
Yoga Reduces Risk of CVD



Promising new evidence suggests that yoga is beneficial in managing and improving the risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease and can be considered to be a potentially effective therapy for cardiovascular health. The study has been published in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*.

In a review of 37 randomised controlled trials comprising of 2768 subjects, investigators from Netherlands and the US have found that yoga provides the same benefits in risk factor reduction as compared with traditional physical activities such as biking or brisk walking. The investigators note, "This finding is significant as individuals who cannot or prefer not to perform traditional aerobic exercise might still achieve similar benefits in [cardiovascular] risk reduction."

Several studies have shown the physical, spiritual and mental benefits of yoga. This review was conducted to appraise the evidence and to provide a realistic pooled estimate of yoga's effectiveness when compared with traditional exercise and no exercise. The investigators found that risk factors for cardiovascular disease improved more in those doing yoga as compared to those doing no exercise; they also found that yoga's effect on these risks was comparable to exercise.

When compared with no exercise, yoga was associated with significant improvement in the primary outcome risk factors including a reduction in body mass index, systolic blood pressure and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol and an increase in high-density lipoprotein cholesterol. Significant improvements were observed in secondary endpoints such as body weight, diastolic blood pressure, total cholesterol and heart rate. However, no improvements were observed in parameters of diabetes. Significant improvement was observed in risk factor improvements when yoga was combined with medication. In patients with existing coronary heart disease, yoga provided a statistically significant benefit in lowering LDL-cholesterol when added with statins and lipid-lowering drugs.

When compared with exercise, yoga was again shown to have comparable effects on risk factors. The investigators believe that this might be due to yoga's impact on stress reduction that has positive impacts on neuroendocrine status, metabolic and cardiovascular function. According to the investigators, these findings "suggest that there could be comparable working mechanisms, with some possible physiological aerobic benefits occurring with yoga practice, and some stress-reducing, relaxation effect occurring with aerobic exercise."

Senior author Professor Myriam Hunink from Erasmus University Medical Center, Rotterdam, and Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, points out that while evidence of yoga's benefit on cardiovascular health is growing, the physiological explanation for this effect remains unclear. The authors also point out that the dose-response relationship and the relative costs and benefits of yoga when compared to exercise or medication also remain unclear.

However, the results clearly show that yoga is very useful and is especially beneficial for patients who have lower physical tolerance, pre-existing cardiac conditions, the elderly or those with musculoskeletal or joint pain. Yoga can be cost-effective treatment and does not require any expensive equipment or technology. In addition, it has greater adherence, health-related quality of life improvements and greater accessibility to larger segments of the population.

Source: ESC

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