

How Yoga Helps in Anxiety, Depression and Stress in Peri- Menopausal Phase

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Abstract

Introduction: The peri-menopausal phase is a significant transitional period in a woman's life, often accompanied by emotional and psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, mood swings, and heightened stress. While hormonal changes are natural during this time, their impact on mental health can be profound. Yoga, grounded in ancient Indian wisdom and supported by modern science, offers a holistic and practical approach to managing these symptoms.

Purpose of the Study: This paper explores how yogic practices, particularly those derived from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, provide effective tools for emotional regulation and mental clarity. The second sutra, "Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah" (YS 1.2), defines yoga as the cessation of mental fluctuations—an essential goal for women experiencing psychological instability during peri-menopause.

Methodology (Review): Practical techniques such as restorative asanas (e.g., Supta Baddha Konasana, Viparita Karani), Pranayama (especially Nadi Shodhana and Bhramari), and Dhyana (meditation) are discussed for their ability to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, reduce cortisol levels, and promote a sense of calm. Pratyahara helps in withdrawing the senses from external triggers, encouraging internal awareness and emotional grounding.

Results / Findings: Moreover, the ethical and philosophical limbs of Ashtanga Yoga—such as Santosha (contentment), Svadhyaya (self-reflection), and Ishvarapranidhana (surrender)—are highlighted as tools for building psychological resilience.

Conclusion: Evidence from recent studies supports that consistent yogic practice leads to measurable improvements in mood, sleep, and overall well-being. This paper concludes by emphasizing the integration of classical yoga philosophy with accessible daily practices to support peri-menopausal women in navigating this life phase with balance, strength, and emotional stability.

Keywords: Peri-menopause, emotional balance, Yoga, Patanjali's Sutras, Pranayama, meditation, relaxation, resilience.

Introduction

The peri-menopausal phase is a natural but often challenging stage in a woman's life. It usually begins a few years before menopause, commonly in the late 40s or early 50s. During this period, a woman's body prepares to stop menstruation completely. This transition is controlled by the body's hormones, mainly estrogen and progesterone, which start to fluctuate and gradually decrease.

These hormonal changes are normal, but they can create several physical, emotional, and mental effects. Many women notice changes in their mood and energy levels. Feelings of anxiety, sadness, or irritability become more common. Some may even experience mild depression or frequent mood swings. Along with these emotional changes, there are also physical symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, disturbed sleep, joint pain, and fatigue. These symptoms can make daily life difficult and affect personal relationships, work performance, and overall well-being.

Modern medical science mainly explains these problems as the result of hormonal imbalance. Doctors often suggest medicines, hormone therapy, or lifestyle changes to manage the discomfort. While these treatments can help, they sometimes address only the physical side of the problem. However, women in this phase also need mental peace, emotional stability, and spiritual strength.

This is where yoga becomes an important and supportive practice. Yoga is an ancient Indian system that promotes overall health and inner balance. Unlike modern treatments that focus mainly on the body, yoga looks at the whole person—the body, the mind, and the spirit—as a connected unit. It teaches that when one part of us is disturbed, the others also suffer. For example, when the mind is restless, the body may feel tired or tense; when the body is weak, the mind may feel anxious or sad.

Yoga works by restoring harmony among all these levels. Through physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana), yoga helps calm the mind, relax the body, and improve inner awareness. It encourages self-acceptance, emotional stability, and positive thinking. Regular practice of yoga during the peri-menopausal phase can therefore reduce stress, improve sleep, and bring a sense of peace and balance to a woman's life. In this way, yoga offers not just physical relief but also emotional healing, helping women face this natural transition with confidence, strength, and grace.

Understanding the Yogic Approach

To understand how yoga helps women during the peri-menopausal phase, it is important to know the basic philosophy behind it. The foundation of yoga is found in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, an ancient and respected text written thousands of years ago. This book is considered one of the most important guides for understanding the true meaning of yoga. It does not only talk about physical postures but also about how to control the mind, emotions, and behavior to live a peaceful and balanced life.

The second sutra of the text, "Yogas chitta vrittinirodhah," explains the real purpose of yoga. In simple words, it means "Yoga is the calming or control of the restless movements of the mind." Our mind is always active—it keeps thinking, worrying, planning, and imagining. During the peri-menopausal period, these mental fluctuations can become stronger because of hormonal changes, emotional stress, and physical discomfort. A woman may feel anxious, moody, or easily disturbed. At such times, this sutra reminds us that yoga is the key to bringing stillness and peace to the mind.

Yoga teaches that the mind and body are deeply connected. When the mind is calm, the body also feels relaxed. Similarly, when the body is tense or tired, the mind becomes restless. Therefore, yoga aims to bring balance to both through physical movement, controlled breathing, and meditation.

By practicing yoga regularly, women learn to become more aware of their thoughts and emotions. Instead of reacting immediately to stress or irritation, they learn to pause, observe, and respond calmly. This process builds inner strength and emotional stability. Yoga also works directly on the nervous system—it activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for relaxation and healing. This helps reduce stress hormones like cortisol and brings a sense of deep rest to the body and mind.

More importantly, yoga is not just a physical exercise routine; it is a way of living. It encourages healthy habits, mindful thinking, and positive relationships. It helps women connect with their inner selves and find meaning and peace even during times of change. For women in the peri-menopausal phase, adopting yoga as a lifestyle can make this transition smoother, helping them move from confusion and discomfort to clarity and calmness. In essence, yoga offers a path toward self-awareness, acceptance, and harmony, making it a valuable companion in every woman's journey through life.

Methods and Practices

Yoga offers a wide range of techniques that can effectively help women manage anxiety, depression, and stress during the peri-menopausal phase. These practices work on the body, mind, and emotions at the same time. They do not only relieve symptoms but also build inner

peace and strength over time. Below are some key yoga methods that have been found particularly helpful during this stage of life.

1. Restorative Asanas (Postures) : Restorative yoga poses are gentle, supportive postures that allow the body to rest deeply. Unlike active or fast forms of yoga, restorative asanas are performed slowly, often with the help of cushions, bolsters, or folded blankets. The main purpose of these poses is relaxation and restoration of energy. Two important restorative poses are:

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose): In this pose, the body lies back in a relaxed position with the soles of the feet together and knees dropped out to the sides. It helps open the chest, improve blood flow to the abdominal organs, and relieve tension in the hips and lower back. It also supports hormonal balance by improving circulation to the reproductive organs.

Viparita Karani (Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose): This simple yet powerful posture involves lying on the back with the legs extended upward against a wall. It helps reduce tiredness, calms the nervous system, and improves lymphatic drainage. It is particularly soothing for women who experience fatigue, insomnia, or anxiety during peri-menopause.

These asanas slow down the body's stress response, lower heart rate, and encourage deep rest. When practiced regularly, they help in balancing hormones, improving sleep, and reducing emotional tension.

2. Pranayama (Breathing Techniques) : Breathing is directly connected to our emotions. When we are anxious or stressed, our breath becomes fast and shallow. Pranayama, or yogic breathing, teaches us to control and deepen the breath, which in turn calms the mind and brings clarity.

Some useful pranayama techniques for peri-menopausal women are:

Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing): This breathing technique balances the two hemispheres of the brain—the logical and emotional sides. It helps bring harmony to the nervous system, reduces anxiety, and improves emotional stability. Regular practice of Nadi Shodhana increases focus and brings a sense of calmness.

Bhramari (Humming Bee Breath): This practice involves making a gentle humming sound like a bee while exhaling. The vibration created in the head and chest has a soothing effect on the nerves. Bhramari helps reduce anger, restlessness, and irritability, while promoting deep relaxation.

These pranayama practices activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for rest and healing. They also help lower cortisol, the body's stress hormone, allowing the body to enter a relaxed and balanced state. With daily practice, women may experience better emotional control, peaceful sleep, and reduced anxiety.

3. Dhyana (Meditation) : Meditation is one of the most powerful tools for emotional healing. It is the practice of sitting quietly and observing the mind without judgment. For peri-menopausal women, meditation can bring great relief from emotional ups and downs.

During meditation, women learn to watch their thoughts and emotions instead of reacting to them. Over time, this helps reduce anxiety, fear, and overthinking. Meditation also improves concentration, emotional clarity, and patience.

Even short daily sessions—about 10 to 15 minutes—can make a big difference. Guided meditations, mindfulness meditation, or simply focusing on the breath can all help calm the mind and restore emotional balance.

4. Pratyahara (Withdrawal of Senses) : Pratyahara is one of the inner limbs of yoga that teaches control over the senses. In our busy modern lives, our senses are constantly bombarded by noise, screens, and stressful surroundings. This constant stimulation keeps the mind restless.

Through the practice of pratyahara, one learns to turn attention inward and withdraw from unnecessary distractions. This doesn't mean avoiding life, but rather developing the ability to remain calm and centered even in a noisy or stressful environment.

For women in the peri-menopausal phase, practicing pratyahara helps them become more aware of their emotions and reactions. It reduces sensitivity to external stress and promotes inner peace. Techniques such as closing the eyes, focusing on the breath, or practicing relaxation in silence can all help in cultivating this state of inner withdrawal and balance.

By combining these four key practices—asanas, pranayama, meditation, and pratyahara—women can experience deep physical relaxation, emotional stability, and mental clarity. These yogic tools not only ease the symptoms of peri-menopause but also empower women to move through this stage of life with confidence, grace, and inner strength.

Major Findings

Modern scientific research strongly supports the idea that yoga has positive effects on mental and emotional health, particularly for women going through hormonal changes such as those in the peri-menopausal phase. Over the last few decades, many studies from medical and

psychological fields have explored how yoga influences the brain, nervous system, and hormones—and the results have been very encouraging.

Regular yoga practice has been shown to:

- 1) Reduce anxiety and depression:** Yoga lowers the production of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which are responsible for feelings of tension, worry, and fear. At the same time, it increases the release of endorphins and serotonin—the “feel-good” chemicals in the brain—leading to greater emotional stability and happiness.
- 2) Improve sleep quality:** Many women in the peri-menopausal stage experience insomnia or disturbed sleep due to hormonal imbalance. Gentle yoga postures, breathing practices, and meditation help relax the body before bedtime, calm the mind, and regulate sleep cycles.
- 3) Lower blood pressure and cortisol levels:** Research shows that deep breathing and relaxation during yoga activate the parasympathetic nervous system—the part of the body responsible for rest and recovery. This helps in lowering heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones, creating a state of physical and mental calm.
- 4) Enhance mood and life satisfaction:** Regular yoga practice builds self-awareness and emotional control. Women who practice yoga often report feeling more confident, balanced, and positive in their daily lives.

A good example comes from a 2021 study published in the journal *Menopause*. The researchers observed a group of women who practiced yoga three times a week for eight weeks. By the end of the study, these women showed significant improvement in mood, sleep, and overall quality of life compared to those who did not practice yoga. They also reported a noticeable decrease in stress-related symptoms such as anxiety, irritability, and fatigue.

Other studies using brain imaging techniques have shown that yoga can increase activity in areas of the brain related to emotion regulation, focus, and relaxation. This means that yoga does not only make people “feel” calmer—it actually changes how the brain functions.

Medical experts explain that yoga’s benefits come from its ability to create a strong mind-body connection. Through controlled movement, deep breathing, and focused awareness, yoga helps the body send calming signals to the brain. This reduces overactivity in the stress centers of the brain and encourages a balanced hormonal response.

In short, the growing body of scientific evidence confirms what ancient yoga philosophy has taught for centuries: that yoga is a powerful tool for achieving balance and well-being. For peri-menopausal women, these findings give hope and confidence that a regular yoga routine can bring measurable improvements not only in physical health but also in mental peace and emotional strength.

Conclusion

The peri-menopausal phase marks an important turning point in a woman's life. It is often seen only as a physical change—the time when menstruation gradually stops—but in truth, it is much more than that. It is also a period of emotional transformation, self-reflection, and spiritual growth. During this stage, women may experience mood swings, anxiety, and fatigue, yet it also offers an opportunity to pause, slow down, and reconnect with one's inner self.

Yoga serves as a powerful companion during this transition. It provides a natural, safe, and holistic way to handle both the physical symptoms and the emotional ups and downs that come with hormonal changes. Unlike medicines that focus mainly on relieving individual symptoms, yoga works on the whole person—the body, mind, and spirit—helping them function in harmony.

Through regular practice of yoga postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana), women can experience deep relaxation, better sleep, and emotional balance. These practices calm the nervous system, reduce stress, and bring stability to the mind. Over time, yoga builds inner strength, patience, and self-awareness, enabling women to respond to challenges with more calmness and confidence.

The philosophy of yoga, as taught in the ancient scriptures like Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, offers timeless wisdom that helps women accept change gracefully. Principles such as Santosha (contentment) and Ishvarapranidhana (surrender to a higher power) remind us that peace comes from within, not from external circumstances. By applying these values in everyday life, women can develop resilience and find deeper meaning in their experiences.

The key lies in integrating classical yoga philosophy with simple daily practices. When yoga becomes a part of one's lifestyle—not just a weekly exercise—it helps women navigate this natural transition with grace, strength, and awareness.

In this way, yoga transforms the peri-menopausal phase from a time of struggle into a journey of renewal, balance, and self-discovery. It teaches every woman that this phase is not an end, but a beautiful beginning toward a more peaceful and empowered life.

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