

International Day of Yoga: Promoting Global Health and Well-being through Ancient Indian Wisdom

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Abstract

The International Day of Yoga is celebrated on 21st June every year, this day is one of the most successful and grand examples of cultural diplomacy and global health promotion in the twenty first century. Yoga started in ancient India but has spread throughout the world as a practice that has a significant impact on physical, mental, emotional and social health. In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly has declared 21st June as International Day of Yoga, celebrating yoga contribution to human health and sustainable lifestyles at holistic level. This article explores the history of yoga, the importance of the International Day of Yoga and how it contributes to the promotion of health and well-being around the world. The study explores the integrative approach of yoga in relation to modern challenges of health such as stress, non-communicable diseases, mental health disorders, and on the basis of the philosophical traditions, contemporary health research and international policy frameworks. The article also delves into the role of yoga in cultural diplomacy and sustainable development.

Keywords: yoga, international day of yoga, global health, well-being, ancient indian wisdom, cultural diplomacy, sustainable development

Introduction

Science, technology and medicine have advanced at an unprecedented pace in the twenty first century. However, there are still many health problems that are confronting humanity such as stress related problems, mental health issues, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and lifestyle related diseases. As the concerns have grown, holistic methods of health have become more and more prevalent. Of these, yoga has become one of the most popular and practiced systems of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Yoga originated in India thousands of years ago and is deeply rooted in Indian philosophical traditions. The Sanskrit word *Yoga* derives from the root *Yuj*, meaning "to unite" or "to join," signifying the union of body, mind, and spirit. According to the United Nations, yoga represents "an invaluable gift from India's ancient tradition" and embodies "unity of mind and body, thought and action." ([United Nations](#)) Recognizing its universal appeal and contribution to health, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 69/131 on 11th December 2014, proclaiming 21st June as the International Day of Yoga. The resolution was supported by a record 175 member states and acknowledged that yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being. ([Wikisource](#))

This article delves into the relevance of the “International Day of Yoga”, and how the ancient wisdom of India plays a role in today's society, to improve health and wellbeing for the world.

Historical Foundations of Yoga

The roots of yoga go back to the ancient civilizations of the Indian subcontinent. The yoga practices are mentioned in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali is one of these texts that has the most systematic philosophical approach for yoga.

Patanjali defines yoga as:

"Yogaḥ citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ"

commonly translated as "Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind" (Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*, I.2).

This definition highlights yoga as a discipline aimed at achieving mental clarity, self-realization, and inner peace. Traditionally, yoga encompasses ethical principles (*Yama* and *Niyama*), physical postures (*Asana*), breath regulation (*Pranayama*), concentration (*Dharana*), meditation (*Dhyana*), and spiritual liberation (*Samadhi*).

The ancient Indian sages believed that health was not just the absence of disease, but also a balance of the three – body, mind and consciousness. This notion of a holistic understanding is very pertinent to contemporary public health discussions.

International Day of Yoga: Genesis and Global Recognition

The proposal for an International Day of Yoga was first presented by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2014. He described yoga as:

"An invaluable gift from our ancient tradition." ([United Nations](#))

Subsequently, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 69/131 on 11 December 2014.

The resolution explicitly recognized that:

"Yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being." ([Wikisource](#))

The first International Day of Yoga was celebrated globally on 21st June 2015. Since then, millions of people across countries, cultures, religions, and age groups have participated in yoga events, demonstrating its universal appeal. The observance seeks to raise awareness regarding the numerous benefits of yoga and encourage healthier lifestyles worldwide. ([United Nations](#))

Yoga and Physical Health

The greatest benefit from yoga is the emphasis on physical well-being. Research has shown that people who practice yoga regularly experience benefits in increased flexibility, strength in muscles, better balance, breathing capacity, and the health of the cardiovascular system.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes yoga as a valuable form of physical activity that can contribute to lifelong health and well-being. Yoga assists in preventing and managing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disorders. ([World Health Organization](#))

Recent medical observations suggest that even twenty minutes of daily yoga practice can enhance flexibility, improve posture, strengthen muscles, regulate breathing, and promote better sleep. Regular practice also contributes to disease prevention and long-term health maintenance. ([The Times of India](#))

Furthermore, emerging research indicates that yoga may support healthy ageing. The 2026 theme of the International Day of Yoga, "Yoga for Healthy Ageing," highlights yoga's potential role in maintaining mobility, balance, independence, and cognitive well-being among older adults. ([United Nations](#))

Yoga and Mental Well-being

Mental health is one of the most pressing challenges of the world. It is estimated that millions of people across the world suffer from anxiety, depression, stress and burn out. Yoga provides a useful resource in this regard for improving mental health.

Yoga integrates physical movement with mindful breathing and meditation. This combination helps regulate stress responses, improve emotional resilience, and cultivate mindfulness. WHO acknowledges yoga's role in reducing stress and promoting mental and emotional well-being. ([World Health Organization](#))

Modern neuroscience suggests that meditation and breathing exercises can positively influence brain function, emotional regulation, and cognitive performance. Recent findings also indicate that yoga may contribute to slowing cognitive decline among older adults, thereby supporting healthy ageing. ([The Times of India](#))

In today's fast-paced societies that are increasingly technologically driven and urbanized, the psychological advantages of yoga are especially relevant.

Yoga as Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Yoga is not only a health aid, but also a great tool for cultural diplomacy. Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power" emphasizes the ability of nations to influence others through culture, values, and ideas rather than coercion. Yoga has been accepted in the world and it showcases the successful application of India's cultural heritage as soft power. International Day of Yoga is a day where people of different cultural and religious backgrounds come together and help in the process of intercultural dialogue and understanding. As the United Nations observes, yoga symbolizes harmony between humanity and nature and encourages a holistic approach to life. ([United Nations](#))

The global involvement in yoga events underscores the universal nature of Indian philosophies and the impact of yoga on the well-being of the world.

Yoga and Sustainable Development

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on health, well-being, quality education, gender equality and sustainable communities. Yoga has direct and indirect impacts on multiple SDGs.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

Yoga fosters healthy lifestyles, mental endurance and physical activity to achieve preventive health.

SDG 4: Quality Education

Yoga based education aids in the holistic learning, concentration, emotional intelligence and character development of students.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Community yoga programs foster social cohesion and encourage healthier urban living.

SDG 13: Climate Action

The traditional yogic philosophy is harmony between humans and nature, which promotes responsible environmental practices. In this way, Yoga is not only about the health of individuals but also about the

health of society and the environment.

Challenges and Criticisms

While this is becoming a popular method, there are still a number of problems. Firstly, commercialization has commercialized yoga, sometimes to the detriment of its philosophy. Secondly, there is now a discussion on cultural appropriation concerning the portrayal and interpretation of yoga outside India. Third, the standardization and teacher quality issues raise the need for evidence-based practice and professional training. But, continued scientific investigation is needed to explore how yoga works in other people and under various health conditions. It has been found to be effective and there is much evidence to support this but further multi-disciplinary research needs to be undertaken.

Conclusion

The International Day of Yoga shows how old wisdom and today's health issues come together. In India yoga started as a way to think and grow spiritually. It helps with health. Body, mind, emotions and spirit. The United Nations passed a resolution, number 69/131 that says yoga is for everyone and helps people be well. The International Day of Yoga is about yoga. Yoga is good, for beings. With the rising health demands of modern societies, yoga is available, affordable, and sustainable in terms of its practice to achieve wellness. This is an indicator that the ancient knowledge system of India continues to provide insights to deal with today's concerns, as yoga is becoming an accepted practice all over the world. International Day of Yoga is not just a celebration of a cultural heritage but also a vision of health and wellness for the world based on harmony, balance, and holistic living.

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