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A Systematic Review of Randomised Control Trials on the Effects of Yoga on Stress Measures and Mood

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Abstract

Stress related disorders such as depression and anxiety are leading sources of disability worldwide, and current treatment methods such as conventional antidepressant medications are not beneficial for all individuals. There is evidence that yoga has mood-enhancing properties possibly related to its inhibitory effects on physiological stress and inflammation, which are frequently associated with affective disorders. However the biological mechanisms via which yoga exerts its therapeutic mood-modulating effects are largely unknown. This systematic review investigates the effects of yoga on sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis regulation measures. It focuses on studies collecting physiological parameters such as blood pressure, heart rate, cortisol, peripheral cytokine expression and/or structural and functional brain measures in regions involved in stress and mood regulation. Overall the 25 randomised control studies discussed provide preliminary evidence to suggest that yoga practice leads to better regulation of the sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system, as well as a decrease in depressive and anxious symptoms in a range of populations. Further research is warranted to confirm these preliminary findings and facilitate implementation in clinical settings.

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