



ROLE OF YOGIC PRACTICES IN POSTPARTUM CARE

Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Child birth is a critical event in a woman's life. It comes with responsibility, physical-emotional stress and strain along with anatomical, physiological and hormonal changes. Maternal physical and emotional health issues are quite common after parturition. Yoga can be an important management tool in these conditions. Yoga is a cost-effective therapy and can be administered easily with only initial guidance. The mother can perform it at home after properly learning from trained personnel. **Materials and Methods:** This is a conceptual study based on elaboration of references from various books on Yoga, research articles and web sources. **Discussion:** Yogic practices with their holistic and psycho-physiological approach help in management of various physical conditions as well as emotional and psychological issues. Overall effects of all these practices are reduction in pain, improved mood status and sleep, reduced stress, anxiety and depression, improved physiological functions and re-established hormonal axis. The specific practices performed for specific health conditions help in their management. **Conclusion:** Yogic practices help in speedy recovery of the body for normal functioning of daily life in the postpartum women. They help in management of various postpartum health conditions and in coping with stress and give a positive sense of wellbeing.

KEYWORDS

Yoga, Yogic, Postpartum, Postnatal.

INTRODUCTION

Child birth is one of the most crucial and critical events in a woman's life. The woman needs immensity of care during pregnancy as well as after child birth. As compared to pregnancy the postpartum period is neglected for the provision of quality care.¹

Puerperium is the period of 6 weeks following the child birth during which the mother's reproductive organs return to their normal non pregnant state both anatomically and physiologically.² The term Puerperium is often used synonymously to postpartum period but the postpartum care extends beyond the puerperium.

The term 'postpartum' and 'postnatal' are used interchangeably; but 'postpartum' commonly refers to the issues concerning to mother and 'postnatal' is used for issues concerning the foetus. The World Health Organization (WHO) uses one common term 'Postnatal' for referring both of them¹, since it focuses on the issues of both mother and the foetus. This article uses the term 'Postpartum' as it is concerned with the issues of mother after child birth.

Child birth as exciting, as enjoying it is, it comes with responsibility, physical and emotional stress and strain along with anatomical, physiological and hormonal changes which makes it overwhelming to cope with. The period after child birth, many physical and psychological conditions peep out like Back ache, extreme tiredness, depression, urinary incontinence, haemorrhoids, perineal pain, headache, bowel problems like constipation or faecal incontinence etc.^{3,4,5}

In many studies Yogic practices are proved as effective way to tackle some of these conditions like postpartum depression, postpartum stress, anxiety, sleep disorders and backache. Yoga has been seen improving the quality of life of post-partum women. Many of these conditions are able to be managed by Yoga. Therefore, Yoga can become an important tool in many of these conditions.^{6,7,8,9} Also Yoga is a cost-effective therapy and can be administered easily with only initial guidance. The mother can perform it at home after properly learning from trained personnel.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This is a conceptual study based on elaboration and interpretation of references from various books on Yoga, research articles and web sources.

Review Of Literature:

Maternal physical and emotional health issues after parturition include, postpartum weight gain, anxiety, depression, extreme tiredness or fatigue, backache, headache, sleep disorders, constipation,

haemorrhoids, sagging of breast, laxity of abdominal muscles, laxity of perineal muscles, varicose veins, perineal pain, urinary incontinence and much more.^{3,4}

Yogic practices in Postpartum care:

The yogic practices after parturition vary with the passage of time since the body of the mother recovers with time from the changes of pregnancy and child birth. The practices vary through these 3 phases:

- 1) During the puerperium (up to 6 weeks)
 - A) Immediate (within 24 hours)
 - B) Early (up to 7 days)
 - C) Remote (up to 6 weeks)²
- 2) After Puerperium till 3 months (7th week -3rd month)
- 3) After 3rd month⁹

1) During the puerperium (up to 6 weeks):

A) Immediate (within 24 hours):

As the mother is too tired with parturition it is suggested her to take sufficient rest for first few hours. After a good resting period, early ambulation is encouraged.²

B) Early (up to 7 days):

During this period heavy exercises are not advised. It is useful to have a walk various time a day. Some breathing exercises like Deep breathing techniques (*Deergha Shwasan*), Sectional Breathing (Yogic Breathing) can be initiated. Though the rigorous *Pranayamas* are not indicated, the *Anuloma-Viloma Pranayama*, *Bhramari Pranayama* can be done. Om chanting and meditation are also advised to help relieve the stress and to get ready to cope with the increased responsibility.

C) Remote (up to 6 weeks):

Along with above said breathing techniques, *Pranayamas*, meditation, some loosening and warm up exercises (*Sukshma Vyayama*) can also be done like rotation of joints starting from neck to ankle such as, Neck rotation, Shoulder rotation, Wrist rotation, Head rotation, Foot stretch etc.¹¹

2) After Puerperium till 3 months (7th week-3rd month):

After 6 weeks simple, non-complex *asanas* can be started like *Vajrasana*¹¹ *Ardhakatichakrasana*, *Tadasana*, *Vrikshasana*, *Shavasana*, *Gomukhasana*, *Pashchimnamaskaras*, along with that Deep Breathing Techniques, *Anuloma-Viloma Pranayama*, *Bhramari Pranayama*, Meditation, OM chanting can also be practiced.

3) After 3rd month:

Three months after delivery all *Asanas* may be practiced with comfort.¹¹ But some of the advised *Asanas* are: *Bhujangasana*¹⁰

Pashchimottanasana, Vajrasana¹¹, Ardhakatichakrasana, Uttanpadasana, Tadasana, Trikonasana, Vakrasana, Bhadrasana, Balasana, Padmasana, Shavasana, Pavanmuktasana, Adhomukhshvanasana and Suryanamaskaras etc.

Pranayama, Yoga Nidra, Shavasana, Bhramari Pranayama, OM chanting, Meditation etc.

Table No. 1. Various practices in phases of postpartum care:

Type of Practice	Puerperium (up to 6t week)			7th week 3rd month	After 3rd month
	Immediate	Early	Remote		
Walking	Slow walking	Slow Walking	Walking	Walking	Walking
Breathing techniques	-	Deep. Breathing, Sectional Breathing	Deep. Breathing, Sectional Breathing	Deep Breathing, Sectional Breathing	Deep Breathing, Sectional Breathing
Pranayaa	-	Anuloma-Viloma, Bhramari	Anuloma-Viloma, Bhramari	Anuloma-Viloma, Bhramari	All Pranayamas
Meditation	-	Meditation	Meditation	Meditation	Meditation
OMChanting	-	Om Chanting	Om Chanting	Om Chanting	Om Chanting
Sukshma Vyayama (Loosening exercises)	-	-	Joint Rotations	Joint Rotations	Joint Rotations
Asana	-	-	-	Vajrasana Ardhakatichakrasana Tadasana Vrikshasana Shavasana Gomukhasana Pashchimnamaskaras	Bhujangasana Pashchimottanasana Vajrasana Ardhakatichakrasana Uttanpadasana Tadasana, Trikonasana Vakrasana, Bhadrasana Balasana, Padmasana Shavasana Pavanmuktasana Adhomukhshvanasana Suryanamaskaras

Various Yogic procedures according to the conditions (After 3 months):

1) Postpartum weight gain:¹²

Suryanamaskaras (Sun-salutations), Bhujangasana, Sarvangasana, Pada-Hastasana, Janu-Sheershasana, Dhanurasana, Shalabhasana, Vajrasana, Suptavajrasana, Kapalbhathi Kriya etc.

2) Backache:¹²

Jathar parivartanasana, Pashchimottanasana, Adhomukhshvanasana, Ushtrasana, Shalabhasana, Dhanurasana etc.

3) Anxiety and depression:¹²

Shirshasana, Shavasana, Anuloma - Viloma and Nadishodhana Pranayama, Yoga Nidra, Halasana, Balasana, Sarvangasana, Bhramari Pranayama, OM chanting, Meditation etc.

4) Extreme fatigue:¹²

Same as recommended for anxiety and depression.

5) Headache:¹²

Sarvangasana, Shirshasana, Nadi Shodhana Pranayama, Bhramari Pranayama, OM chanting, Yoga Nidra, Shavasana, Pashchimottanasana etc.

6) Sleep disorders:¹²

Shirshasana, Pashchimottanasana, Uttanasana, Bhastrika

7) Haemorrhoids:^{12,13}

Sarvangasana, Jathar Parivartanasana, Vajrasana, Pashchimottanasana, Bhujangasana, Ujjayi pranayama etc.

8) Constipation:¹²

Vajrasana, Jathar Parivartanasana, Pashchimottanasana, Pavanmuktasana etc.

9) Breast sagging:

Gomukhasana, Pashchim Namaskaras, Hand rotations etc.

10) Laxity of abdominal muscles:

Bhujangasana, Pashchimottanasana, Uttanpadasana, Ardhakatichakrasana, Kati-Chakrasana, Dhanurasana, Ushtrasana, Setubandhasana, Kapalbhathi etc.

11) Vericose veins:

Vajrasana, Supta Vajrasana, Sarvangasana, Sheershasana etc.

12) Laxity of perineal muscles:¹⁴

Bhadrasana, Utkatasana, Moola Bandha, Ashwini Mudra etc.

DISCUSSION:

The Yogic practices can certainly be performed after normal deliveries. After complicated deliveries and deliveries by caesarian section they can be performed after the consultation with obstetrician. In C- section deliveries it must be ensured that the sutures are removed and the wound is completely healed. These practices are easy to perform after initial guidance only, provided that they are learned from trained personnel.

Yogic practices with their holistic and psycho-physiological approach help in management of physical conditions as well as emotional and psychological issues in postpartum care. The possible mechanism of action of these practices can be explained as further:

Walking:

Slow walking resumed early after delivery helps in improved circulation of blood throughout the body especially lower parts of the body, reducing the chances of thrombosis, helps in more rapid involution of uterus, early caesation of lochial flow, better bowel and urinary functions, more rapid gaining of the tonus of abdominal muscles and a quick return of the physical strength.¹⁵

Breathing techniques:

Breathing techniques like, deep breathing and sectional breathing help in increased oxygenation of blood, decreased heart rate, decreased cortisol secretion in the body, decreased blood pressure, which in turn decreases stress and enhances the mood. This helps in to cope with the stress after parturition, and also helps in postpartum anxiety and depression.^{16,17}

Pranayama:

Pranayamas help in decrease in heart rate and blood pressure as seen in *Bhramari Pranayama* helps in decrease anxiety, increases parasympathetic nervous system leading to calming effect on mind. Breathing through alternate nostril as seen in *Anuloma Viloma* helps in normalizing sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system balance.^{18,19}

OM chanting:

In many studies OM chanting found beneficial for many physiological and psychological functions of the body. OM chanting is an important exhalation exercise, and significantly improves pulmonary functions. Significant decrease in the heart rate was reported followed by OM meditation, significant decrease in the blood pressure and pulse rate followed by OM meditation are found. This causes psycho physiological relaxation. There is significant decrease in depression, anxiety and stress are found.²⁰

Meditation:

Researches have shown that during the process of meditation, accumulated stresses are removed, energy is increased, and health is positively affected overall. There are various health benefits associated with the practice of meditation. These include stress reduction,

decreased anxiety, decreased depression, reduction in pain (both physical and psychological), and improved memory. Physiological benefits include reduced blood pressure, heart rate, cortisol and epinephrine; decreased metabolism, decreased oxygen utilization, and carbon dioxide elimination; and increased melatonin, and relative blood flow to the brain.²¹

Loosening exercises (Sukshma Vyayama):

Loosening exercises include rotation of joints helps in strengthening of joint structures, reducing the rigidity of muscles surrounding the joint in turn helping in flexibility of joint, proper movements and helps the body to come out of the months long physically not so active phase and prepares the body to get ready to perform *Asanas*.

Asanas:

The various *Asanas* stretch the muscles of that particular region stimulating the proprioceptors bring about mild stretch reflex resulting in increasing blood flow. It thereby results in improved nutrition and oxygenation; better removal of waste accumulates from that area which in turn helps in normalizing physiology of those muscles. The stretch reflex helps in flexibility of joints and also improves normal tone of the muscles. By observing breath changes or changes in the body while performing *asana* helps in slowing of thought process and thereby temporarily decreasing the cortical activity. This results in emotional and psychological stability. Yogic practices help in restoring the hormonal imbalance after parturition which is due to the effect of yoga on interactions between the central nervous system, limbic system, ANS, HPA axis and the immune system working together to maintain the hormonal homeostasis. The specific set of practices recommended for specific health conditions work through these mechanisms and help in management of these conditions.^{22,23,24}

The specific set of practices recommended for specific health conditions work through these mechanisms and help in management of these conditions.

1) Postpartum Weight gain:

Suryanamaskaras, Bhujangasana, Sarvangasana, Pada Hastasana, Janu Sheershasana, Dhanurasana, Shalabhasana, Vajrasana and Supta Vajrasana help in management of post-partum weight gain by stretching the muscles of all the body, especially stretching the abdominal muscles, and by improving digestion and *Agni* (Digestive fire) in case of *Vajrasana* and *Bhujangasana*.

2) Backache:

Jathar-Parivartanasana, Pashchimottanasana, Adhomukhshvanasana, Ushtrasana, Shalabhasana, Dhanurasana stretch the muscles of back and spine and help in correction of posture in postpartum women and also relieves the backache.

3) Anxiety, Depression, Stress, and Extreme Fatigue:

Shavasana, Anuloma- Viloma and Nadishodhana Pranayama, Yoga nidra, Halasana, Balasana, Bhramari Pranayama, OM chanting, Meditation etc. help in relieving stress, relaxing the mind and body and help in management of these conditions in postpartum care.

4) Sleep disorders:

Shirshasana, Pashchimottanasana, Uttanasana, Shavasana, Yoga Nidra, Bhramari Pranayama, Bhastrika Pranayama, OM chanting, Meditation etc. help in sleep disorders by inducing deep relaxation, reducing sympathetic arousal and anxiety, and increased secretion of melatonin, and improving oxygen consumption, relaxation awareness, emotional stability, and sleep quality.

5) Haemorrhoids:

Sarvangasana, Jathar Parivartanasana, Vajrasana, Ujjayi Pranayama, Bhujangasana etc. overall effects of these *Asanas* are: relief in the congestion of blood in the perianal region, by improving blood circulation towards heart and abdominal organs. It thereby improves the digestion and constipation which in turn relieves the haemorrhoids.

6) Constipation:

Vajrasana, Jathar Parivartanasana, Pashchimottanasana, Pavanmuktasana, Bhujangasana etc. facilitate blood circulation towards abdominal organs and intestines

7) Breast sagging:

Gomukhasana, Pashchim Namaskaras, Hand rotations etc. stretch and tones up the thoracic muscles along with breasts.

8) Laxity of abdominal muscles:

Bhujangasana, Pashchimottanasana, Uttanpadasana, Ardhakatichakrasana, Kati Chakrasana, Dhanurasana, Ushtrasana, Setubandhasana, Kapalbhathi etc. stretch and tones up abdominal wall and thereby reducing the abdominal laxity.

9) Vericose veins:

Vajrasana, Supta Vajrasana, Sarvangasana, Sheershasana etc. improve blood circulation towards heart, thereby relieves congestion in lower limbs.

10) Laxity of perineal muscles:

Bhadrasana, Utkatasana, Moola Bandha, Ashwini Mudra etc. stretch the pelvic floor and tones up the perineal muscles.

Overall effects of all these practices are reduction in pain, improved mood status and sleep, reduced stress, anxiety and depression, improved physiological functions, re-established hormonal axis, improved posture, decrease in laxity of abdominal and perineal muscles, and a positive sense of well-being.

CONCLUSION:

Yogic practices help in speedy recovery of the body for normal functioning of daily life in the postpartum women. They not just help in coping with stress but also give a positive sense of wellbeing. They help in management of many postpartum health conditions like, Postpartum weight gain, Backache, Anxiety, Depression, Extreme tiredness, Headache, Sleep disorders, Haemorrhoids, Constipation, Sagging of breast, Laxity of abdominal muscles, Laxity of perineal muscles etc.

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