

Improvement in physiological and psychological parameters after six months of yoga practice in military men

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Mind-body practices such as yoga are believed to have potential beneficial effects on cognition, as well as on emotional control and on improvement of stress tolerance. However, previous studies were mainly performed on eastern experienced practitioners, or in unhealthy subjects undergoing concomitant conventional therapies. In addition, several kinds of physical exercises have also shown to improve several aspects of mental and body health. Further investigation is needed on the effects of yoga practice per se, even as the possible preventive benefits of this practice on healthy subjects. This study investigated the effects of yoga on memory and on psychophysiological parameters related to stress, as well as offering a possible relationship between these measurements. A controlled trial comparing yoga practice and conventional physical exercises was carried out with yoga-naïve healthy military men. Data from memory tests, salivary cortisol levels and stress, anxiety, and depression inventories were assessed before and after six months of yoga practice. There were significant improvements of the performance on the memory tests, which were accompanied by improvements in psychophysiological parameters in the yoga-practitioners. Improvements were detected when yoga practitioners were compared to non-practitioners, as well as when comparisons were conducted between basal and after practice outcomes. The results indicated that yoga can effectively improve memory after six months of regular practice, along with psychophysiological measurements related to anxiety, depression and stress in healthy subjects. Yoga could be an effective treatment of anxiety, depression and stress. Furthermore, an indirect influence of parameters related to emotional state on cognitive improvement promoted by yoga practice can be proposed. Taken together with previous work, the present results point out to an important application of yoga practice in preventive health care and overall improvement in daily life.

Keywords: Yoga. Memory. Stress. Anxiety. Depression. Cortisol Levels.