

## Role of Yoga Props in Beginner and Old-Aged Yoga Practitioners

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### Abstract

In the last few decades, the number of people practicing yoga has grown exponentially. In 1978, the World Health Organization formally started promoting yoga in developing countries with the recognition its advantages to the human race. Yoga has been done all over the world by both young and old-aged people in an effort to live healthy lives. Living with a physically inactive lifestyle increases the risk factor of developing a variety of illnesses, including arthritis, diabetes, cancer, respiratory problems, and cardiovascular and metabolic diseases. Physical activities and healthy foods help our body to maintain healthy and assist in preventing such unwanted diseases. Yoga asanas practiced is the one of the best physical activities as well as mental awareness to keep our body healthy. Beginners and old-aged people who did yoga faced difficulties, discomfort, and pain. Beginners' bodies are stiff, less flexible, and unable to control their breathing and their body's balance. Old-Aged also have changed all physical, physiological, and psychological pattern of body with the making of weak of all body functions. In those people, practising yoga alone or without any assistance or support could result in unwanted pains and injuries. Yoga props are used to lessen, eliminate those unwanted pains or injuries and to increase the quality of practice. Yoga props allow to get closer to the goal of yoga practice by strengthening, balancing and flexibility our body.

**Key words:** Yoga asana, physical activity, beginners, old-aged, yoga props.

### Introduction:

Aging is the process of man become older. Every human being become older day by day. By becoming older, there is also change in their physical and physiological pattern of body. Due to these changing patterns may lead to unhealthy state of body and also may leads to many chronic pains in the body. Even though common people who do not do any physical exercise or activity may also leads to chronic pain. Insufficient physical activity or lack of exercise is major cause of chronic pain [1]. To maintain the body and prevent from such unwanted pain we should do some physical activities to massage body organs and to balance their functions. Yoga practicing is one of the best ways to maintain our bodily function and to keep our body in an equilibrium state. Asanas are the one of the most significant tools of yoga which provide the benefit of smooth function of our physical body as well as physiological system [2]. Practicing of yoga asana should follow a good discipline in relation with breathing awareness. Beginners and old aged persons cannot practice yoga asanas properly because they may have faced many discomforts and pains to follow the discipline of yoga asana

practices. So, they need some helps or support to practice asana in correct way and to reduce pain and discomfort.

### **Common Reason for Unable to Practice Yoga:**

Everyone can practice yoga, but the important thing we need to remember is that not all bodies are the same. So, the body of a beginner is not adapted to the practice of yoga because yoga practice constitutes of a lot of stretching, bending, folding, and twisting in yoga asanas. The beginners may have following issues like - lack of joint mobility; low range of motion in joints; stiffness of body; less flexibility & stretchable of body; lack of strength, endurance & stamina; cannot keep balance; lack of body awareness and cannot control the breath etc. These are the reasons that beginners are hard to practice yoga. Same as old age people also have same issues like beginners because of their physical and physiological change pattern over their ages. Regular practice of yoga improved all these problems.

### **Aging and Physical and Physiological Changes:**

Aging is the nature of human being. It represents the changes in human being over time. Physiological changes occur with aging in all our organ systems. The cardiac output decreases, blood pressure increases, blood sugar level imbalance and chemicals inside our body such as serotone, oxytocin, endorphin, gamma-aminobutyric acid GABA etc. become imbalance. The lungs appear weak in gas exchange, reduce in vital capacity and lower expiratory flow rates. With aging man lose their bone mass or density. The spine becomes shorter as the inter-vertebrae disks gradually lose fluid. The spinal column becomes curved and compressed then started acute pains and less ability of body twisting movement. Fluid in the joints may decrease and leads to stiffer and less flexible in the joint movement. The cartilage may begin to rub together and gradually smaller. Hip and knee joints may start to lose cartilage. It may lead to inflammation, pain, stiffness, deformity and may cause arthritis, osteoarthritis etc. Lean body mass become decrease and fats are deposited in muscle tissue. The muscle fibres become decrease. Muscles become less toned and less able to contract because of changes in the muscle tissue. Loss of muscle mass reduces strength and endurance. So, it is necessary to maintain body from these physical and physiological change pattern to prevent from old age diseases.

### **Yogasana:**

Asana is the specific body position or posture which one can hold continuously with physically and mentally steady, calm, quiet and comfortable. It is the third limb of the Ashtanga Yoga. According to the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali Maharishi defined asana as “sthiram sukham asanam” which means steady and comfortable is the posture. Asana should be practiced perfectly relaxed and without effort. In the Yoga Sutra, asana is put in the way of developing the ability of long-time sitting position for the meditation practice. [3]

By practicing asana one can attain firmness of body and mind, free from diseases, lightness, and flexibility of limbs. Stiffness of the body is due to blocked prana, vital energy, and a subsequent accumulation of toxins. When prana begins to flow, the toxins are removed from

the system ensuring the health of the whole body. Asanas practice stretching, massaging, and stimulating our body as well as internal organs and release mental tensions [4, 5]. Asanas tone the muscles, tissues, ligaments, joints, and nerves. It also maintains the smooth functioning and health of all the body's systems. Asanas also boost metabolism, lymphatic circulation, hormonal secretions and brings out a chemical balance such as serotone, oxytocin, endorphin, gamma-aminobutyric acid GABA etc. in the body [4]. Regular practice of asana maintains the physical body as well as mental body in an optimum condition and promotes health even in an unhealthy body.

Many medical scientists and researchers have found out the various benefits of yoga practice from the different studies. Still many researchers are studying on the efficacy of yoga practices. Whole world accepts the benefit of yoga and taking the advantage of it. Yoga practice has benefit from childhood to old ages. One study done by Mishra on the benefit of yoga practice in Aging population, the result revealed that yoga has efficiency to bring health advantage to aging population [6]. The practice of yoga has remarkable improvement on the aspect of quality of life such as Physical Health, Psychological Status, Social Relation Ships and Environmental Health of Female Elderly Citizens [7].

Yoga asanas have basic positions of standing, sitting, forward and backward bends, twisting, inversion and lying down. The most important thing is that we should feel comfortable and relaxed when we practicing asanas and also have the ability to hold the final position for required period of time to get maximum benefit of the practice. Old age people are hard to practice asana in that way because of their physical and physiological change with respect to their ages. Practicing of yoga asana in wrong alignment or wrong way may cause bad effect to the body and unwanted injuries too. To practice yoga asana in correct alignment or in correct manner there is needed of some kind of help. Yoga props help to practice asana comfortable, relaxed and enable to hold longer duration of time without any strain or tension in the body.

### **Yoga Props:**

Yoga props were developed by BKS Iyenger. Any item that aids in body alignment, relaxation, strengthening, or stretching is referred to as a yoga prop. The ancient yogis were also used ropes, logs of wood and stones to help them to practise asanas effectively. Additionally, it aids in maintaining positions for longer and conserves energy. By allowing for stretching and a state of relaxation during practise, asana with props aid in maintaining balance and improving posture. It supports the development of emotional stability and willpower as well. By regulating blood flow, giving the body's organs a rest, and revitalising the body, asana with props can aid with a variety of common diseases. Yoga props enable to practitioner to be practiced asana in a relaxing way, balancing the body and mind actively as well as passively [5].

Some of the useful props which are widely used:

- i. *Yoga Belt*: It helps to provide the required tension and stretch on the specific muscles and tendons that asana works without strain in the final stretch of asana. It also helps in the

increase of range of motion in body joints such as shoulder joint, hip joint etc. It is about 60cm (2ft) long, made from strong woven material, with a buckle at either end.

- ii. *Wooden Block*: It acts as support in all types of asanas. It avoids excess stretch of muscles and joints while bending or twisting and prevent from the injuries. It helps in reducing the pressure and stable the body in final position of asana. It also provides required extra height for specific asana. The measurement of the block should be about 23cm(9in) x 12cm(4.5in) x 7cm(3in).
- iii. *Rounded Wooden Block*: It is used to give extra height in upright standing or standing twist asana. It helps to rotate our body more effectively and without strain. It is mainly act on the lower limb muscles such as calve muscles, hamstring muscle. It is about 5cm(2in) high and 10cm (4in) long.
- iv. *Bolster*: It is used to support our body and enable to take relax and stretch effectively without strain. It reduces the stress of the muscle and helps in the relax of muscles. It also helps to lift the specific body part like knee, chest, shoulder etc. that is required for the asana and help in smooth blood circulation. It should weigh about 3kg (7lbs) and be stuffed with dense cotton. The bolster should be about 60cm (2ft) long with a diameter of 23cm (9in).
- v. *Blanket*: It is used to support the joints and the back muscles. It is also used to open the chest in reclining asanas and pranayama. It is used to reduces pain in the joints mainly ankle and knee joint while practicing sitting asana. It supports the head and shoulders in inversion asanas. It should be cotton blanket, measuring about 2m (6.5ft) x 1.2m (4ft) are most suitable.
- vi. *Chair*: It helps in seated twists of spine specially at lumber area and thoracic region. It also supports lower body portion (from trunk to leg) in lifting for longer period of time. It should be folding metal chair has an open back rest, which allows to place both legs through it. The chair should be firmly rested on the ground and completely stable.
- vii. *Low Open Stool*: It is used to support the body in forward bend and back bend. In forward bend, it supports the anterior body portion from excess bend and provides sufficient stretch in back muscles and vertebrae. It can be also used for inclined or decline forward bending. Same way in back bend, it supports to lift posterior body portion and provide maximum stretch in thoracic region. It also helps in making arch the torso easily. It should not be more than 45cm (1.5ft) high and should rest firmly on the ground.
- viii. *High Stool*: It is used to practice standing twist asana. It helps in twisting of lower lumber region and improving flexibility of spine. It also helps to rotate the spine and torso effectively without strain. High stool supports the leg in one leg standing and stretch hamstring muscle quadricep and calve muscles and also increase flexibility of hip joint. It should be mid-thigh height of the practitioner.
- ix. *Wooden Table*: It is useful to support torso or posterior body part mainly for cardiac patients or respiratory disorder patients. It should be approx. 60cm (2ft) high. It must be rested firmly on the ground. [5]
- x. *Yoga Wheel*: It is used for beck bending and stretching back muscles. It increases the flexibility of spine.

- xi. *Wall*: A wall also can take as yoga props. It supports the body to sit straight and erect while practicing sitting asana. It also aids to maintain balance and sense of alignment, especially in inverted and standing asanas. Additionally, it also provides the confidence to practise asanas without any fear of injury or strain.

**Objective:**

The objectives of the study are –

- i. to search yoga practitioner are accustomed with yoga props,
- ii. to search the yoga props increase the quality of practice, and
- iii. to search yoga practitioners are fascinated by yoga props.

**Method:**

Total 200 responses were collected through questionnaire. The survey was conducted in the North - Eastern region of India through google form. Three Professors suggestion was taken to form the questionnaire in this field. Questionnaires were distributed through email and WhatsApp for collecting the data. Descriptive statistics was implied to this study. To assess the data, percentage of replies was implied.

**Limitation:** Responses which of the subject whose ages below 35 years and above 50 years were not included in the study.

**Delimitation:** Only 200 responses were collected for the study.

The study was conducted only on the age range 35-50 years of the country.

**Result & Discussion:**

The study of the survey is shown in the following Table no. 1.

Q	Question	Yes%	No%	May be%
1	Know the importance of physical activity or exercise.	98.5	1.5	0
2	Participate physical activity or exercise daily.	94.5	5.5	0
3	Participate in any sport.	38	61.5	0
4	Know about yoga asana.	90.5	9.5	0
5	Practice yoga asana regularly.	37.5	51.5	11
6	Difficult to practice asana.	67	17.5	15.5
7	Pain while practicing asana.	65.5	19	15.5
8	Need help while practicing asana.	47.5	21	31.5
9	Practice yoga at yoga centre.	11	65.5	23.5
10	Practice yoga under the guidance of yoga expert or instructor.	18.5	58	23.5
11	Know about yoga props (yoga belt, block, bolster etc.).	14.5	61	24.5

12	Yoga props used regularly.	10.5	4	85.5
13	Yoga props is helpful.	14	0.5	85.5
14	Yoga props support you while practicing yoga.	14.5	0	85.5
15	Yoga props reduce pain while practicing yoga.	12.5	1	86.5
16	Yoga props increase the quality of practice.	14	0.5	85.5
17	Like to practice yoga with yoga props.	14	0	86
18	Practicing yoga keep our body fit and healthy.	85	3.5	11.5
19	Practicing yoga keep our mind calm and peace.	79	3.5	17.5
20	Like to recommend yoga props for further practice.	14	0	86

The survey of the study reflects that the people of North-Eastern region of India are very much concerned about the value of physical activity or exercise as 98.5 percent responded positively. Even 94.5% of people have a habit to participate regular exercise. The group response for sports involvement was only 38%, where negative response is 61.5 percent and 0.5 percent. On the other hand, in case of the response regarding the practice of yoga on regular basis, the positive response is 37.5 percent, negative response is 51.5 percent and 11 percent respondent were not sure. So, as the result in the question of difficulty to practice asana, 67 percent response experiencing difficult, 17.5 percent not and 15.5 percent were not sure. In the question of the experiencing pain during practicing asana, 65.5 percent response positively, 19 percent response negative and 15.5 percent were not sure. For the question, need help for practicing yoga asana, 47.5 percent response positively, 21 percent response negatively and 31.5 percent response doubtful. 11 percent of the respondents practice yoga at yoga centre, 65.5 not at centre and 23.5 responses unsure. 18.5 percent positive response and 58 percent negative response was there while 23.5 percent was not sure about practice yoga under the guidance of yoga expert or instructor. People are not very concerned when it comes to technical understanding regarding yoga props. They are unaware of yoga props. Only 14.5% of respondents indicated that they were knowledgeable about it. Naturally, just 10.5% of participants used props when practising yoga. However, 14% of respondents believe that using props helps in good practise and also wish to endorse the use of props. Finally, it can be concluded that practising yoga helps to maintain a quiet and peaceful mind in addition to a physically fit and healthy body.

### **Conclusion and Justification:**

From the above study it can be concluded as

- a. Practitioners are not familiar with yoga props.
- b. Yoga props may be increased the quality of practice.
- c. Props may attract to the practitioners in regular practice of yoga asana.

As per the data included in the above, it clearly indicates that subjects are not very much familiar to the props to use, how to use and its benefit too. In a previous study, three

physical disability patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a neurodegenerative disease of motor neurons and suffering cramps in various part of body assigned 7 months yoga therapy. The patients with physical disability had practiced yoga with the help of various yoga props and therapist. The result revealed that yoga therapy can be used as cramp management for the patient with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) [8]. Another study to a patient of 14-year-old girl suffering with gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD), including two previous Nissen fundoplication surgeries for her GERD, dysphagia, and chest and abdominal pain. The girl had two surgeries for gastro-esophageal reflux disease. She had weak functioning body system, unable to go school, unable to sleep well and unable to socialize. She had become wheelchair-bound. The researchers applied 4 months treatment of Iyenger yoga with used of props to support the body. The researchers found that yoga practice with the used of yoga props may be useful in treating children and adolescents who have chronic pain and disability [9]. So, yoga props may help the person who cannot practice yoga asana in correct way and provides comfortable while practicing.

#### **Recommendation:**

It might be better for beginners and old aged people to practice yoga with the assistance of yoga instructor or experts and emphasis to use of the props to have quality practices and to prevent from wrong practice and unwanted injuries.

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