

Yoga-Related Injury in India: Deep Silence and Closed Eyes

Dear Editor,

Yoga demands immense dedication and practice that finally culminates into physical and mental well-being. As yoga involves activities such as stretching, physical postures, breath control, and meditation, it is well advised to be practiced under the guidance of a seasoned trainer to reach rich dividends and avoid pitfalls.^[1] The joy of yoga grows with a lifetime of learning and enjoying the journey into one's inner self. Unraveling the dimensions of self-discovery by mastering yogic postures and asanas multiplies the richness of the experiences of a dedicated practitioner.

In the initial phases of the yoga journey, either under supervision or through a self-taught regimen, injuries are potential complications. It is but only logical to think that novice learners are prone to these injuries. The Western literature has attempted to document the prevalence and characteristics of yoga-associated injuries. A study spanning 13 years, described strains/sprains as common yoga-related injuries, with elderly population being more prone to these.^[2] A systematic review regarding the prevalence of adverse events in yoga practices with comparison between yoga practitioners and nonyoga practitioners revealed that a sizable number of practitioners experienced injuries which in most cases were mild and transient with comparable risks to those of nonyoga practitioners.^[3] In a large pool of 33,000 yoga teachers, therapists, and other clinicians in one questionnaire-based survey, most participants described yoga injuries as common phenomena. Spine and upper extremity joints such as shoulder and wrist were the commonly affected regions.^[4] The chief reasons attributed to injuries were poor technique, poor alignment, history of previous injuries, excess efforts, and improper or inadequate instructions. Specific asanas were linked to specific injuries such as neck injuries attributed to sirsasana (headstand). A recent systematic review of published case reports and series on adverse events related to yoga (76 cases in total) described 27 musculoskeletal adverse events (35.5%) followed by nervous system- and eye-related injuries.^[5] Most of these cases, though, had full recovery barring one case each with no recovery and death. Avoidance of extreme postures by beginners, practicing under supervision, adaptation or avoidance of certain postures in persons with medical preconditions, and

avoidance of forceful activities by those with compromised bone health were important takeaway from the above study. The reports and articles from India were very few as described in that study, and the same applies to the overall literature search in worldwide medical literature. The land where yoga originated and thrived to become a force to reckon with has been less vocal about notifying the associated injuries. One probable explanation for the low reported adverse incidences may be that we are doing yoga since ages or in a better manner as compared to the western enthusiasts but even that statement would require scientific backup. The lack of scientific registry for this specific health aspect of yoga and the lack of interest in contributing to medical literature have seen the number and quality of literature far less robust than the potential. The development of scientific data collection for every aspect of yoga shall place India in an authoritative position in shaping guidelines and global consensus with evidence-based approach. It is high time that India takes a deep breath and observes yoga with a scientific bent of mind.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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