, the brain is bathed in chemicals; the sympathetic nervous system gets a jump-start. Glucose and fats flood the bloodstream and our cardiovascular and respiratory systems rev up, all to give us the armaments we need to deal with the stress. These changes would make sense if we were running for our lives or rescuing our child from a fire. But when everything from taxes to television news triggers a reactive response, stress becomes toxic.

At present considerable evidence exists for the place of Mind Body Medicine in maintaining and improving psychological health. Ten million American adults now say they practice some form of meditation regularly, twice as many as a decade ago. “For 30 years meditation research has told us that it works beautifully as an antidote to stress”, says Daniel Goleman, author of “Destructive Emotions”. But what is exciting about the new research is how meditation can train the mind and reshape the brain.

Sahaja Yoga is a unique form of meditation technique developed in 1970 by *Dr Nirmala Devi Srivastava* PhD (Honorary Doctorate in Cognitive Sciences from Romania University). For her significant contributions to understanding of subtle human energy systems she received numerous academic awards, some of which include honorary membership to the very prestigious Presidium of Petroyaska’s Academy of Art and Science, Russia (*Einstein* being one of members) and the United Nations Peace Prize.

In recent times, research studies comparing experienced *Sahaja Yoga* meditators compared to controls have shown decreased sympathetic nervous activity and increased parasympathetic activity, important for relaxation and rest. SYM has been shown to reduce autonomic activity in short- and long-term practitioners compared to controls (Rai et al. 1988, Harrison et al. 2004), reflecting a distressed state. Electrophysiological studies comparing the brain activation of long-term *Sahaja Yoga* practitioners have been able to find specific brain activation patterns corresponding to a relaxed state of mind and subjective feelings of happiness and have also shown better interconnectivity of different brain regions (Aftanas and Golocheikine, 2001, 2002a, b, 2003, 2005).

Rigorous randomized trials on SYM using active control groups have demonstrated significant effects on depressive mood and work stress in full-time workers. (Manocha et al. 2011, Morgan et al. 2001), on enhanced quality of life (Sheng Chia et al. 2012) and on improving psychological health in a diverse group of population consisting of different nationalities and age groups (Rai et al. 2010). Good improvements were shown in patients with asthma, hypertension, epilepsy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children also, after few weeks of meditation training (Chugh, 1997; Manocha et al. 2002, Panjwani U, et al 1996, Harrison et al. 2004, Rubiya K, 2009).

Even when cardiologists aggressively manage their patient’s cholesterol and blood pressure levels, millions of Indians continue to suffer heart attacks and strokes.

The reason is *endothelial dysfunction*. One of its most important functions of endothelium is the release of nitric oxide, which signals the arteries to relax and dilate. The authors have recently completed large randomized controlled study at the MGM Institute of Health Sciences, Navi Mumbai on effects of SYM on various parameters and have shown a very significant improvements in, endothelial function and serum cortisol levels and also shown significantly decreased oxidative stress and perceived stress levels in long-term *Sahaja Yoga* meditators as compared to general healthy population, who were not practicing any meditation.

Heart rate variability: Our thoughts, emotions, and experiences of the external world are tightly connected to the functioning of our heart rhythm and breathing. The more flexible we are, the more capable we are of dealing with life's inevitable stressors. This flexibility is reflected in our cardiovascular system and can be measured as heart rate variability (HRV). When you are putting out heaps of adrenaline from stress, you make your heart more touchy and irritable. The result of this can be as disastrous as a sudden death. That is a tragedy that steals hundreds of thousands of lives a year. Can it be averted?

Now, this is not anything new. It turns out that meditative traditions, most notably from India from about 2,500 to 3,500 years ago have already mastered this. A few minutes of meditation have an immediate and marked impact on the level of our autonomic tone and HRV. The authors have conducted a large randomized control trial on SYM and showed that the mean low frequency/high frequency ratio of the *Sahaja Yoga* group were significantly lower than the non-yoga group. The lower LF/HF ratio in *yoga* group indicated a better sympathovagal balance in *yoga* subjects. Also higher levels of HF which were recorded in the *yoga* group indicated a *Parasympathetic Dominant (Relaxed) State* in subjects.

Sahaja Yoga meditation is now a central feature in corporate wellness and youth development programs globally and is increasingly being practiced in more than 110 countries of the world and prescribed by many doctors as a part of holistic health recommendations. It is nonintrusive and self-regulating in nature and can be practiced by people of all ages and religions. It is well researched and taught free of charge at all the *Sahaja Yoga* Centers in India and abroad. This simple technique can be learnt free from internet also. For more information visit web site www.freemeditation.com or write to doctorsandeeprai@gmail.com.

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