



What is healthy for the Heart of Yoga?

There has been a surge of media attention in the UK on the health benefits of Yoga based on the results of a recent study published:

In the Guardian under the title '[Yoga may provide similar health benefits to 'cycling or brisk walking'](#)'.

In the Telegraph under the title '[Yoga just as good as aerobics for cutting heart disease risk'](#)'.

On the BBC News page under the title '[Yoga may guard against heart disease, study finds'](#)'.

Along with a recent article in the Guardian under the title '[Should Yoga be part of NHS care?](#)'"

All this is on the one hand seems great and on paper appears to be good publicity, yet it lands in an environment where we have a huge amount of information available on the potential dangers of unhelpful lifestyle on the heart and a huge amount of heart problems.

It is almost as if there are parallels between the increasing weight of information and the increasing weight of the population.

Furthermore we are also in an environment of a quick fix as is illustrated by a recent email:

"What if I told you that emotional and physical freedom is within reach simply by releasing a muscle deep in the core of your body?"

Plus the idea and increasing reduction of the amount of time needed to correct issues accumulated over years, if not generations. This is apparent with the 20' workout being usurped by the 15' workout, and then being usurped by the 10' workout, and then being usurped by the 7' workout, et al.

This idea around time is highlighted in the [Guardian report](#) with the comment:

"But it is still unclear how much Yoga someone has to do to get the benefits found"

This is where it gets tricky in terms of:

1. How often one needs to get on the mat
2. How long one needs to practice

I would suggest that once a week (let alone the questions such group size or surrounding environment) may well not be enough to effect a deeper change. The reality is that I feel we need to practice at a very minimum, 4 times a week if not 5 or 6. Hence you may as well go for broke with 7 i.e. daily. As we all know it is very easy for 6 to become 4, or 4 to become 2. Hence go for 7 and end up with 5 at least.

Also that the amount of time we need to be practicing in order to make a realistic impact on deep seated issues needs to be realistically considered. I have said [before](#) that:

*"A short term strength of the viniyoga of Yoga methodology is, that you can have a personal daily practice session designed for only 25'.
A long term weakness of the viniyoga of Yoga methodology is, that you only have a personal daily practice session designed for 25'."*

In order to make an impact more than what is called a Tanu or short term attenuation of symptoms in Chapter Two verse 2 of the Yoga Sūtra, I feel we need to be practicing daily for at least 60' - 75' and including seated practices such as Mudrā or Prāṇāyāma.

Obviously this is a goal that needs to be built up gradually in terms of home practice, though some try to make up the numbers by weekly multi-grouping via Yoga Studios and their 'all you can eat in a month' deals. This is a convenient resource but long term there are considerations, these would need to be the subject of a separate post.

Another area that arises is the link between Yoga as a tool for medical intervention and the relationship of this possibility with the Medical Health and increasingly Health insurance bodies. This is illustrated in the Guardian report by:

"But it is still unclear how cost-effective it is relative to undertaking other forms of exercise or taking drugs."

This is an increasingly complex area that raises the question of are we in danger of the teaching of Yoga postures being increasingly shaped within the health and therapeutic healthcare field to meet the demands/standardisations of the medical and/or insurance health authorities in terms of:

1. Choice – Which Yoga posture works for what problem?
2. Duration – How long must I stay in a particular posture in order to have a specific effect/result?
3. Frequency – How often must I practice this posture to effect a result?
4. Timescale – Over what period of time must I practice this posture to effect a result?
5. Comparable Applications – What will be the effect of Yoga postures compared to other forms of physical exercise?
6. Relative Costs – What will be the cost of Yoga compared to other forms of exercise?
7. Treatment Budgets – What will be the cost of Yoga as a form of treatment relative to taking drugs?

Complex implications to evaluate and they leave us with questions around what is healthy for the heart of Yoga rather than what is healthy for the heart of the person!

On top of all of this I would offer a final factor in this post that I feel is important for our journey of 'wanting to do Yoga' rather than 'having to do Yoga' and wrote extensively on in a post.

It is the pleasure of practising Yoga because you want to practice.....

"It is the pleasure of practising Yoga because you want to practice without the encumbrance of needing it to reduce symptoms at the level of body, energy, mind or emotions, that opens the door to what is beyond Āsana and especially love as with anything you pursue because of love rather than need. Maybe this is a factor that can open the door beyond Āsana towards the deeper practices of Yoga with their more subtle and our less immediately measurable reward based judgements of their inner effect or value.

The pursuit of Prāṇāyāma is one such example of a Yoga activity that is more comparable to the pursuit of an art than an activity of fitness or health. From this you can find yourself making space for it in your inner life and as an activity that you want to do outside of the class or teacher environment."