

Shavasana Autopsychorelaxation : A self-report measure of cost-effective integrative medicine

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Abstract

Dear Editor,

We read with interest the review on Shavasana yoga by Sharma et al. ¹ The ancient marvel of yoga is the priceless gift of India to the world. We feel this would be an ideal opportunity to draw attention towards pioneer yogic studies in the last ten years which are related to shavasana.

Yoga produces many beneficial emotional, psychological, behavioral and biological effects. The psychophysiological responses to yoga are opposite to the stress response. Shavasana, yoganidra, meditation and slow, rhythmic pranayama breathing are very effective in calming the mind and promoting psychosomatic health. The physiological benefits which follow shavasana helped cardiac patients with ventricular ectopics ² become more resilient to stressful conditions and rehabilitation following myocardial infarction. ³

The relaxation by yoga training was seen to be associated with a significant increase of cardiac vagal modulation among healthy yoga practitioners. ⁴ It is of interest to note that yoga has been associated with improved heart rate variability and respiratory variables including decrease in sympathetic response. ⁵⁶

Shavasana produced a significant increase in deep breathing difference and an appreciable but statistically insignificant increase in RR interval variation suggesting an enhanced parasympathetic activity. In addition there was significant blunting of cold pressor-induced increase in heart rate and blood pressure during and even five minutes after cold pressor test. ⁷

Furthermore, Yoga induces dramatic shifts in all homodynamic variables and the authors have postulated that this effect may be the basis for the purported yogic health

claim and prevention of heart attack. ⁸

It is pertinent to mention here a recent study suggesting use of yoga and shavasana in reducing stress and reporting psychophysiological benefits on self rated fear, anxiety, sadness and disturbed sleep in 47 Tsunami survivors. ⁹

Since shavasana is cost-effective and easy to implement with no side effects, and leads to a deep physical and mental relaxation, it could be a suitable intervention during cardiac rehabilitation to shift the autonomic balance towards an increase of vagal activity and possibly decrease cardiac mortality.

Endorsed by authors, we conclude by emphasizing usefulness of shavasana in combating stress. It can be said that shavasana is a highly interesting field for further research and this technique and other variations of yoga like pranayama deserve further study regarding therapeutic merits in a wide range of disorders.

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