

Yoga as a Supportive Approach for Anxiety and Depression: A Review of Recent Evidence

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Abstract

Background:

Anxiety and depression are common mental health conditions that affect emotional well-being, daily functioning, and quality of life. Yoga has gained attention as a supportive approach because it combines physical postures, breathing practices, meditation, and relaxation.

Objective:

This review aims to examine recent evidence on the role of yoga in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression and to explore its potential as a supportive approach to mental health care.

Methods:

Recent randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and relevant research studies on yoga and mental health were reviewed. The review focused on the effects of yoga on anxiety, depression, stress, emotional well-being, sleep, and related psychological outcomes.

Results:

Recent evidence suggests that yoga may help reduce anxiety, depressive symptoms, stress, and negative emotional states while improving mood, sleep, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. The combined practice of asana, pranayama, meditation, and relaxation may contribute to these benefits. However, differences in yoga styles, intervention duration, frequency, study populations, and outcome measures limit direct comparison between studies.

Conclusion:

Yoga appears to be a practical and potentially beneficial supportive approach for anxiety and depression. It may be used alongside appropriate psychological and medical care rather than as a replacement for established treatment. Further research using standardized protocols and longer follow-up is needed to establish its long-term effectiveness.

Keywords: Yoga; Anxiety; Depression; Mental Health; Pranayama; Meditation; Stress; Psychological Well-being

1. Introduction

Yoga is a combination of physical postures, breathing practices, relaxation, and meditation. These practices may help a person manage stress and develop better awareness of physical and emotional responses. Recent research suggests that yoga may have a positive effect on anxiety and depressive symptoms. A systematic review and meta-analysis by *Gothe et al. (2023)* found that yoga-based interventions may reduce anxiety symptoms in people with anxiety disorders and may also help reduce depressive symptoms, although the authors noted that the quality of evidence was limited by differences between studies. More recent evidence has also shown encouraging results. *Moosburner et al. (2024)*, in a systematic review and meta-analysis of people with depressive disorders, reported that yoga was associated with a reduction in short-term depression severity when compared with passive controls. Similarly, a randomized controlled trial among university students found that a 12-week yoga program improved perceived stress, emotional well-being, and both state and trait anxiety (*Castellote-Caballero et al., 2024*). Another recent clinical trial reported that integrated yoga, when used along

with standard care, may provide additional benefits for adults with clinical depression (*Vibin et al., 2024*). These findings suggest that yoga may be useful as a supportive approach for people experiencing anxiety and depression. However, differences in yoga practices, duration of intervention, study populations, and outcome measures make it important to examine the available evidence carefully. Therefore, the present review aims to discuss recent research on the role of yoga in anxiety and depression and to understand its possible benefits as a complementary approach to mental health care.

2. Anxiety and Depression: A Brief Overview

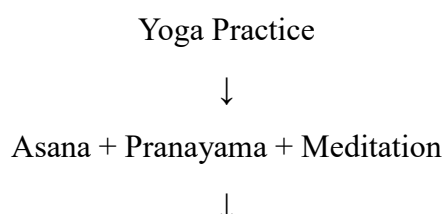
Anxiety and depression are two of the most common mental health conditions and can affect a person's emotional, physical, and social well-being. According to the World Health Organization, anxiety and depressive disorders are among the most common mental disorders worldwide. In 2021, around 359 million people were living with an anxiety disorder, while depressive disorders affected about 332 million people globally (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). Anxiety is generally associated with excessive worry, fear, nervousness, restlessness, and difficulty in feeling relaxed. These symptoms may also be accompanied by physical changes such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, disturbed sleep, and changes in breathing. Depression, on the other hand, is commonly associated with persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, low energy, poor concentration, sleep disturbances, and reduced motivation. Although anxiety and depression are different conditions, they can occur together and may influence each other. Long-lasting stress and emotional difficulties can also make these symptoms more difficult to manage.

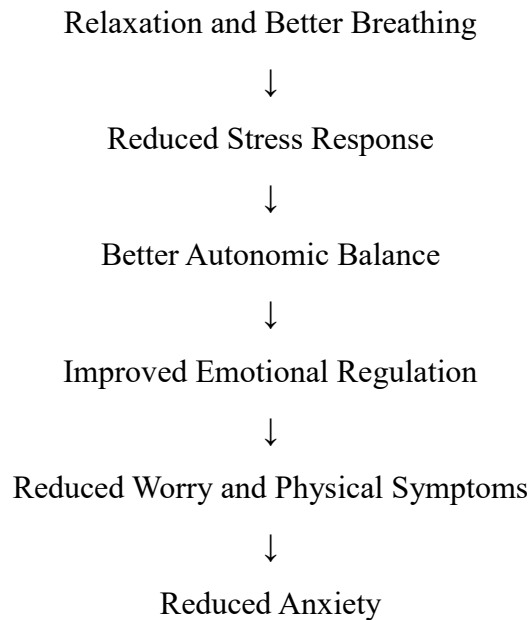
Both conditions can have a considerable effect on daily functioning and quality of life. For this reason, treatment usually includes approaches such as psychological therapy, medication, lifestyle modification, or a combination of these methods. In recent years, interest has also increased in supportive approaches such as yoga. Recent evidence suggests that yoga may help reduce symptoms of both anxiety and depression, although the strength of evidence differs across studies. A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that yoga may improve depressive symptoms and may also have a small beneficial effect on anxiety in people with major depressive disorder (*Liu et al., 2023*). Similarly, a recent systematic review found beneficial short-term effects of yoga on depression severity, particularly when compared with passive controls (*Moosburner et al., 2024*). These findings provide a basis for examining yoga as a supportive approach for people experiencing anxiety and depression.

3. Yoga and Mental Health

Recent studies suggest that regular yoga practice may have beneficial effects on psychological well-being. A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis reported that yoga may help reduce stress in stressed adults, supporting its use as a non-pharmacological approach for stress management (*Schleinker et al., 2024*). Similarly, a randomized controlled trial among university students found that a 12-week yoga program significantly improved perceived stress, emotional well-being, and both state and trait anxiety (*Castellote-Caballero et al., 2024*). Yoga may also be helpful in people with more significant mental health symptoms. Moosburner et al. (2024), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of 24 studies involving 1,395 participants with depressive disorders, found that yoga produced a significant short-term reduction in depression severity when compared with passive controls. However, the authors also noted differences in the quality of evidence and study methods. Another randomized controlled trial found that adding an integrated yoga program to standard care provided additional benefits for adults with clinical depression (*Vibin et al., 2024*).

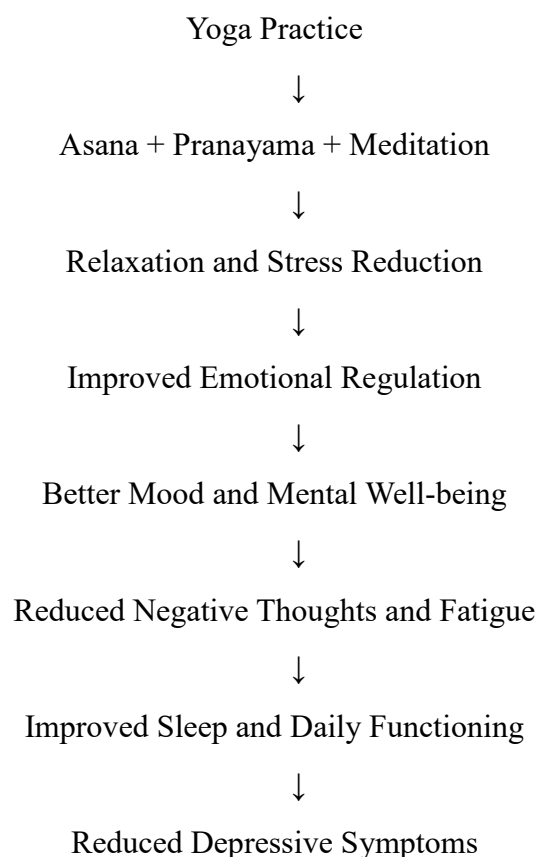
Figure 1. Possible pathway through which yoga may help reduce anxiety





The figure presents a simple pathway through which yoga may help in reducing anxiety. Yoga practices such as asana, pranayama, and meditation may promote relaxation and improve breathing, which can help reduce the body's stress response. These changes may support better autonomic balance and emotional regulation, ultimately helping to reduce worry, physical symptoms, and overall anxiety.

Figure 2. Possible pathway of yoga in reducing depressive symptoms



The figure shows a possible pathway through which yoga may help in reducing depressive symptoms. Regular yoga practice may promote relaxation, reduce stress, and improve emotional regulation. These changes may support better mood, sleep, and daily functioning, which may ultimately contribute to a reduction in depressive symptoms.

Table 1: Evidence from Recent Studies

Year	Author(s)	Study / Population	Main findings
2026	Natarajan et al.	RCT in individuals with anxiety disorder	Yoga was investigated for anxiety severity, quality of life, and biological markers, supporting its potential as a complementary approach for anxiety management.
2026	Ghai et al.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of Yoga Nidra; 73 studies, 5,201 participants	Yoga Nidra showed beneficial effects on stress, anxiety, and depression, although methodological limitations require cautious interpretation.
2026	Ranjbar et al.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of yoga during pregnancy and postpartum; 35 studies	Yoga was associated with reductions in prenatal depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms, although certainty of evidence was low to very low.
2025	Kwok et al.	Randomized clinical trial in people with Parkinson's disease	Meditation and yoga were studied for anxiety, depression, and chronic inflammation, with findings supporting their potential role in improving psychological outcomes.
2025	Moszeik et al.	Randomized controlled trial of online Yoga Nidra	Yoga Nidra was examined for stress, anxiety, depression, rumination, sleep, well-being, and cortisol, providing evidence for its possible psychological benefits.
2025	Arya et al.	Systematic review of yoga interventions among nursing professionals and students	The review found generally positive effects of yoga interventions on mental health outcomes in nursing populations.
2025	Punsuwun et al.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of yoga for depressive symptoms during pregnancy	Yoga showed beneficial effects on depressive symptoms among pregnant women.
2025	Çuvadar et al.	Meta-analysis of yoga during pregnancy	Yoga was associated with improvements in anxiety, depression, and stress during pregnancy.
2024	Moosburner et al.	Systematic review and meta-analysis; 24 studies, 1,395 participants with depressive disorders	Yoga significantly reduced short-term depression severity compared with passive controls and was associated with higher remission rates.
2024	Vibin et al.	Randomized controlled trial in adults with clinical depression	Integrated yoga used along with standard care showed additional benefits for adults with clinical depression.
2024	Yadav et al.	RCT in hospitalized COVID-19 patients; yoga-based breathing practices	The yoga group showed significant improvements in depression, anxiety, stress, overall DASS scores, and fear of COVID-19.

2024	Schleinker et al.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of yoga in stressed adults	Yoga was associated with reduced stress, supporting its possible role in improving psychological well-being.
2023	Martínez-Calderon et al.	Systematic review, meta-analysis and meta-regression; 23 studies, 1,420 participants	Yoga was superior to controls in reducing anxiety symptoms in anxiety disorders; sensitivity analyses also supported reductions in depressive symptoms.
2023	Wu et al.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of 34 RCTs in major depressive disorder	Yoga produced moderate improvements in depressive symptoms and a smaller improvement in anxiety symptoms; no adverse events were reported in the yoga groups.
2023	Sangeethalaxmi & Hankey	RCT of yoga breathing and relaxation in young adults with bronchial asthma	Yoga breathing and relaxation used as an add-on approach improved quality of life, anxiety, and depression.
2023	Simon et al.	Secondary analysis of RCT comparing Kundalini Yoga, CBT, and stress education in generalized anxiety disorder	Yoga showed lower symptom severity than stress education on several anxiety/depression measures, although CBT showed broader benefits.
2022	Chang et al.	RCT of online Isha Upa Yoga in 679 university students	Yoga improved stress and well-being and was also associated with improvements in anxiety and depression by the end of the intervention.
2022	Rajagopalan et al.	RCT of Om chanting and Yoga Nidra in 80 patients with hypertension	Significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress were observed along with improvements in sleep quality and HRV.
2022	Liu et al.	RCT of mindfulness yoga in women receiving chemotherapy for early breast cancer	Mindfulness yoga was investigated for anxiety and depression and showed beneficial psychological effects.
2022	Tele-yoga study	RCT in patients with ankylosing spondylitis	Tele-yoga produced significant improvements in anxiety and depression along with physical outcomes.
2022	Low back pain study	Controlled study in computer users with chronic low back pain	Integrated yoga with mindfulness reduced stress, anxiety, and depression more than the comparison physical-exercise program.

4. Limitations and Research Gaps:

Although recent research indicates that yoga may be beneficial in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, several limitations remain in the existing evidence. One important limitation is the **considerable variation in yoga interventions**, including differences in yoga style, session duration, frequency, and the combination of asana, pranayama, meditation, and relaxation techniques. Such variation makes it difficult to determine which specific components or dosage of yoga are most effective (Moosburner et al., 2024; Ghai et al., 2026). The methodological quality of available studies is also inconsistent, with differences in sample size, control groups,

outcome measures, and risk of bias. Recent reviews have reported that the certainty of evidence ranges from moderate to very low in some outcomes (Moosburner et al., 2024).

Another important research gap is the **limited number of long-term studies**. Many studies have focused mainly on short-term changes, while evidence regarding the maintenance of improvements after the intervention is still limited (Schleinzer et al., 2024). Recent research among students has also highlighted that many available studies use relatively short intervention periods, making it difficult to understand the sustained effects of yoga on anxiety and related physiological outcomes (Sharma et al., 2025). In addition, blinding is generally difficult in yoga research because participants are aware of the intervention they receive, which may increase expectation and reporting bias (Moosburner et al., 2024). Therefore, future studies should include larger and more diverse samples, standardized yoga protocols, clearly defined intervention duration and frequency, longer follow-up periods, and both psychological and objective physiological measures. More high-quality randomized controlled trials are also needed to identify **how, for whom, and under what conditions yoga can be most effectively used as a supportive approach for anxiety and depression** (Ghai et al., 2026).

5. Conclusion

Yoga appears to be a promising and practical supportive approach for improving mental well-being and reducing symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. The combined practice of asana, pranayama, meditation, and relaxation provides a holistic approach that may help individuals manage stress, improve emotional balance, and develop better coping abilities. Its relatively simple nature, flexibility, and suitability for different age groups make it a useful option that can be incorporated into daily life.

Overall, yoga should not be viewed as a replacement for medical or psychological treatment, particularly in individuals with moderate to severe mental health conditions. Rather, it may be used alongside appropriate professional care as part of a comprehensive approach to mental health. Continued research with standardized yoga practices, appropriate study designs, and longer follow-up periods will further clarify its role in the prevention and management of anxiety and depression.

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