

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

III B A HISTORY VI SEMESTER CORE – I BASED ELECTIVE –

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT (18BHI65S)

DR. SEETHALAKSHMI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY - GAC (AUTO)- 18

Cell: 9487087335

seethaprof@gmail.com

Unit IV

Stress

Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain. Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action.

Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way you respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to your overall well-being.

Sometimes, the best way to manage your stress involves changing your situation. At other times, the best strategy involves changing the way you respond to the situation.

Developing a clear understanding of how stress impacts your physical and mental health is important. It's also important to recognize how your mental and physical health affects your stress level.

Volume 90%

Stress can be short-term or long-term. Both can lead to a variety of symptoms, but chronic stress can take a serious toll on the body over time and have long-lasting health effects.

Some common signs of stress include:¹

- Changes in mood
- Clammy or sweaty palms
- Decreased sex drive
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty sleeping
- Digestive problems
- Dizziness
- Feeling anxious
- Frequent sickness
- Grinding teeth
- Headaches
- Low energy
- Muscle tension, especially in the neck and shoulders
- Physical aches and pains
- Racing heartbeat
- Trembling

Common Symptoms of Too Much Stress

Stress is not always easy to recognize, but there are some ways to identify some signs that you might be experiencing too much pressure. Sometimes stress can come from an obvious source, but sometimes even small daily stresses from work, school, family, and friends can take a toll on your mind and body.

If you think stress might be affecting you, there are a few things you can watch for:

- **Psychological signs** such as difficulty concentrating, worrying, anxiety, and trouble remembering
- **Emotional signs** such as being angry, irritated, moody, or frustrated
- **Physical signs** such as high blood pressure, changes in weight, frequent colds or infections, and changes in the menstrual cycle and libido
- **Behavioral signs** such as poor self-care, not having time for the things you enjoy, or relying on drugs and alcohol to cope

Causes

There are many different things in life that can cause stress. Some of the main sources of stress include work, finances, relationships, parenting, and day-to-day inconveniences.

Stress can trigger the body's response to a perceived threat or danger, known as the [fight-or-flight response](#).² During this reaction, certain hormones like adrenaline and cortisol are released. This speeds the heart rate, slows digestion, shunts blood flow to major muscle groups, and

changes various other autonomic nervous functions, giving the body a burst of energy and strength.

Originally named for its ability to enable us to physically fight or run away when faced with danger, the fight-or-flight response is now activated in situations where neither response is appropriate—like in traffic or during a stressful day at work.

When the perceived threat is gone, systems are designed to return to normal function via the [relaxation response](#).³ But in cases of chronic stress, the relaxation response doesn't occur often enough, and being in a near-constant state of fight-or-flight can cause damage to the body.

Stress can also lead to some unhealthy habits that have a negative impact on your health. For example, many people cope with stress by eating too much or by smoking. These unhealthy habits damage the body and create bigger problems in the long-term.⁴

Types of Stress

Not all types of stress are harmful or even negative. Some of the different types of stress that you might experience include:

- **Acute stress:** Acute stress is a very short-term type of stress that can either be positive or more distressing; this is the type of stress we most often encounter in day-to-day life.
- **Chronic stress:** Chronic stress is stress that seems never-ending and inescapable, like the stress of a bad marriage or an extremely taxing job; chronic stress can also stem from traumatic experiences and childhood trauma.

- **Episodic acute stress:** Episodic acute stress is acute stress that seems to run rampant and be a way of life, creating a life of ongoing distress.
- **Eustress:** Eustress is fun and exciting. It's known as a positive type of stress that can keep you energized. It's associated with surges of adrenaline, such as when you are skiing or racing to meet a deadline.

Impact of Stress

The connection between your mind and body is apparent when you examine the impact stress has on your life.

Feeling stressed out over a relationship, money, or your living situation can create physical health issues. The inverse is also true. Health problems, whether you're dealing with high blood pressure or you have diabetes, will also affect your stress level and your mental health. When your brain experiences high degrees of stress, your body reacts accordingly.

Serious acute stress, like being involved in a natural disaster or getting into a verbal altercation, can trigger heart attacks, arrhythmias, and even sudden death. However, this happens mostly in individuals who already have heart disease.⁵

Stress also takes an emotional toll. While some stress may produce feelings of mild anxiety or frustration, prolonged stress can also lead to [burnout](#), [anxiety disorders](#), and [depression](#).

Chronic stress can have a serious impact on your health as well. If you experience chronic stress, your [autonomic nervous system](#) will be overactive, which is likely to damage your body.

Stress-Influenced Conditions

- Diabetes
- Hair loss
- Heart disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Obesity
- Sexual dysfunction
- Tooth and gum disease
- Ulcers

"Stress doesn't only make us feel awful emotionally," says Jay Winner, MD, author of *Take the Stress Out of Your Life* and director of the Stress Management Program for Sansum Clinic in Santa Barbara, Calif. "It can also exacerbate just about any health condition you can think of."

Studies have found many health problems related to stress. Stress seems to worsen or increase the risk of conditions like [obesity](#), heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, depression, gastrointestinal problems, and asthma.

Before you get too stressed out about being stressed out, there is some good news. Following some simple stress relief tips could both lower your stress and lower your health risks.

10 Health Problems Related to Stress

What are some of the most significant health problems related to stress? Here's a sampling.

1. **Heart disease.** Researchers have long suspected that the stressed-out, type A personality has a higher risk of high blood pressure and [heart](#) problems. We don't know why, exactly. Stress can directly increase heart rate and [blood](#) flow, and causes the release of cholesterol and [triglycerides](#) into the [blood](#) stream. It's also possible that stress is related to other problems -- an increased likelihood of smoking or obesity -- that indirectly increase the heart risks.

Doctors do know that sudden emotional stress can be a trigger for serious cardiac problems, including [heart attacks](#). People who have chronic heart problems need to avoid acute stress - - and learn how to successfully manage life's unavoidable stresses -- as much as they can.

2. **Asthma.** Many studies have shown that stress can worsen [asthma](#). Some evidence suggests that a parent's chronic stress might even increase the risk of developing asthma in their children. One study looked at how parental stress affected the asthma rates of young children who were also exposed to air pollution or whose mothers smoked during pregnancy. The kids with stressed out parents had a substantially higher risk of developing asthma.
3. **Obesity.** Excess fat in the belly seems to pose greater health risks than fat on the legs or hips -- and unfortunately, that's just where people with high stress seem to store it. "Stress causes higher levels of the hormone cortisol," says Winner, "and that seems to increase the amount of fat that's deposited in the [abdomen](#)."
4. **Diabetes.** Stress can worsen diabetes in two ways. First, it increases the likelihood of bad behaviors, such as unhealthy eating and excessive drinking. Second, stress seems to raise the glucose levels of people with [type 2 diabetes](#) directly.

5. **Headaches.** Stress is considered one of the most common triggers for [headaches](#) -- not just tension [headaches](#), but migraines as well.
6. **Depression and anxiety.** It's probably no surprise that chronic stress is connected with higher rates of [depression](#) and [anxiety](#). One survey of recent studies found that people who had stress related to their jobs -- like demanding work with few rewards -- had an 80% higher risk of developing [depression](#) within a few years than people with lower stress.
7. **Gastrointestinal problems.** Here's one thing that stress doesn't do -- it doesn't cause ulcers. However, it can make them worse. Stress is also a common factor in many other GI conditions, such as chronic heartburn (or gastroesophageal reflux disease, [GERD](#)) and irritable bowel syndrome ([IBS](#)), Winner says.
8. **Alzheimer's disease.** One animal study found that stress might worsen [Alzheimer's disease](#), causing its [brain lesions](#) to form more quickly. Some researchers speculate that reducing stress has the potential to slow down the progression of the disease.
9. **Accelerated aging.** There's actually evidence that stress can affect how you age. One study compared the DNA of mothers who were under high stress -- they were caring for a chronically ill child -- with women who were not. Researchers found that a particular region of the chromosomes showed the effects of accelerated aging. Stress seemed to accelerate aging about 9 to 17 additional years.
10. **Premature death.** A study looked at the health effects of stress by studying elderly caregivers looking after their spouses -- people who are naturally under a great deal of stress. It found that caregivers had a 63% higher rate of death than people their age who were not caregivers

Still, you might be wondering why. Why would stress make us sick? Why would an emotional feeling wreck havoc on our bodies?

Stress isn't only a feeling. "Stress isn't just in your head," Winner says. It's a built-in physiologic response to a threat. When you're stressed, your body responds. Your blood vessels constrict. Your [blood pressure](#) and pulse rise. You breathe faster. Your bloodstream is flooded with hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline.

"When you're chronically stressed, those physiologic changes, over time, can lead to health problems," Winner tells WebMD.

Stress Management Works

While the number of health problems related to stress might be alarming, don't despair. Studies suggest that [stress management](#) techniques will not only make you feel better, but they might have concrete health benefits.

For instance, one study of [heart attack](#) survivors found that taking a stress management class slashed their risks of a second cardiac event by 74%. There's even some evidence that stress management will improve immunity.

Still, many of us remain skeptical about stress management. After all, our lives are just plain stressful. We have busy jobs, families to raise, tight finances, and no time to spare. Stress management might seem like a nice idea, but completely impossible.

It's true that you might not be able to remove all the stressful things from your life. But you can change how you respond to them, Winner says. That's what stress management is all about. Learning some basic [stress relief](#) techniques isn't difficult, either.

4 Ways to Fight Back Against Stress -- and Improve Your Health

The next time you feel stressed, here are four stress relief tips you can try.

1. **Breathe deeply.** Just a few minutes of deep breathing can calm you and tame the physiologic stress response, Winner says. While building in a specific time to relax each day is a good idea, one advantage to deep breathing for stress relief is that you can do it anywhere -- at your desk or in your (parked) car, for instance. Winner recommends that as you breathe out, you relax a specific muscle group. Start with the muscles in your jaw. On the next breath out, relax your shoulders. Move through the different areas of your body until you're feeling calm.
2. **Focus on the moment.** When you're stressed, you're probably living in the future or the past. You're worried about what to do next or regretful about something you've already done. To get some stress relief, instead try focusing on what you're doing right now. "You can calm yourself by bringing yourself back to the present moment," says Winner. "If you're walking, feel the sensation of your legs moving. If you're eating, focus on the taste and the sensation of the food."
3. **Reframe the situation.** So you're already running late and then find yourself stuck in terrible traffic. Getting worked up is a natural reaction, but it won't help you at all. Rather than swearing and pounding the steering wheel, get a different perspective. Look at that time as an opportunity -- a few minutes to yourself where you don't have any other obligations.
4. **Keep your problems in perspective.** It might seem Pollyannaish, but the next time you're feeling stressed out, think about the things for which you're grateful. "We get stressed when we focus so much on a specific problem that we lose perspective," says Winner. "You need to remind yourself of the basic ways in which you're lucky -- that

you have family and friends, that you can see, that you can walk." It can be a surprisingly effective method for stress relief.

While these stress management techniques can help in the moment, you can also make a few larger changes to your way of life. Regular exercise is key to long-term stress management, says Winner. People who [exercise](#) tend to have better moods and more energy than people who don't. What's more, regular exercise will independently lower your risks for many health problems.

Learning some relaxation techniques, meditation, or [yoga](#) will help with stress management, too. Getting good at any of these approaches will take a little time and practice, but the payoff -- for your short-term mood and long-term health -- could be substantial.

Stress Management Techniques

There is no doubt about it; the world is a difficult place to live. Making a living, raising a family, and negotiating relationships are difficult but necessary tasks for all people - and these sources of stress are just the normal everyday ones. Abuse, violence, chaos, disease, misfortune and other 'out of the ordinary' sorts of situations can and do add additional layers of stress to our lives. It's no wonder that many people become tense, burned out and looking for means of escape.

Though life *is* often unavoidably difficult, there *are* effective ways to manage how much we become affected by stress. We'll explore some stress management methods in this article, but first, we'll start by defining what stress is.

The Nature Of Stress

When we talk about stress, really we are often talking about how stress affects us in body mind and spirit. Stress can be defined then as the reaction we have to difficult, demanding or challenging events. Our bodies and minds have been designed with a 'fight or flight' reflex that

helps to orient and become alert when we are faced with challenging or dangerous events. Our attention gets narrowed towards such events, and our brain instructs our bodies to prepare for possible physical action such as confronting the event physically (e.g., 'fight') or running away from the source of the danger (e.g., 'flight'). Muscular tension, increased heart rate, and higher concentrations of blood sugars and hormones are involved in this process.

Our body's stress response is really designed for the people we once were; less sophisticated hunter-gatherer type tribes people whose major sources of stress are where the next meal will come from and how to avoid predators. The stressors faced by most of us today are less physical and concrete than those faced by our ancestors; We worry instead about the threat of being laid off from work, of how to keep our children from becoming drug addicts, and about what to do if terrorists attack. Where our ancestors could deal with their stress reactions through direct physical activity (e.g., hunting for food, running away from an attacker), our own threats are less tangible and larger-scale and we often are unable to find anyone to attack or run away from. Even when we can, for example, attack someone as a way of discharging our tension, we often don't because we don't want to be sued or arrested for breaking the law. Because we are often unable to discharge our activation we end up experiencing this activated physical and mental state a lot of the time so that it ceases to be just occasional 'acute stress' and becomes instead 'chronic stress'.

Stressful Events
Breakup of intimate romantic relationships, friendships
Death of a family member or friend
Economic hardships

Racism and Discrimination
Poor Health
Assaults on physical safety
Birth or Adoption
Relationship transitions (marriage, moving away from home)
Promotion or Demotion at work

The table above lists a number of serious stressful events that people experience, often more than one at a time. It's important to note that a given event doesn't have to be negative in tone to be stressful; Any significantly challenging event, even positive ones like weddings, can create stress.

Where acute stress is healthy and very important to our well being, chronic stress is unhealthy. A great number of diseases (physical and mental both) are either brought on in part or made worse by people being chronically stressed out. Chronic stress also makes it more difficult for us to handle our relationships well.

Coping With Stress

People try many ways, both positive and negative, to lessen their stress levels. Dysfunctional negative and unhealthy methods of coping include:

- Addictions (alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, etc.)
- Smoking
- Over-eating
- Being Perfectionistic

These methods are considered dysfunctional because, over time, they end up making the situation worse for people rather than making it better. Drinking as a means of stress reduction works in the short term because alcohol is a powerful muscle and attention relaxer. Repeated use of alcohol ends up causing 'tolerance' which means that people have to drink more and more to get the same effect. The end result is addiction to alcohol (a very serious health and social risk) which only adds stress to the drinker's life.

There are many positive and 'functional' methods of coping with stress:

- Relaxation/Meditation - Cultivating interior stillness and calmness through meditation and relaxation techniques such as massage therapy, and progressive muscle relaxation.
- Exercise - Regular physical exertion of any intensity (a gentle 30 minute walk, a Yoga or Pilates class, an hour long strenuous free-weight workout, etc.) helps discharge muscle tension and build strength, resilience and energy.
- Healthy Diet - Eating healthy whole foods and avoiding sugary and fattening treats helps keep the body's internal rhythms more balanced.
- Socialization And Supportive Conversation - Many people are able to relax and to feel part of something larger than themselves by sharing their concerns with trusted others. This can take the form of talking with friends and family, psychotherapy or counseling, or prayer.
- Assertive Communication - Some stress is caused by not getting what you want from other people. Asking for what you want in a direct but polite way is the best method for getting what you want, and thereby reducing stress.

- Time Management - Some stress is caused by poor organization. Learning how to manage appointments, to say 'no' to requests you can't get done, to organize records, and to use memory enhancement tools (like alarm clocks and 'palm pilots') can make a big difference.
- Asking For Assistance - Whatever it is that you are dealing with right now, other people have dealt with it before. Seeking out their counsel when you don't know what to do is often a good way to avoid reinventing the wheel.

The big problem with healthy coping strategies is that they often don't make one feel better immediately; they only really work after one makes a commitment to practicing them repeatedly over time. It takes some faith and a certain amount of discipline to make it possible for these strategies to work.

Good General Advice For Managing Stress:

"Make the time to practice one or more healthy coping strategies on a regular basis. You won't have time to fit it in at first but do it anyway. Over time your practice will yield results and you'll find you want to make the time to continue your practice."

yoga

Yoga is a mind and body practice with a 5,000-year history in ancient Indian philosophy. Various styles of yoga combine physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation.

In more recent years, it has become popular as a form of physical exercise based upon poses that promote improved control of the mind and body and enhance well-being.

There are several different types of yoga and many disciplines within the practice. This article explores the history, philosophy, and various branches of yoga.

What is yoga?

In the modern world, the South Asian art of yoga has expanded to all corners of the globe. While it is now a popular form of exercise and meditation, this has not always been the case.

History

Share on PinterestYoga has a long history of helping people achieve mental and physical balance.

There is no written record of the inventor of yoga.

Male yoga practitioners are known as yogis, and female yoga practitioners are called yoginis. Both practiced and taught yoga long before any written account of yoga came into existence.

Over the next five millennia, yogis passed the discipline down to their students, and many different schools of yoga developed as the practice expanded its global reach and popularity.

The “Yoga Sutra,” a 2,000-year-old treatise on yogic philosophy by the Indian sage Patanjali, is a guidebook on how to master the mind, control the emotions, and grow spiritually. The Yoga Sutra is the earliest written record of yoga and one of the oldest texts in existence and provides the framework for all modern yoga.

Yoga is well known for its postures and poses, but they were not a key part of original yoga traditions in India. Fitness was not a primary goal. Practitioners and followers of yogic tradition focused instead on other practices, such as expanding spiritual energy using breathing methods and mental focus.

The tradition began to gain popularity in the West at the end of the 19th century. An explosion of interest in postural yoga occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, first in India and later in the West.

Philosophy

To convey its spiritual message and guide sessions, yoga often uses the imagery of a tree with roots, a trunk, branches, blossoms, and fruits. Each “branch” of yoga represents a different focus and set of characteristics.

The six branches are:

- **Hatha yoga:** This is the physical and mental branch designed to prime the body and mind.
- **Raja yoga:** This branch involves meditation and strict adherence to a series of disciplinary steps known as the “eight limbs” of yoga.
- **Karma yoga:** This is a path of service that aims to create a future free from negativity and selfishness.
- **Bhakti yoga:** This aims to establish the path of devotion, a positive way to channel emotions and cultivate acceptance and tolerance.

- **Jnana yoga:** This branch of yoga is about wisdom, the path of the scholar, and developing the intellect through study.
- **Tantra yoga:** This is the pathway of ritual, ceremony, or consummation of a relationship.

Approaching yoga with a specific goal in mind can help a person decide which branch to follow.

Chakras

The word “chakra” literally means spinning wheel.

Yoga maintains that chakras are center points of energy, thoughts, feelings, and the physical body. According to yogic teachers, chakras determine the way people experience reality through emotional reactions, desires or aversions, levels of confidence or fear, and even physical symptoms and effects.

When energy becomes blocked in a chakra, it is said to trigger physical, mental, or emotional imbalances that manifest in symptoms, such as [anxiety](#), lethargy, or poor digestion.

Asanas are the many physical positions in Hatha yoga. People who practice yoga use asanas to free energy and stimulate an imbalanced chakra.

There are seven major chakras, each with their own focus:

- **Sahasrara:** The “thousand-petaled” or “crown” chakra represents the state of pure consciousness. This chakra is located at the crown of the head, and the color white or violet represents it. Sahasrara involves matters of inner wisdom and physical death.

- **Ajna:** The “command” or “third-eye chakra” is a meeting point between two important energetic streams in the body. Ajna corresponds to the colors violet, indigo, or deep blue, though traditional yoga practitioners describe it as white. The ajna chakra relates to the pituitary gland, which drives growth and development.
- **Vishuddha:** The color red or blue represents the “especially pure” or “throat” chakra. Practitioners consider this chakra to be the home of speech, hearing, and metabolism.
- **Anahata:** The “unstruck” or “heart” chakra relates to the colors green and pink. Key issues involving anahata include complex emotions, compassion, tenderness, unconditional love, equilibrium, rejection, and wellbeing.
- **Manipura:** Yellow represents the “jewel city” or “navel” chakra. Practitioners connect this chakra with the digestive system, as well as personal power, fear, anxiety, developing opinions, and tendencies towards an introverted personality.
- **Svadhishthana:** Practitioners claim that the “one’s own base” or “pelvic” chakra is the home of the reproductive organs, the genitourinary system, and the adrenal gland.
- **Muladhara:** The “root support” or “root chakra” is at the base of the spine in the coccygeal region. It is said to contain our natural urges relating to food, sleep, sex, and survival, as well as the source of avoidance and fear.

Types

Share on PinterestModern yoga has a range of styles to suit everyone, whatever the desired outcome.

Modern yoga has evolved with a focus on exercise, strength, flexibility, and breathing. It can help boost physical and mental well-being.

There are many styles of yoga, and no style is more authentic or superior to another. The key is to choose a class appropriate for your fitness level.

Types and styles of yoga may include:

Ashtanga yoga: This type of yoga uses ancient yoga teachings. However, it became popular during the 1970s. Ashtanga applies six established sequences of postures that rapidly link every movement to breath.

Bikram yoga: Also known as “hot” yoga, Bikram occurs in artificially heated rooms at temperatures of nearly 105 degrees and 40 percent humidity. It consists of 26 poses and a sequence of two breathing exercises.

Hatha yoga: This is a generic term for any type of yoga that teaches physical postures. “Hatha” classes usually serve as a gentle introduction to the basic yoga postures.

Iyengar yoga: This type focuses on finding the correct alignment in each pose using a range of props, such as blocks, blankets, straps, chairs, and bolsters.

Jivamukti yoga: Jivamukti means “liberation while living.” This type emerged in 1984 and incorporates spiritual teachings and practices that focus on the fast-paced flow between poses rather than the poses themselves.

This focus is called vinyasa. Each class has a theme, which is explored through yoga scripture, chanting, meditation, asana, pranayama, and music. Jivamukti yoga can be physically intense.

Kripalu yoga: This type teaches practitioners to know, accept, and learn from the body. A student of Kripalu learns to find their own level of practice by looking inward. The classes usually begin with breathing exercises and gentle stretches, followed by a series of individual poses and final relaxation.

Kundalini yoga: Kundalini means “coiled, like a snake.” Kundalini yoga is a system of meditation that aims to release pent-up energy.

A class typically begins with chanting and ends with singing. In between, it features asana, pranayama, and meditation customized to create a specific outcome.

Power yoga: In the late 1980s, practitioners developed this active and athletic type of yoga, based on the traditional ashtanga system.

Sivananda: This is a system based on a five-point philosophy. This philosophy maintains that proper breathing, relaxation, diet, exercise, and positive thinking work together to form a healthy yogic lifestyle. Typically uses the same 12 basic asanas, bookended by sun salutations and savasana poses.

Viniyoga: Viniyoga can adapt to any person, regardless of physical ability. Viniyoga teachers require in-depth training and tend to be experts on [anatomy](#) and yoga therapy.

Yin: This is a quiet, meditative yoga practice, also called taoist yoga. Yin yoga allows the release of tension in key joints, including:

- the ankles
- knees
- hips
- the whole back
- neck
- shoulders

Yin poses are passive, meaning that gravity shoulders most of the force and effort.

Prenatal yoga: Prenatal yoga uses postures that practitioners have designed for people who are pregnant. It can support people in getting back into shape after pregnancy as well as supporting health during pregnancy.

Restorative yoga: This is a relaxing method of yoga. A person spends a restorative yoga class in four or five simple poses, using props like blankets and bolsters to sink into deep relaxation without exerting any effort in holding the pose.

MEDICAL NEWS TODAY NEWSLETTER

Yoga is low-impact and safe for people when a well-trained instructor is guiding the practice.

Injury due to yoga is an infrequent barrier to continued practice, and severe injury due to yoga is rare. However, consider [a few factors](#)^{Trusted Source} before starting.

Anyone who is pregnant or who has an on-going medical condition, such as [high blood pressure](#), [glaucoma](#), or [sciatica](#), should talk to their healthcare practitioner before practicing yoga. They may need to alter or avoid some yoga poses.

Beginners should avoid extreme poses and difficult techniques, such as headstand, lotus position, and forceful breathing.

When using yoga to manage a condition, do not replace conventional medical care with yoga or postpone seeing a healthcare provider about pain or any other medical problem.

Takeaway

Yoga is a five-millennia-old practice that has changed over time. Modern yoga focuses on stretches and poses designed to stimulate inner peace and physical energy.

Ancient yoga was less about fitness and more about mental focus and expanding spiritual energy. The Yoga Sutra, now considered to be the definitive guidebook to practicing yoga, came into the practice 2000 years ago.

There are many different types of yoga depending on what people want from it and a person's current level of physical fitness. However, some people choose to replace conventional treatment for conditions with yoga and this can prevent a person from receiving the necessary care.

People with certain conditions, such as sciatica, should approach yoga slowly and with caution.

Yoga can help support a balanced, active lifestyle.

What is the safest way to start yoga if I have never done it before?

Discuss with your healthcare provider and your yoga instructor the best way to start practicing yoga. In most cases, a “Yoga for Beginners” class will offer a series of low-intensity positions that will allow you to assess your flexibility and endurance.

How well you tolerate this introductory class can guide what other yoga practices you can investigate. Remember, the goal of modern yoga is to focus on your health, so do what feels most appropriate for your fitness level.

Research has produced mixed results but appears to show that tai chi [can improve](#) [Trusted Source](#) balance control, fitness, and flexibility. The activity may also reduce the risk of falls in older people.

Tai chi also appears to [reduce pain](#) and the symptoms of [depression](#) [Trusted Source](#) in some cases.

This martial art is an ancient Chinese tradition that has evolved over centuries. Some people use tai chi to help alleviate [stress](#) and [anxiety](#). Others claim it promotes serenity and inner peace.

People generally regard it as [safe](#) for individuals of all ages as it does not put too much stress on the muscles and joints.

This article explores the documented evidence for the benefits of tai chi.

Benefits

Various research suggests tai chi offers a range of benefits for people with and without chronic conditions. These benefits include:

- improved balance
- pain management
- and brain function
- [improved sleep](#) Trusted Source quality
- [enhanced immune system](#) Trusted Source

Fall reduction

Tai chi showed some potential benefits for helping prevent trips and falls in older adults across a range of studies.

A [2012 review](#) looked at 159 randomized controlled trials of various types of practices to prevent falls in older adults.

The studies involved more than 79,193 people, with the authors concluding that tai chi could reduce the risk of falling.

A [2015 systematic review](#)^{Trusted Source} of seven trials involving 544 tai chi chuan practitioners concluded it helped improve balance control and flexibility.

Meanwhile, a [2014 review](#)^{Trusted Source} found that exercises, including tai chi, might have reduced the fear of falling among older adults in a retirement community immediately after a workout. However, the review did not reach any conclusions about tai chi reducing the frequency of falls.

One [2012 trial](#)^{Trusted Source} of 195 older adults with [Parkinson's disease](#) showed that tai chi helped treat balance issues with more success than resistance training or regular stretching.

Another article notes that the activity is a [successful exercise intervention](#)^{Trusted Source} for factors related to falls in older people.

The evidence from these studies suggests that tai chi might help support many aspects of balance and posture.

To discover more evidence-based information and resources for healthy aging, visit [our dedicated hub](#).

Chronic pain

Several small studies suggest that tai chi can significantly impact the chronic pain that people experience with specific conditions, such as [osteoarthritis](#) of the knee and [fibromyalgia](#).

A [2013 meta-analysis](#)^{Trusted Source} of seven different trials seemed to demonstrate that a 12-week course of tai chi could improve the stiffness and pain symptoms of knee osteoarthritis and improve physical function.

However, the review authors recommended further, larger-scale trials to support their conclusions, as the studies they examined had flaws and potential biases.

A [2015 review](#) of 54 studies involving 3,913 participants provided moderate-quality evidence that tai chi could help improve physical function in those with knee osteoarthritis. While tai chi only formed the basis of five of the studies, the evidence that exercise helped provide short-term relief for knee osteoarthritis was strong.

Tai chi also seems to have some evidence supporting its use to help manage fibromyalgia.

A [2010 trial](#)^{Trusted Source} showed tai chi to be better than wellness education and stretching for regularizing sleep patterns and treating symptoms of pain and [fatigue](#) in people with fibromyalgia.

A [2012 study](#)^{Trusted Source} of 101 people suggested that combining tai chi with mindfulness training could improve fibromyalgia symptoms and functional difficulties.

Chronic heart failure

Some practitioners of tai chi praise it as an effective management tool for people with chronic [heart failure](#). However, current evidence does not support this conclusion. Any studies showing an improvement indicate that the findings were insignificant.

A [2015 systematic review](#)[Trusted Source](#) of 20 studies showed tai chi as beneficial for multiple areas of cardiovascular health, such as [blood pressure](#) and heart rate. However, the quality of the studies was low, and the researchers drew no definitive conclusions.

A [2014 review](#) of 13 small trials also showed inconclusive evidence to support the activity as a preventative measure against cardiovascular disease.

However, the [results of one trial](#)[Trusted Source](#), which followed people after a recent [heart attack](#), demonstrated that tai chi significantly improved maximum oxygen capacity.

Mental health and cognitive function

Tai chi is a tranquil, fluid martial art that has associations with mindfulness and psychological well-being.

However, the evidence is thin on the ground for the [mental health](#) benefits of the activity. Some studies suggest a link, but a large [2010 meta-analysis](#)[Trusted Source](#) of 40 studies failed to provide definitive conclusions.

Research looking at the effect of tai chi on cognitive function yielded more promising results.

A systematic [review and meta-analysis from 2014](#)[Trusted Source](#) involved 2,553 adults aged 60 years and over with and without cognitive impairments. The results were significant in showing beneficial effects on cognitive function. The studies also demonstrated small but significant benefits for people who were cognitively impaired.

A [2015 review](#)[Trusted Source](#) of nine studies involving 632 healthy adults showed the potential benefits of tai chi for cognitive ability. It advocated further large-scale studies to confirm the potential benefits of tai chi.

While tai chi is a gentle, low-impact activity, people should seek medical advice before starting any form of exercise. This especially applies to those who are:

- older
- pregnant
- experiencing [back pain](#) or [osteoporosis](#)

Types

There are five different styles of tai chi, dating from different periods in history. Each has a unique set of methods and principles, lineage, and date of origin.

[They are:](#)

- Chen style, which began sometime between 1528 and 1587
- Yang style, which began sometime between 1799 and 1872

- Wu or Wu Hao style, which began sometime between 1812 and 1880
- Wu style, which began sometime between 1870 and 1942
- Sun style, which began sometime between 1861 and 1932

Some of these forms of tai chi lean towards health, while others stress competition or self-defense.

People considering a tai chi course should speak to an experienced instructor about which style they practice and whether it will offer the expected benefits.

History

The true origins of tai chi remain a mystery, but the concepts are rooted in Chinese history, Taoism, and Confucianism.

Zhang Sanfeng, a 12th-century Taoist monk, is believed to be the founder of tai chi. Some stories claim that Zhang Sanfeng left his monastery to become a hermit, after which he created a form of fighting based on softness.

Summary

Tai chi is a low-impact, noncompetitive martial art that is known for its potential health benefits.

Researchers have conducted many studies on this martial art to understand its health benefits.

Some studies show tai chi can improve brain function, lower stress and depression, and reduce chronic pain.

However, scientists must conduct further studies to confirm its benefits.

People who wish to start practicing tai chi should consult their doctor first if possible.