

Yoga and Mental Well-Being: Contemporary Perspectives and Practices

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Abstract

Mental well-being has become an important dimension of contemporary health, particularly in the context of stress, anxiety, occupational pressure, social change, and increasingly digital lifestyles. Yoga is a mind-body practice that commonly combines physical postures, breathing techniques, meditation, relaxation, and mindful attention. This paper examines contemporary perspectives on yoga and mental well-being, focusing on stress management, anxiety, emotional regulation, mindfulness, sleep, workplace well-being, social connection, long-term practice, and safe integration with professional care. Recent research indicates promising effects of yoga on mental health and well-being, although the evidence is heterogeneous and yoga interventions are not consistently described across studies. A 2025 systematic review identified 129 randomized trials and found that yoga research commonly combines physical, breathing, and mental components, while recommending better reporting and standardization. A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis of stressed adults found short-term reductions in perceived stress, although the evidence was rated low quality. Research among nursing professionals and students also reported improvements in stress, anxiety, burnout, depression, sleep, and life satisfaction across included trials. The paper argues that yoga can be a useful complementary practice for mental well-being, while emphasizing realistic expectations, appropriate instruction, research quality, and professional care when clinically significant symptoms are present.

Keywords

Yoga; Mental Well-Being; Mental Health; Stress Management; Anxiety; Mindfulness; Emotional Regulation; Sleep; Contemporary Practices

Introduction

Mental well-being includes emotional balance, psychological functioning, resilience, social connection, and the ability to respond to everyday challenges. Contemporary lifestyles can expose individuals to work pressure, academic demands, social expectations, financial concerns, and continuous digital stimulation.

Yoga has moved from its historical Indian context into diverse contemporary settings, including fitness centres, workplaces, schools, healthcare programs, community groups,

and digital platforms. Modern yoga interventions may combine postures, breathing, meditation, and relaxation, although their content varies considerably.

A 2025 systematic review of randomized controlled trials found that yoga is generally operationalized as a mind-body or mind-body-spirit practice incorporating physical, mental, and breathing components. The authors emphasized that inconsistent reporting makes comparison and replication difficult. [\[cite turn0search0 turn0search3\]](#)

Evidence for mental well-being is promising but not definitive. A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis of 13 randomized trials involving 1,026 stressed adults found a short-term reduction in perceived stress compared with passive controls, but graded the evidence as low quality. [\[cite turn0search11\]](#)

This paper examines nine dimensions of yoga and mental well-being: stress, anxiety, emotional regulation, mindfulness, sleep, workplace health, social connection, long-term practice, and safe integration.

1. Yoga as a Contemporary Mind-Body Practice

Contemporary yoga is commonly presented as a combination of physical postures, breathing practices, meditation, and mindful awareness. The exact balance varies across programs and traditions. This multidimensional structure may explain why yoga is considered relevant to mental well-being. Physical movement can support activity and body awareness, while breathing and meditation may provide opportunities for relaxation and focused attention. Recent research recommends clearer reporting of yoga components so that researchers and practitioners can understand which elements are associated with particular outcomes. [\[cite turn0search0\]](#)

2. Yoga and Stress Management

Stress management is one of the most frequently studied mental-health applications of yoga. Yoga sessions can create structured periods of physical movement, controlled breathing, relaxation, and attention away from daily stressors. A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis found a short-term beneficial effect of yoga on perceived stress compared with passive controls, although the quality of evidence was low. [\[cite turn0search11\]](#) A separate review of single-session yoga and its components found that many studies reported reduced acute psychological or physiological stress reactivity, suggesting possible immediate effects for some individuals. [\[cite turn0search2\]](#)

3. Yoga and Anxiety Management

Anxiety involves excessive worry, fear, physiological arousal, or difficulty managing perceived threats. Yoga may support anxiety management through breathing, physical activity, relaxation, and focused attention. A 2025 scoping review of single yoga sessions found that many studies reported improvements in anxiety and stress, including

among adults with mental illnesses, although the evidence varied by population and session characteristics. ^[cite turn0search6] Yoga should be considered complementary rather than a substitute for evidence-based treatment of diagnosed anxiety disorders.

4. Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation

Mindfulness encourages awareness of thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and breathing without immediate reactive judgement. Yoga can incorporate mindful attention during movement and meditation. Greater awareness may help individuals recognize emotional and physical signs of stress earlier and develop more deliberate responses. The practice may also encourage a sense of connection between bodily states and emotional experiences. Mindfulness is not a guarantee of emotional control, and individual responses to yoga can differ substantially.

5. Yoga, Sleep, and Psychological Recovery

Sleep is closely related to mental well-being. Stress can interfere with sleep, while poor sleep can increase emotional strain, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. Yoga may support sleep through relaxation, physical activity, and calming routines. Contemporary research has examined yoga in relation to sleep quality and psychological recovery, with findings suggesting potential benefits in some populations. Persistent insomnia or major sleep disturbance should be assessed by qualified healthcare professionals rather than managed solely through yoga.

6. Yoga in Workplace and Professional Settings

Work-related stress and burnout are major concerns in many occupations. Yoga programs can be adapted to workplaces through short sessions, breathing exercises, stretching, or guided relaxation. A 2025 systematic review of 14 randomized trials involving 967 nursing professionals and students found that most included studies reported improvements in mental-health outcomes, with nine reporting significant stress reductions and three reporting reduced anxiety. ^[cite turn0search9] Workplace yoga should complement, not replace, organizational measures addressing excessive workload, poor work design, or unhealthy working conditions.

7. Yoga, Social Connection, and Community Well-Being

Mental well-being is influenced by social relationships and feelings of belonging. Group yoga classes can provide opportunities for interaction, shared routines, and supportive community experiences. The social benefits of yoga depend on the setting and are not guaranteed by the practice itself. Online and individual yoga may provide different social experiences from community-based group sessions. Inclusive and accessible programs can potentially combine physical activity with social participation and a sense of community.

8. Long-Term Practice and Contemporary Evidence

Long-term yoga practice has been studied in relation to psychological, cognitive, neural, and physiological outcomes. A 2025 scoping review mapped long-term evidence and identified promising areas while also highlighting research gaps. [\[cite\]turn0search8](#) Long-term outcomes may depend on adherence, practice frequency, duration, intervention content, and individual characteristics. More standardized studies are needed to determine which yoga components and practice schedules are most effective for particular mental-health outcomes.

9. Safe Practice and Integration with Professional Care

Yoga is generally suitable for many people when practiced appropriately, but physical injury and psychological discomfort can occur. Appropriate instruction and modification are especially important for beginners, older adults, people with injuries, and individuals with significant health conditions. Yoga should be integrated responsibly with professional mental-health and medical care when needed. People experiencing severe anxiety, depression, trauma-related symptoms, suicidal thoughts, or major functional impairment should seek appropriate professional support rather than relying on yoga alone. A contemporary model of yoga and mental well-being should therefore combine accessibility, evidence, safety, cultural respect, and clear boundaries around clinical treatment.

Illustration

The following illustration presents contemporary yoga as a multidimensional practice connecting mindfulness, breathing, physical activity, stress management, and emotional well-being.

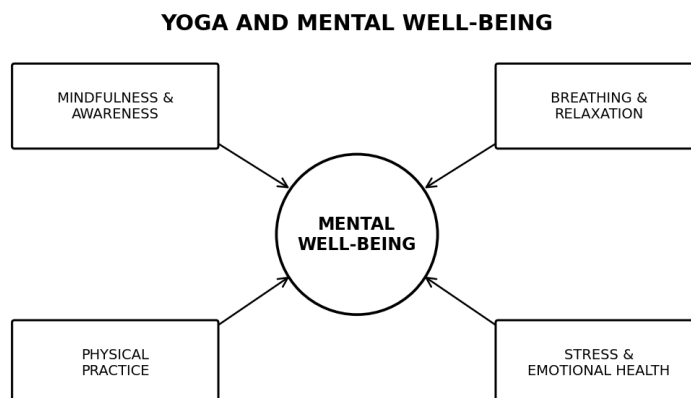


Figure 1. Yoga and its relationship with contemporary mental well-being.

Conclusion

Yoga has become an increasingly visible contemporary approach to mental well-being because it combines physical movement, breathing, relaxation, mindfulness, and self-awareness. Research suggests potential benefits for perceived stress, anxiety, emotional well-being, sleep, and selected occupational populations.

However, the evidence remains heterogeneous. Recent systematic reviews highlight both promising outcomes and limitations related to intervention design, reporting, sample characteristics, and comparison groups. [cite turn0search0 turn0search11](#)

Yoga is best understood as a complementary mental-wellness practice rather than a universal treatment for mental illness. Responsible use involves realistic expectations, qualified instruction, appropriate adaptation, continued research, and timely access to professional healthcare when clinically significant symptoms are present.

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