



Significance of Lifestyle Modifications for Psychosomatic Disorders

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Abstract

Real comfort and happiness is concealed in a sound health. Although modern 'remote control' technology has given us sophisticated machines, medical equipments and powerful medicines, we are not successful in maintaining the health. Diseases like typhoid, malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis, small pox etc. have been controlled due to antibiotics but we are unable to control diseases such as hypertension, insomnia, heart diseases, diabetes, asthma where the cause of disease is not a germ or bacteria and therefore in the absence of health we are far away from happiness.

Generally it is considered that more money will fetch more pleasure and happiness. To earn more money we cross our physical and mental limits and adopt a wrong lifestyle. The result is the increased risk factor and stress in our life. Our Rishi-Munis (saints) have given specific guidelines through Ayurveda and yoga, suggesting an ideal daily routine (Dinacharya) and also the life style as per the seasonal changes (Ritucharya) so as to maintain a perfect healthy condition. Scientific studies have revealed that the corrections in lifestyle can even reverse the process of heart disease and enhance the healing power in human body. In the ancient time yoga was a part of life style in India to promote and maintain healthy state of body and mind, the basis for happiness and comfort.

In the present paper, the scientific evidences have been presented to make people realize the significance of a proper life style for health and happiness. Suitable changes in our life style including pattern of exercise, yoga, diet, sleep, physical and mental relaxation as well as attitude have been suggested for better health and happiness.



Introduction :

Man has conquered diseases like Malaria, Tuberculosis, Typhoid, Small pox, Leprosy etc through vaccines and antibiotics. But in spite of the well-developed 'remote control' technology the happiness is far away from us. Instead of pleasure and comfort he is struggling with intimidating diseases such as hypertension, insomnia, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, spinal disorders where the cause is not the germ or bacteria but the restless and tense mind and stress. The life has become so fast and full of competition that it has disturbed the peace of mind. For more happiness and pleasure more money is required which compels him to work more. While doing so he adopts a wrong life-style that disturbs the circadian rhythm and leads him ultimately to exhaustion, stress, dis-ease and unhappiness due to constant body complaint. Appropriate changes in the life style on the basis of yogic principles can even reverse the heart disease and would help us in maintaining our healthy state of body and mind thereby preventing such stress disorders. This is Drugless therapy for germless diseases.

What is life style?

The word 'lifestyle' was first used in 1939, Alvin Toffler. It included patterns of social relations, entertainment, and dress. A lifestyle also reflects an individual's typical attitude, values or outlook. A specific 'lifestyle' means a conscious or unconscious choice between two different sets of behaviours. The way we eat, perform exercise, take rest, play, behave with others, think, plan, drive a vehicle, sleep, carry out our routine work and commitments and the total living style etc are all included in the term 'lifestyle'. Our routine work and day today life depends on social, political, economical, religious, ecological, family background and various environmental factors. Today the life style has become entirely 'materialistic' in nature. Materialistic progress is also necessary but it should be well coordinated with rational thinking and practical outlook. The viewing is mostly affected by our 'Igo' consciousness and the matter soon becomes a prestige issue. The lifestyle that leads to more and more tensions and unhappiness and ultimately psychosomatic ailments like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, depression etc, is unquestionably called 'improper lifestyle'.

Yoga is an ancient spiritual practice, a way of life, a vibrant living tradition of moral and ethical principles and is seen as a means to enlightenment or self-realization. Daily practice of yoga leads to improved health, emotional well-being, mental clarity, and joy in living.

Effect of improper lifestyle :

The word 'improper lifestyle' indicates unsuitable style or the life pattern adopted by the individual. Irregularity in lunch and dinner timings, junk food consumption, insufficient sleep or rest and hyper-reactivity to every stimulus, poor interpersonal relationship and no control on emotions are indicative of improper lifestyle. Laziness due to luxurious lifestyle, lack of exercise and mental pressure because of tight schedule and occupational threat are a few other risk



factors. Dr Brown and Goldstein (2) have mentioned that a diet high in saturated fat and cholesterol produces double trouble i.e. it will saturate the receptors and also decrease the number of receptors that metabolize and remove cholesterol from the blood stream.

Our inner environment is conditioned by nature to cope with an acute stress better than a chronic stress. Emotional stress is mostly chronic in nature. When an individual is struggling hard to meet his basic life demands and also living such irregular life, he is more susceptible to emotional stress when he meets failure and frustration.

Recent studies of Dr. Judith Ockene (2) show that the lining of normal coronary arteries produces a substance, known as Endothelium-Derived Relaxation Factor (EDRF) that dilates the coronary artery during the exercises, allowing more blood-flow to the heart. When the lining of the coronary artery is damaged by atherosclerosis, the production of EDRF is reduced. Now the arteries cannot relax, on the other hand they constrict during the exercise under the sympathetic dominance and thus reduce the coronary blood flow. Smoking also reduces release of EDRF. In such a situation, it is possible that the artery will develop spasm at the site of the blockage, causing an heart attack. Stress is also known to decrease the level of HDL i. e. a good cholesterol. Zautra AJ (9) found that rheumatoid arthritis (RA) aggravated, in 20 women whenever the disturbance in their interpersonal relationship with husband increased. Women having good marital relationships were less affected.

Studies conducted on 50 first year medical students by Malathi A and Damodaran A (7) revealed that the increased anxiety level of these students at the time of examination probably affected their performance and when they practiced yoga regularly prior to the examination, the anxiety and the number of failures were significantly reduced, compared to the control group. The improvement in other parameters such as better sense of well being, feeling of relaxation, improved concentration, self confidence, improved efficiency, good interpersonal relationship, increased attentiveness, lowered irritability levels and an optimistic outlook in life was also observed in yoga group by way of feedback score.

Effect of lifestyle changes :

Dr. Dean Ornish (2) for the first time showed the reversal of the coronary artery blockages by making comprehensive lifestyle changes. In his first study on 10 heart patients he found that the blood pressure and the cholesterol level dropped significantly and the exercise capability also improved after changing the lifestyle. He conducted his second study on 48 (24 control and 24 experimental) patients who followed his 24 days lifestyle program. The lifestyle group showed 91% reduction in chest pain, 55% improvement in exercise capability, 21% reduction in cholesterol level and significant reduction in Blood pressure at rest and in emotional stress. Patients experienced well-being along with reduced anxiety, fear, worry and depression. Control group remained at the same level and became slightly worse. He included Yoga practices like asana, pranayama, relaxation, meditation as well as the dietary changes like low fat diet and 'attitude changing' based on yogic education, in his lifestyle program.



Mahajan A. S. and his colleagues (6) investigated lipid profile of 52 patients of angina before and after yogic lifestyle intervention for 14 weeks. They found that the subjects who practiced yoga showed decrease in triglycerides, serum cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, compared to 41 control patients. Schmidt T and his associates (8) also studied the effect of comprehensive residential 3 months Kriya Yoga program along with low fat vegetarian food and found substantial reduction in risk factors such as body mass index, total serum and LDL cholesterol, fibrinogen and blood pressure. Similarly urinary excretion of adrenaline, noradrenaline, dopamine, aldosterone as well as serum testosterone and luteinizing hormone levels were reduced while cortisol excretion increased significantly. Garfinkel M.S and his colleagues (3) evaluated Yoga based regimen for treatment of osteo-arthritis of hands for 8 weeks and found that the Yoga group showed significant reduction in pain during work, tenderness and increased finger range of motion. All these studies indicate that by making proper changes in the lifestyle, based on the yogic principles, the risk factors can be successfully reduced.

How to change the lifestyle

It is not easy to adopt totally a different lifestyle from the next day but once you decide to follow proper lifestyle pattern, the following guidelines will help you to make necessary changes in your present lifestyle.

1. **Accept your faults** and mistakes you might have done.
2. Learn to **calm down yourself**. Remain peaceful in your mind so that it is easy to **control your emotions, thoughts and actions**.
3. **Make positive changes in** your overall **out look** towards others, in your style of communication, home arrangements, clothes, timings for yoga, other exercises and hobbies etc.
4. **Organize your work**. Plan it properly for the whole year, considering seasonal changes, festivals, holidays and family functions among relatives.
5. Do not forget the comfort and pleasure components in all the activities. Indian classical music, pleasant fragrance, scents would definitely help you to make your moods, temperament and behavior suitable for the environment.
6. Assess your own diet. It should be well balanced (yukta) from nutrition and quantity point of view. Avoid processed and fast foods. Eat with pleasant and relaxed mind. A short prayer or a thankful remembrance of the almighty God before taking food is always better to cultivate the devotional attitude.
7. Honesty, mutual trust, loyalty, respect for the elders, affectionate and friendly approach for all, wishing and greeting others on various occasion, are good qualities which would improve your interpersonal relationship with others and would bring you more happiness and contentment.



8. 30 minutes morning walk would improve your stamina and would keep you cheerful and fresh through out the day. It will also regulate the level of cholesterol in the blood.
9. Cultivate a habit of rational thinking from all the angles before arriving at the conclusions of the decisions. Altruism, compassion and forgiveness would empower your healing power.
10. Enjoy the humor and comedy. Share the jokes with your friends and family members. Laughter is the best medicine as it relaxes us quickly and makes us sportive for any kind of situation. It also supports our healing process.

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