

## MANAGEMENT OF MENOPAUSAL PROBLEMS THROUGH YOGIC PRACTICE

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### Abstract:

Menopause involves both physiological and psychological manifestations that result from hormonal changes. Basically health is understood as the perfect equilibrium of body, mind, intellect and soul. The person who enjoys lightness of body, slowness of breathing, calmness of mind, control over emotions, action in relaxation and blissful awareness is said to be healthy. Women's health is bound up with social, cultural and economic factor that influence all aspect of their lives and consequences are born by women themselves. Yoga is a physical and mental practice that involves the body, mind and spirit. The practice, which originated in India, is designed to enhance awareness, create a mind-body-spirit balance, cleanse, heal and strengthen the body, liberate the true self and, as practiced today, improve fitness.

**Keywords:** Menopausal problem Management Yoga Therapy

### Introduction

Health of women is very important as they have so many responsibilities in personal life, family life and social life. She performed multidimensional activities in her life which are very important to shape the family and society as a whole. Women often concentrate on health care of family and generally neglect their own health. Women health requires more attention significant changes takes place continuously in her life. Women's health is bound up with social, cultural and economic factor that influence all aspect of their lives and consequences are born by women themselves. Women have the risk of experiencing reproduction-related health problems. This happens during the fertile years after reaching puberty when there is a physiological change in a woman's body. Also when the menstruation stops permanently i.e. menopause the period of transition can be quite challenging and yoga can help with the imbalances in these times.

Yoga is a physical and mental practice that involves the body, mind and spirit. The practice, which

originated in India, is designed to enhance awareness, create a mind-body-spirit balance, cleanse, heal and strengthen the body, liberate the true self and, as practiced today, improve fitness. The most common form practiced in the United States is Hatha yoga, which includes specific movements or postures and various breathing techniques and is often complimented with meditation.

Yoga is now practiced around the world for its psychological, physical and spiritual benefits. Americans have practiced it for more than 100 years, but it gained popularity in the 1960s as young people developed a taste for all things Eastern. According to results of a 2012 survey conducted by Sports Marketing Surveys USA on behalf of Yoga Journal, 20.4 million Americans, or 8.7 percent of U.S. adults, are believed to practice yoga.

### What is Menopause?

Menopause is a major turning point in the life of a woman directly related to her womanhood. It's not a disease but a natural biological process. It is the stage in women's life when menstrual period stops

permanently i.e. cessation of menstrual cycle permanently. It normally occurs between the ages of 45 to 55 years of age. The ideal age is 50. The age of menopause depends on multiple factors such as number of ovarian follicles at birth, the frequency of loss of these follicles through her life and the number of ovarian follicles required to maintain the menstrual cycle. In specific situation where surgical operations like removal of uterus, it may occur earlier. There are hormonal, physical and psychological changes associated. It can occur gradually or abruptly.

### **Symptoms of Menopause:**

Menopause is the most striking event occurring during the middle age in women and represents the end of woman's reproductive life. As woman approaches her midlife years, the production of estrogen and progesterone slows down and eventually stops altogether at menopause. Irregular menstruation, night sweats, insomnia, vaginal dryness, decreased libido, impairment of cognitive function, physical discomfort and dissatisfaction about life are the main symptoms of this stage. Apart from this, problems like osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, atherosclerosis, breathing difficulty, indigestion, hot flushes, physical weakness, disinterest, sleep disturbance, palpitation, instability, weakness, body aches, backache, urinary and faecal incontinence, reduced muscle strength and fatigue, varicose veins are also experienced by menopausal women. Hot flushes are one of the main symptoms associated with menopause and occur in more than 75% of menopausal, consisting of intense episodes of heat that begins on chest and spreads to face, sweating, and flushing of face. Hot flushes are associated with headache, anxiety and palpitations, and it usually lasts 2-4 minutes and can vary in frequency.

**Pre-Menopause:** It is a transitional period before the actual menopause. There is decrease of fertility and decrease of frequency of ovulation and levels of ovarian hormones (oestrogen and progesterone) are erratic. Pre-menopause duration is variable, and it is defined as the time of irregular periods until menopause. Estrogen and progesterone play major role in Menopause. During this stage ovaries produce less estrogen and progesterone leading to discomfort and irritability. The natural menopausal age of a woman serves as a biomarker for subsequent disease prediction and mortality. Age of menopause is a very important biomarker of not only the loss of fertility

but also an increased risk for various mid-life diseases and problems. Many of these diseases can be prevented by timely intervention of lifestyle modification.

In India the average life span of women has approached 62 years, and the problems of menopause are becoming more significant. Epidemiological studies have identified that age-adjusted mortality is reduced by 2% while the risk of uterine/ovarian cancer increases by 5% with each increasing year of age at menopause. The Indian subcontinent includes many ethnic groups and cultures where the perception and symptoms of menopause varies from region to region. During menopause, along with the cessation of menstruation, other biological and psychosocial events occur which can be classified as stressors or facilitators. Since Menopause is a biological process, it does not actually require medical treatment. Menopause is not an illness but a natural biological process. The risk of Heart disease and Osteoporosis increases after menopause. Increased understanding of the risks and side effects associated with medical interventions for the management of menopausal symptoms has contributed to the appeal of alternative modalities of management. Physical exercise, proper diet and alleviation of stress are effective ways to handle the menopausal symptoms, and prevent chronic ailments.

**Post-Menopause:** Twelve months after the last menstrual period, ovary is no more ovulating and producing hormones.

**Menopausal Health Problems:** When the body produces less oestrogen and progesterone, the part of the body that depends upon these hormones to keep them healthy will react and cause discomfort in woman. In the ancient times the systematic and disciplined lifestyle prevalent and comparatively high level of tolerance and positivity towards life had left no scope for the development of health problems after menopause. It is not wrong to say that the genesis of this post menopause problem is the modern age lifestyle, change of psychological attitude towards life and decrease of adaptability. It gives rise to various health problems at the physical, psychological and emotional level.

**Physical impacts associated:**

1. **Vasomotor instability:** It is the most common problem. There is sudden increase in the flow of

blood to the skin, increase the body temperature to 1-7 degree. The waves of heat spread all over the body particularly upper part and face. These flushes are associated with night sweats. The core body temperature falls because of the evaporation of the sweat and woman feels dullness. Hot flushes may occur monthly, weekly or hourly.

2. Urinary complaints: Repeated urinary tract infection is commonly found in these women. Other complaints include urinary incontinence (involuntary flow of urine), increased frequency, urgency, nocturia (increasing frequency during night), painful urination and stress incontinence (urine leakage during coughing, sneezing, laughing and lifting heavy weights).

3. Other physical problems: include vaginitis, dry vagina, prolapsed of uterus and vagina skin is dry and thin, osteoporosis, joint pain, low backache, diffused muscular pain in the body, inflammation and bleeding from gums, loss of hair in the scalp, hair on the face, easy fatigue ability and tiredness, insomnia (not getting sound sleep), weight gain and fat deposition on the abdomen, risk of heart disease because of increase in cholesterol, migrane and headache etc.

**Psychological problems:** include mood swings, depression, impairment of memory, reduce concentration. Menopause involves both physiological and psychological manifestations that result from hormonal changes. The erratic change in hormone level mainly estrogen is thought to influence neurotransmitters particularly serotonin and nor epinephrine and their brain receptors which result in depression and anxiety. Most women will go through significant mood changes during menopause not only due to endocrine changes but also due to other factors like biological, social and psychological factors.

#### **Yogic Management of Menopausal problems:**

Yoga is an ancient Indian science and is one among the six great Indian philosophies. In the spiritual dimension Yoga is a path towards attainment of super conscious states beyond sensory perception and knowledge. According to Maharshi Patanjali Yoga is defined as the process of sublimation of all mental modifications in the mind through a systematic process of Yamas (moral doctrines), Niyamas (disciplines), Asanas (postures), Pranayama (regulated nostril breathing/breath control), Pratyahara (introspection/ in drawing mind away

from perceptible external sensory stimuli), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and finally to attain a state of Samadhi (absorption). Attainment of such a contemplative absorptive state has been elucidated to confer a blissful state of mind and body.

Yoga is an integrated science that helps us to engage in a life of purpose in harmony with our physical and mental capacities and hold on in the circumstances we are placed into. Hence it leads to the all-round personality development. Change in lifestyle, proper diet, reduction of stress and practice of yoga are the effective ways to make menopause bearable and prevent various symptoms/problems. However Hormone Replacement Treatment (HRT) relieves the symptoms/problems partially but it is associated with many side effects such as increased heart disease, breast cancer, strokes and other life threatening disorders. When the different yogic techniques are performed, they gently stretch every muscle of the body, thus promoting better blood circulation and oxidation to all the cells and tissues, this in turn helps in optimizing the functions of endocrine glands and organs of the female reproductive system. These practices of yoga improve the health of Digestive system, Nervous system and other organs.

**The various yogic practices:** Practice asanas under supervision of well trained yoga therapist only.

Taadasan: By the practice of taadasan body becomes well proportioned. It tones up muscles and improves the blood circulation. It also helps to combat stress. Avoid lifting the toes in case of acute cardiac problems varicose veins and vertigo.

Trikonasan & ArdhakatiChakrasana: This will help to stretch the muscles and nerves of the lower back and waist gently. Stretches the body sideways and reduces fat at the waist.

Vajrasan: Vajrasana alters the flow of blood and nervous impulses in the pelvic region and strengthens the pelvic muscles. It is a preventative measure against hernia and also helps to relieve piles. It alleviates menstrual disorders. It increases the efficiency of the entire digestive system, relieving stomach ailments such as hyperacidity and peptic ulcer.

Paschimottanasan: It strengthens the Back and thigh muscles. The pressure exerted by this asana on the abdominal region increases the circulation, thereby stimulates the functioning of the internal organs. Individuals suffering from spinal or disc

injuries/damage should avoid or practice under expert guidance.

**Suptavajrasana:** This asana stretches the intestines and abdominal organs and is useful for all abdominal ailments. It recirculates stagnant blood in the back, alleviating backache. It regulates the function of the thyroid gland and stimulates the thymus gland, boosting the immune system. The pelvic region is given a good stretch and the pressure of the feet on the thighs greatly reduces blood circulation in the legs, diverting it to the pelvic organs. Youthfulness and vitality are increased. People who suffer from heart disease, peptic ulcers, hernia, back conditions or any serious illness should not practise this asana. Pregnant women should also not attempt it.

**Pawanmuktasana:** It helps to reduce the abdominal girth and strengthens the lower abdomen. It also improves blood circulation to the pelvic region. Individuals suffering from spinal or disc injuries/damage should avoid.

**Dhanurasana & Ustrasana:** These asanas are beneficial for the digestive and reproductive systems. It stretches the stomach and intestines, alleviating constipation. The backward bend loosens up the vertebrae and stimulates the spinal nerves, relieving backache, rounded back and drooping shoulders.

**Makarandasan & Shavasana:** both are relaxation techniques. Deep Relaxation Technique in Shavasana is a guided relaxation, where participants are asked to consciously concentrate on each and every part of the body and relax. Guided Relaxation helps in relaxing the muscles of the body by diverting the mind along with practice of deep breathing.

Practice of **moolbandha** it helps in preventing urinary incontinence.

**Pranayama:** They work magically in managing the post-menopausal problems. The air fills the lungs with sufficient oxygenated perfectly. The pranayama balances the various endocrine glands in the body and rejuvenates the body. The various pranayamas which help are anulom-vilom pranayama (alternate breathing), nadishodhana, bhramari.

Yogic Kriyas like Neti, Dhaouti, kapalabhati, trataka more helpful for menopausal problems.

**Meditation:** The practice of meditation helps greatly in relieving the psychological and emotional problems such as depression, insomnia, anxiety, irritation, impairment of memory, lack of

concentration. It also helps in curing the physical problems associated with menopause by reducing the stress, managing the stress properly and keeping a positive attitude towards health.

Menopausal problems are part of normal life. Take it easy and accept the problems with a positive attitude. The psychological adaptability along with yogic practices is helpful in facing these problems. Do regular yoga along with a balanced diet, positive attitude towards life and be healthy and happy. In nutshell, daily practice of yoga is the only key to manage post-menopausal problems.

### **Concept of Health**

Health is understood as homeostasis in a living organism. This is the state in which an organism is in balance with input and output of mass and energy. The prospect for continued survival of an organism is positive. Basically, health is understood as the perfect equilibrium of body, mind, intellect and soul. The person who enjoys lightness of body, slowness of breathing, calmness of mind, control over emotions, action in relaxation and blissful awareness is said to be healthy. The W.H.O. defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, social well-being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity". This definition is in conformity with that explained in Yoga and ancient writings.

Yoga is a self-corrective technique and also a treatment modality, which can prevent and treat the pre-menopausal syndrome but also can help in preventing many of the stress-related problems of the modern lifestyle that women are prone to after menopause. The philosophy and practices of Yoga provide a good field of study for internal experimentation during the emptiness, post-retirement phase of a woman's life and help her to grow in her personality to lead a healthy and happy life.

### **Review of literature and research studies on menopausal problems:**

A study was conducted to assess the prevalence of menopausal symptoms and quality of life after menopause in women from South India at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal. Three hundred and fifty-two postmenopausal women attending the outpatient clinics of obstetrics and gynecology department of Dr TMA Pai Hospital, a tertiary care hospital in South India, were included in the study. The Menopause-Specific Quality of Life (MENQOL)

questionnaire was used in the study. Data were presented as percentages for qualitative variable. Most frequent menopausal symptoms were aching in muscle and joints (67.7%), feeling tired (64.8%), poor memory (60.5%), lower backache (58.8%) and difficulty in sleeping (51.7%). The vasomotor and sexual domains were less frequently complained when compared to physical and psychological domains. The research revealed that the age at onset of menopause in southern Karnataka (India) is 48.7 years which is four years more than the mean menopause age for Indian women. This could be attributed to better socioeconomic and health-care facility in this region<sup>11</sup>.

A study was conducted to assess the effect of yoga technique on the treatment of menopausal symptoms at the Babol Medical University, Iran. A total of 47 post menopausal women aging 45-63 years participated in a 12 week restorative yoga intervention. Assessments on the menopausal symptoms were made by structured questionnaires, interviews and checklist. During the study the subjects practiced breathing techniques, postures and relaxation poses three times a week for 1 hour. Significant pre to post test improvements were found for total scores on menopause questionnaire. There was significant effect on mean hot flush score ( $p=0.001$ ) At the end of this study 40.4% of subjects had decrease in hot flush, 28.4% of subjects anxiety reduced, 57.3% of subjects joint pain and 56.1% of subjects muscle pain reduced. The researcher concluded that Yoga is a powerful technique that can help menopausal women accept and nourish the inevitable change of life<sup>12</sup>.

A study was conducted to evaluate the effect of yoga on post menopausal women to assess its impact on general health, menopausal symptoms and osteoporosis. This clinical study was performed at the Fertility Research Centre and Max Healthcare Centre, New Delhi. A total of 150 patients participated in the study. Group A ( $n=50$ ), women who used no treatment or only calcium supplements. Group B ( $n=50$ ) women taking hormone replacement therapy. Group C ( $n=50$ ) women performing yoga under proper supervision, some of them were taking calcium supplements. The outcome was measured by a questionnaire, blood tests and bone densitometry studies. It was found that the bone mineral density was significantly higher in women in Group C as compared to Group A (confidence interval of 99%.

$P < 0.0023$ ) and higher in women in Group B (confidence value of 99%,  $p < 0.0009$ ). Other menopausal symptoms also were significantly lesser in women who practiced yoga regularly. It was concluded by this study that yoga scores over plain calcium supplements and HRT in managing menopausal symptoms and in preventing osteoporosis<sup>13</sup> A randomized controlled study was done in Pennsylvania state university. The effects of walking and yoga on multidimensional self-esteem, roles played by self-efficacy, body composition, and physical activity (PA) were examined in changes in self-esteem. Previously low-active middle-aged women ( $n = 164$ ; M age = 49.9) participated in four-month randomized controlled exercise trial with three arms: walking, yoga, and control. Interventions were structured and supervised walking program meeting three times per week for 1 hour and supervised yoga program meeting twice per week for 90 minutes. The outcome measures were body composition, fitness assessment, and battery of psychological measures. The walking and yoga interventions failed to enhance global or physical self-esteem but improved sub domain esteem relative to physical condition, strength (for walking) and body attractiveness (for both walking and yoga). Over time the effects of PA, self-efficacy, and body fat on changes in physical self-esteem and global esteem were mediated by changes in physical condition and body attractiveness. Women reporting greater levels of self-efficacy and PA with lower body fat also reported greater enhancements in sub domain esteem. The researcher concluded that these results provide support for the hierarchic and multidimensional nature of self-esteem and indicate that middle-aged women may enhance certain aspects of physical self-esteem by participating in walking and yoga<sup>14</sup>.

A randomized controlled study was conducted to evaluate the effects of a yoga intervention on menopausal symptoms in a sample of survivors of early-stage breast cancer (stages IA–IIB) at Duke University Medical Center and Oregon Health and Science University, USA. Thirty-seven disease-free women experiencing menopausal symptoms were randomized to the 8-week Yoga of Awareness program or to wait-list control. During the two-hour sessions, yoga therapists lead their classes through gentle physical stretching postures, breathing exercises, meditation techniques, study of yoga principles and group discussions. The primary

outcome was daily reports of hot flushes collected at baseline, post treatment, and three months after treatment via an interactive telephone system. Data were analyzed by intention to treat. At post treatment, women who received the yoga program showed significantly greater improvements relative to the control condition in hot-flush frequency, severity, and total scores and in levels of joint pain, fatigue, sleep disturbance, symptom-related bother, and vigor. At three months follow-up, patients maintained their treatment gains in hot flushes, joint pain, fatigue, symptom-related bother, and vigor and showed additional significant gains in negative mood, relaxation, and acceptance. The researcher concluded that the study provides promising support for the beneficial effects of a comprehensive yoga program for hot flushes and other menopausal symptoms in early-stage breast cancer survivors<sup>15</sup>.

#### Conclusion:

Yoga is an integrated science that helps us to engage in a life of purpose in harmony with our physical and mental capacities and hold on in the circumstances we are placed into. Hence it leads to the all-round personality development.

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