

How yoga can help with Type 2 diabetes

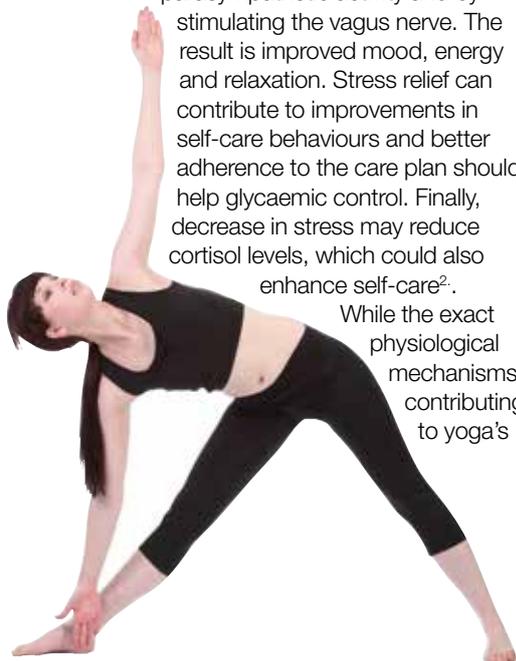
Many people with Type 2 diabetes find it useful to include a complementary therapy like yoga as part of their care plan. **Vidhi Sohdi**, who is a British Wheel of Yoga teacher and the founder of mi-yogah, explains how yoga can support self-management

The easy accessibility of yoga and its mind-body approach may provide a useful alternative to more conventional physical activity for people with diabetes. Researchers have been studying the health benefits of yoga in diabetes and I would argue that there is now encouraging evidence to consider including the practice of yoga in a diabetes exercise programme.

Benefits of yoga

Yoga employs an array of tools in focused, individualised and non-invasive interventions, with the goal of improving metabolism and circulation. This may lead to improved glucose utilisation¹. Yoga also contributes to stress management, by enhancing parasympathetic activity and by stimulating the vagus nerve. The result is improved mood, energy and relaxation. Stress relief can contribute to improvements in self-care behaviours and better adherence to the care plan should help glycaemic control. Finally, decrease in stress may reduce cortisol levels, which could also enhance self-care².

While the exact physiological mechanisms contributing to yoga's



Yoga may help diabetes management through stress control



benefits for diabetes are not fully understood, Eastern medicine philosophy states that certain yoga poses stimulate and massage internal organs, including the pancreas.

Research

The most recent study, conducted by the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, Chennai, found that three months of yoga, along with standard care, showed significant reduction in post-prandial blood glucose, as well as reduced fasting glucose. Participants also reported improved quality of life, improved sleep and reduction in depressive symptoms³. However, these are preliminary results, awaiting confirmation by larger studies and further research. Another study reported that, after 40 days of yoga, adults with Type 2 diabetes experienced significant reductions in body mass index (BMI) and anxiety, as well as improved wellbeing⁴. Research with adults at high risk for Type 2 diabetes showed improvements in weight, blood pressure, insulin control and triglycerides following three months of yoga, compared with a control group of patients receiving only diabetes education materials⁵.

Finally, a recent review of the impact of yoga therapy included 32 randomised, controlled trials involving 2,768 participants⁶. Compared with individuals who did not participate in any physical activity, those who practiced asana-based yoga showed a reduction in their LDL cholesterol and increased their HDL cholesterol levels. In addition, the yoga

practitioners saw significant reductions in BMI, diastolic blood pressure, total cholesterol, triglycerides and heart rate. “This finding is significant, as individuals who cannot, or prefer not to, perform traditional aerobic exercise might still achieve similar benefits in cardiovascular disease risk reduction,” said lead investigator, Dr Paula Chu of Harvard School of Public Health. “Evidence supports yoga’s accessibility and acceptability to patients with lower physical tolerance, like those with pre-existing cardiac conditions, the elderly or those who have musculoskeletal or joint pain.”

These findings are promising. However, the hard scientific evidence for the benefits of yoga in Type 2 diabetes is still limited. Further research will be needed before yoga can be included in standard clinical guidelines. Finally, as with all complementary therapies, patients practising – or intending to take up – yoga should mention this to the healthcare professional looking after their diabetes management plan.

i mi-yogah provides customized one-to-one solutions using yoga postures, breathing and meditation as tools for therapeutic purposes. For more information, go to www.mi-yogah.com



REFERENCES

- 1 McCall T. *Yoga as Medicine: The Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing* (New York, Bantam Dell, 2007)
- 2 de G. Hansen E and Innes K (2013). The benefits of yoga for adults with Type 2 diabetes. *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* 23 (2); 76–77
- 3 Satish L (2014). Impact of Yoga in the Management of Type II Diabetes: a preliminary report published by the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, Chennai
- 4 Kosuri M and Sridhar G (2009). Yoga practice in diabetes improves physical and psychological outcomes. *Metabolic Syndrome and Related Disorders* 7 (6); 515–517
- 5 Yang K, Bernardo L, Sereika S et al (2011). Utilization of 3-month yoga program for adults at high risk for Type 2 diabetes: a pilot study. *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* doi:10.1093/ecam/nep117
- 6 Chu P, Gotink R, Yeh G et al (2014). The effectiveness of yoga in modifying risk factors for cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* pii:2047487314562741