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YOGA - A BOON FOR MENTAL HEALTH

In fact, a recent review of the evidence for using yoga as a treatment for depression found that yoga is used as an additional therapy to treat depressive symptoms, particularly among people with significant levels of depression.

By adopting a variety of postures and taking control of breathing, it is possible to achieve a state of relaxation through yoga, which can relieve feelings of stress and anxiety and hence minimise depression. Equally, yoga appears to be a useful mind-body intervention to manage mood disorders.

In fact, a recent review of the evidence for using yoga as a treatment for depression found that yoga is used as an additional therapy to treat depressive symptoms, particularly among people with significant levels of depression. Current thinking is that the skills and awareness brought by practicing yoga and mindfulness can manage the various processes implicated in substance dependency and relapse, including those that have a biochemical basis.

Yoga reduces Cortisol levels

Your body releases cortisol in response to stressful situations, as this stress hormone prepares your body for action by making glucose more available to power your muscles if the need arises. However, exposure to high levels of cortisol in the longer term can contribute to a range of serious health problems, including excessive weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, compromised immune function, digestive disorders, fertility issues and depression. One way to reduce cortisol is through practicing yoga. Indeed, a study that explored the impact of yoga on markers of stress found that within 10 days of taking part in yogic poses and breathing exercises, levels of cortisol fell.

Yoga enhances Serotonin levels

Serotonin is one of the brain's chemical messengers that not only elevates mood but also helps to reduce

feelings of pain. Low levels of serotonin are frequently associated with depression and one treatment for low mood is medication that helps to restore serotonin levels. Yoga offers a safer option to boost serotonin levels. Certainly, a piece of research that explored the effects of a 12 week yoga program on back pain, mood and serotonin levels found that practicing yoga was connected to a brighter mood and elevated serotonin.

Yoga boosts Dopamine production

Dopamine is another brain's neurotransmitters, which signals feelings of pleasure and low levels are again linked to depressive symptoms. This brain chemical also plays a role in reward pathways that are triggered through drug taking. Enhancing levels of dopamine may therefore boost mood and offer a natural high. While sugar rich foods can raise dopamine levels, a healthier way to do so is through yoga, with research showing that yogic meditation can increase dopamine production by up to 65%

Yoga improves GABA levels

A further neurotransmitter of interest is GABA, as levels of this chemical messenger are reduced in anxiety and mood disorders. While general exercise can reduce cortisol and increase serotonin and dopamine, a study investigated whether elevations in GABA were specific to yoga or aided by various forms of physical activity.

The researchers found that people who took part in 60 minutes of yoga thrice weekly for 12 weeks achieved greater improvements in anxiety and mood than those who walked for a similar duration, which was correlated to levels of GABA. This offers yet another possibility through which yoga exerts its effects on mental wellness.

