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## Research Article

# The Ashtanga Yoga Paradigm: Frameworks for Holistic Health and Well-Being

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### ABSTRACT

Health encompasses multiple dimensions, including physical, mental, social, spiritual, and emotional aspects, extending beyond the mere absence of disease. The term “Yoga” originates from the concept of union, connection, or completeness. It serves as a pathway to reconnect with our inner selves, particularly when our lives are consumed by external demands. Yoga facilitates the alignment of our body, mind, and soul, offering control over the Chitta Vrittis, the waves of thoughts that the mind craves. It fosters stability within our physical and mental being, bringing harmony to our thoughts.

Yogic practices address the holistic well-being of the mind, body, and soul. Yoga should not be reduced to a set of postures used solely for weight loss; postures, or asanas, are just one component. The Ashtanga Yoga system outlined in texts comprises eight limbs: Yama (social discipline) and Niyama (individual discipline) dictate the principles governing one’s life and influence social well-being. Asana and Pranayama have direct impacts on physical and mental health, regulating and revitalizing the body. Pratyahara (withdrawal from senses) maintains control over the body and mind, preventing the senses from indulging in harmful desires that can lead to physical disorders.

Dharana (concentration) enhances the balance between the mind and body, while Dhyana (meditation) reinforces our ability to cope with stress, safeguarding both mental and physical health. Collectively, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi contribute positively to one’s spiritual and emotional health. It’s essential to practice all eight components of Yoga, not just the physical postures.

In today’s world, where stress is prevalent, dietary habits are often flawed, and environmental pollution abounds, these factors collectively impact all facets of health. Yoga serves as a comprehensive approach to enhance and maintain overall well-being, offering strength to the body and joy to the senses. This paper will delve into these aspects in greater detail.

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## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

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Ayurvedic texts, authored by various Acharyas, provide a comprehensive understanding of health, covering multiple dimensions. The *Tridoshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—are considered the foundational pillars of the body, with doshas, dhatus, and malas serving as the roots. In a balanced state, these components perform physiological functions effectively, contributing to an individual’s well-being.

Health encompasses various dimensions, including physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual, and vocational aspects. A person is deemed healthy when all these dimensions exhibit

well-being. Yoga, an ancient science aimed at improving individuals' lives and promoting health, is extensively discussed in spiritual texts. Lord Shiva, known as the Aadi Yogi, imparted the knowledge of Yoga to Mata Parvati. Maharshi Patanjali, in his seminal work "Patanjali Yoga Sutra," divided into four chapters (Samadhi, Sadhana, Vibhuti, Kaivalya), introduced the concept of Ashtanga Yoga—comprising Yam, Niyam, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana,

and Samadhi.

Ashtanga Yoga significantly impacts all dimensions of health. It can be categorized into two divisions: outer (Yam, Niyam, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara) and inner (Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi), collectively known as *Samyam*. Achieving stability and wellness for both the mind and body involves embracing all the limbs of Yoga. A true Yogi is one who incorporates all aspects, not just focusing on the physical postures (Asanas).

According to	Physical dimension	Mental & social dimension
Charak <sup>5</sup>	Good musculature, proportionate and firm body parts, proper digestion and metabolism, capacity to withstand hunger, thirst, excess heat, cold and exercise.	Sense organs working properly and have strong perception.
Sushruta <sup>6</sup>	Balanced <i>dosha</i> ( <i>vata</i> , <i>pitta</i> , <i>kapha</i> ), <i>agni</i> (metabolism), <i>dhatu</i> s (body organs) and proper functioning of malas.	Pleasant state of indriyas, atma & manas.
Kashyap <sup>7</sup>	A good appetite, proper and timely digestion of food, regular bowel movements, strength and good complexion.	Pleasantness in sense organs, good quality of sleep, blissful mind and Soul.

## Health in Ayurveda

### Dimensions of Health

Health is a multi-dimensional concept, as indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO) definition, which encompasses four dimensions: physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being.

#### Physical dimension

The physical dimension of health pertains to the proper functioning of physiological activities in the body. It is characterized by a balanced state of Doshas, Dhatus, and Malas. Indicators of physical health encompass a range of signs, including a good complexion, clean skin, bright eyes, lustrous hair, and a well-clothed body with firm flesh that is not excessively fat. Other signs of physical well-being include a sweet breath, a healthy appetite, sound sleep, regular bowel and bladder activity, and smoothly coordinated bodily movements. In addition, individuals in good physical health exhibit intact special senses, with resting pulse rate, blood pressure, and exercise tolerance falling within the normal range for their age and sex.

#### Mental Dimension

The proper functioning of the body is intricately linked to the mental well-being of an individual. Mental health is as crucial as physical well-being for the body to operate effectively at 100% capacity. Achieving a state of contentment is key to mental health, involving the harmonious balance between the external environment and our inner selves. The ability to perform tasks with precision and efficiency is greatly influenced by mental well-being.

Mental health is often a subjective experience that cannot be easily articulated or assessed by others. Many times, individuals struggle with self-acceptance due to various reasons in their lives, leading to inner conflicts and a lack of inner peace. Embracing constructive criticism and using it as an opportunity for personal growth can contribute to a sense of well-being. Additionally, finding answers to existential questions, such as "Who am I?" and accepting the responses, allows for better control of the mind and the ability to seek solutions rather than succumb to anxiety.

#### Social Dimension

Social well-being signifies the state of harmony within oneself, with others, and within society. It encompasses the quality of our interpersonal relationships with fellow members of society and involves thoughtful consideration of how we can contribute to making society a better place for every individual.

#### Spiritual Dimension

Each passing day brings about our continual evolution. The concept of Yoga has been bestowed upon us by divine entities and our revered Acharyas. Spirituality delves into the state of the mind as we endeavour to discern the authentic purpose and meaning of life.

#### Emotional Dimension

This pertains to the emotions experienced by any sentient being. It encompasses what we feel and the processes through which we navigate and understand those feelings.

#### Vocational Dimension

This is associated with the work-life of an individual.

Achieving success in our professional endeavours provides a unique sense of satisfaction and confidence. Our self-esteem is elevated, and we experience a profound feeling that our contributions not only benefit us personally but also positively impact the community.

## Yogic practices

Yoga, derived from the root word meaning “to add or join,” reflects humanity’s quest for purpose and the profound inquiry into the fundamental question of self-identity—Who am I? The answer to this profound question is not to be found in the external world; rather, it resides within us. The transformative journey to connect with our inner selves is encapsulated by the practice of Yoga and nothing else.

Maharshi Patanjali, a trailblazer in the field of Yoga philosophy, introduced Yoga Darshan, outlining its principles in eight distinct parts for a clearer comprehension of the yogic concepts. These eight limbs are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Each limb serves as a crucial element on the path to self-realization and a deeper understanding of the inner self.

### Yama

Yama refers to a set of ethical principles or moral restraints that are universal and not subject to adjustment based on one’s status, location, time, or conditions. These ethical guidelines are further categorized into five integral parts.

1. **Ahimsa (Non-violence):** Abstaining from causing harm to others physically, emotionally, and psychologically. It involves cultivating a mindset that seeks to avoid any form of violence.
2. **Satya (Honesty):** Upholding truthfulness both internally and externally. It entails being truthful with oneself and refraining from deceitful practices. Practicing Satya in daily life leads to inner harmony and a guilt-free existence.
3. **Asteya (Non-stealing):** Avoiding thoughts and actions associated with stealing, whether it be in terms of property, money, or peace of mind. The practice of Asteya aims to eliminate guilt and complex emotions through the transformative power of yoga.
4. **Brahmacharya (Pure State of Consciousness):** Embracing a pure state of consciousness, transcending dualities such as male and female. Brahmacharya involves being absorbed in true knowledge and maintaining a mind that rises above the distinctions of gender.
5. **Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness/Non-greediness):** Cultivating the virtue of non-possessiveness and avoiding excessive greed. This Yama encourages individuals to limit desires to what is truly necessary or essential, promoting a sense of contentment and detachment from material possessions.

### Niyama

These are practices of self-restraint, known as observances or Niyamas:

1. **Shauch (Cleanliness):** Emphasizes the importance of keeping oneself and the surroundings clean for a healthier life.
2. **Santosh (Contentment):** Encourages being content with what one has, fostering inner peace regardless of changing circumstances.
3. **Tapa (Discipline):** Involves the burning desire to maintain discipline in all endeavors, akin to the intensity of fire.
4. **Swadhyaya (Study of Self):** Involves understanding and acknowledging our true selves without pretense, and working towards personal improvement.
5. **Ishwarpradidhan (Devotion to the Supreme Being):** Advocates surrendering oneself to the supreme being, cultivating gratitude for what is already present.

### Asana

Asanas refer to specific postures designed to open energy channels in the body. Balancing the body in various postures not only enhances physical stability but also stabilizes the mind. The practice removes blockages in the body, promoting flexibility, and includes meditative, strengthening, and relaxing postures that contribute to overall core strength, protecting against diseases.

### Pranayama

Pranayama involves increasing the vital life force or prana. This practice enhances the quality of prana, directly influencing the mind. Controlling prana results in a naturally controlled state of the mind. There are five types of pranayama mentioned in yogic texts, including Suryabhedhi, Sheetali, Bhastrika, Bhramari, Murchha, Kevali (Gherand Samhita), and Sheetkari (Hatha Yoga Pradeepika).

### Pratyahar

Pratyahar focuses on controlling the sense organs, withdrawing them from external stimuli, and directing concentration inward. While it doesn’t mean complete isolation from external stimuli, it enables control over how and when to react.

### Dharana

Dharana involves concentrating attention on a specific force or person within a defined location.

### Dhyana

Dhyana is the continuous, threadlike flow of instinctive interest when concentrating on a higher force or person within the designated location. It represents the effortless linking of attention.

## Samadhi

The state of effortless linkage of attention, experienced as the illumination of a higher concentration force or person, where the yogic feels devoid of oneself, is known as Samadhi.

Yogic practices	Effect on health dimension
1. <i>Yama</i>	
(a) <i>Ahimsa</i>	Social and Emotional
(b) <i>Satya</i>	Social, Mental & Emotional
(c) <i>Asteya</i>	Social
(d) <i>Brahmacharya</i>	Mental & Emotional
(e) <i>Aparigraha</i>	Social & Mental
2. <i>Niyama</i>	
(a) <i>Shaucha</i>	Social & Physical
(b) <i>Santosh</i>	Emotional & Mental
(c) <i>Tapa</i>	Social & Vocational
(d) <i>Swadhyaya</i>	Social & Mental
(e) <i>Ishwarpranidhana</i>	Spiritual
3. <i>Asana</i>	Physical & Mental
4. <i>Pranayama</i>	Physical & Mental
5. <i>Pratyahar</i>	Emotional & Mental
6. <i>Dharana</i>	Spiritual, Mental
7. <i>Dhyana</i>	& Emotional
8. <i>Samadhi</i>	

## Discussion

We find ourselves immersed in an environment filled with habits and dietary choices that gradually erode our health, often without us realizing it. The prevalence of stress and anxiety has become commonplace in today's society, but it is crucial to recognize that this is not a normal state of being. As humans, we are not mere robots; we need to experience and feel to truly embrace our humanity.

Unhealthy food choices, the pollution in our environment, detachment from societal connections, and the misconception that such behaviours are acceptable contribute to what is known in yoga philosophy as "pragyapradh" — wilful ignorance or actions against one's well-being. It's essential for each of us to pause, reflect, and reconsider our approach to various aspects of our health.

By incorporating yoga into our daily routine, we have the opportunity to transform our attitudes toward well-being. This ancient practice offers a holistic approach that not only addresses physical health but also nurtures mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It's time to reconsider our choices and prioritize a healthier, more balanced lifestyle

for the sake of our overall health and vitality.

## Conclusion

In our modern lifestyle, we have adopted numerous activities that are detrimental to our health. It is imperative to introduce activities into our daily routines that promote and enhance our well-being. Yoga emerges as a comprehensive solution to address the various concerns mentioned earlier, presenting a holistic package capable of elevating the quality of our lives and restoring health.

Contrary to a common misconception that associates yoga merely with physical postures, it encompasses a broader philosophy encapsulated in the eight limbs of yoga. These limbs guide not only the practice of postures but also dictate how one should behave, eat, and engage in various aspects of life. Embracing all eight limbs offers a profound understanding of oneself and serves as a key to improving every dimension of health.

Becoming a yogi involves not only performing the physical postures but also adhering to the principles embedded in the eight limbs of yoga. It is an invitation to delve into a comprehensive and transformative journey that leads to enhanced well-being. As individuals, we should aspire to embrace the yogic philosophy in its entirety and strive to become yogis in the true sense.

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