

Yogic Help for Anorexia Nervosa

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Introduction

The eating disorder which occurs due to various environmental factors concludes anorexia nervosa. In this, the person becomes over conscious of the weight he gains thus leading to excessive weight loss. It is more common in females than males and is seen majorly in middle class and upper class part of the society. It is seen because of the pressure by the society and the desire to look good in order to achieve certain motives. Anorexia nervosa can also be called as “unstoppable dieting” as the person feel he/she is fat even after excessive weight loss.

Symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa

Person suffering with anorexia nervosa may experience; Dizziness, stiffness of joints, anxiety and feeling of guilt, low blood pressure, muscle weakness, abdominal pains, early morning waking, abnormal menstrual cycles and constant depression or irritated mood [1].

It has the highest mortality rate in the psychiatric disorders and is not only socially-bound but can also be genetic [2].

Recent studies say that first degree relatives of an individual with AN have approximately ten fold greater life time risk of having AN than the relatives of an unaffected individual. Many times a pregnant women in the fear of gaining weight due to the baby bump takes up excessive dieting, this condition is called pregorexia.

People suffering from anorexia nervosa experience the following:

1. Osteoporosis

Excessive weight loss or not eating proper nutrient food may reduce the bone density leading to osteoporosis.

2. Heart problems

Anorexia nervosa results in reduction of muscle mass which also affects the cardiac muscle. Severe anorexia nervosa can also lead to cardiac failure.

3. Infertility

Most common effect of Anorexia nervosa on a women. The loss of excessive fat leads to less or no production of estrogen necessary to stimulate ovulation.

4. Brain damage

Anorexia nervosa leads to nerve damage with further leads to nerve damage conditions like confusion, cold sensations and anxiety.

5. Blood disorders

Anorexia nervosa can reduce the blood supply and deficiency of various vitamins can lead to anemia (pernicious anemia because of vitamin B12). Can also lead to life threatening conditions like pancytopenia.

Treatments

Along with the professional help from medical world, yoga has always been the most essential and pocket friendly remedy for all the disorders especially

mental illness. Yoga can always boost the inner confidence and help in finding peace which is necessary for all the mental health patients.

Practicing yoga by anorexic patients can secure them the ability to gain confidence for accepting themselves for who they are and get rid of the anxiety.

Yoga can be the most useful kit for any anorexia nervosa patient as the physical yogic activity or asanas help in gaining strength and develop metabolism whereas various types of meditation and breathing exercises can help in gaining the inner peace and confidence to reduce anxiety.

Breathing exercises in yoga [3]

1. Breath retention (kumbhaka pranayama)
2. Channel cleaning breath (nadi shodhana pranayama)
3. Conqueror breath (ujjayi pranayama)
4. Deer seal (mrigi mudra)
5. Lion pose (blowing off steam from mouth)
6. Single nostril breath (surya/Chandra bedhana pranayama)
7. Skull shining breath (kapalbhati pranayama)

Physical strengthening poses of yoga for anorexia nervosa [4]

Crab pose:

- Stimulates respiratory and endocrine system.
- Builds arm, leg and core body strength.
- Helps building a hold and control over body.

Pigeon pose:

- Provides deep stretch for buttocks and outer thigh muscles.
- There are several variations such as forward bend, reclining, seated pigeon etc.

Locust pose:

- Build lower back and strengthen spine.
- Precursor to all the flexibility poses.

Mountain pose:

- Idealized as preparatory or resting phase.
- Strengthens thighs knees and ankles.
- Tones muscles near abdomen and buttocks.

Goddess pose:

- Great for centering your breathing.
- Helps gaining focus.

Squat pose:

- Helps gaining concentration, coordination and balance.
- Eases tension from lower back.

Conclusion

Before practicing the physical yogic activities, a patient should always begin with the breathing exercises. Many patients due to certain contraindications cannot perform certain asana, hence beginning with meditation can be essential for everyone. Various breathing exercises in yoga can benefit in relaxation, cleansing and reduction of stress from the body but not all should be practiced together initially. For An anorexia nervosa patient, the heart rate and muscle strength are already relatively low, therefore the exercise should be minimal initially and gradually increased. Along with the exercises certain therapies like psychotherapy, nutritional rehabilitation, and behavioral therapy should be taken. Also for breathing exercises, certain contraindications like lung disorders and current medication should be taken care of.

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