

Surya Namaskar or 'Sun salutation': A boon in disguise for women

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Abstract

There will be no life on earth, without the sun. Surya Namaskar or 'Sun Salutation' is a very ancient technique of paying respect or expressing gratitude to the sun that is the source of all forms of life on the planet. Symbolically, the sun becomes our source of energy as well. About the history of this technique, it has been said by the ancient rishis of India that the different parts of the body are governed by different devas (divine impulses or divine light). The solar plexus (located behind the navel, which is the central point of the human body), also known as the second brain, is said to be connected to the sun. This is the main reason why the ancient rishis recommended the practice of Surya Namaskar, because the regular practice of this technique enhances the solar plexus, which increases one's creativity and intuitive abilities. It is also important to understand the science behind this very ancient technique, because a deeper understanding will bring forth the right outlook and approach towards this very sacred and powerful yogic technique. All our emotions get stored in the solar plexus, and it is also the point from where one's gut feelings arise. The size of the solar plexus is said to like the size of a small gooseberry. However, for those who do yoga, it becomes much bigger - almost three to four times bigger than the normal size. The more expanded your solar plexus, the greater is your mental stability and your intuition. This could be your mantra to stay fit, happy and peaceful. A mantra whose effect lasts through the day.

Keywords: Surya Namaskar, solar plexus, mental stability, intuition, mental stability, yogic technique

Introduction

In vedic astrology, the Sun is the principal of light, love and life. It is the most important factor for determining the spiritual life and potential of an individual. It represents the soul, the body – whose will is behind our fate. It is also the mind or the mental principal on a lower level as reason, clarity and illumination. Surya Namaskar, which is known as “Sun Salutation” in English, is essentially about building a dimension within you where your physical cycles are in sync with the sun's cycles, which run at about twelve-and-a-quarter years.

Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to find the effect of Surya Namaskar on women who regularly practice it over those who do not practice it and also to find whether the practitioners are healthier and their stress dispositions than other women.

Objectives of the Study

To determine the effect of Surya Namaskar on overall health, regular menstrual cycle and endurance of women.

To compare the effect of Surya Namaskar on women who do Surya Namaskar and those who do not.

Hypothesis

Surya Namaskar training would offer higher benefits in improving physical fitness and improve immunity and reduce stress levels in women. Women performing Surya Namaskar will be physically, mentally and socially fit.

Sample

500 women in the age group of 25-45 were selected, 250 were Surya Namaskar performers while 250 were non-performers. The women were assessed before and after the Surya

Namaskar programme. The women were taught the 12 different poses of Surya Namaskar.

Method

In the present research to get the desired result the Adjustment Inventory for School Students by K. P. Sinha and R. P. Singh (1971) was used.

Salient Features of Surya Namaskar

The Surya Namaskar, is a set of 12 powerful yoga asanas, providing a good cardiovascular exercise. These alternating backward and forward bending postures flex and stretch the spinal column through their maximum range giving a profound stretch to the whole body. The postures are a good way to keep the body in shape and the mind calm and healthy. The best time to do Surya Namaskar is early morning on an empty stomach. Each Sun Salutation round consists of two sets. These 12 yoga poses complete one set of Surya Namaskar. To complete the second half, you need to repeat the same sequence of postures, only moving the left leg instead of the right. Besides good health, Surya Namaskar provides an opportunity to express gratitude to the sun for sustaining life on this planet. It is not by accident but by intent that it has been structured with twelve postures or twelve asanas in it. If your system is in a certain level of vibrancy and readiness, and in a good state of receptivity, then naturally your cycle will be in sync with the solar cycle.

Mantras refer to a combination of syllables, sounds, or phrases, which can be chanted or sung. In case of Sun Salutation, they are sung in praise of the Sun. Chanting mantras extends Sun Salutation benefits; it not only has subtle but also penetrating effects on both mind and body. There are 12 mantras which praise different qualities of Sun, adding a spiritual touch to the entire practice. One must remember to chant them with

gratefulness. Each sun salutation mantra has a specific meaning. The sun salutation mantras can be chanted verbally or in your mind. Surya Namaskar also provides an opportunity to express gratitude to the sun for sustaining life on this planet, besides good health.

12 Poses (Asanas) Of Surya Namaskar

1) Pranamasana (Prayer pose) om mitrāya namaḥ: Stand at the edge of your mat, keep your feet together and balance your weight equally on both the feet. Expand your chest and relax your shoulders. As you breathe in, lift both arms up from the sides and as you exhale, bring your palms together in front of the chest in prayer position.

2) Hastauttanasana (Raised Arms pose) om ravaye namaḥ: Breathe in, lift the arms up and back, keeping the biceps close to the ears. In this pose, the effort is to stretch the whole body up from the heels to the tips of the fingers

3) Hasta Padasana (Hand to Foot pose) om sūryāya namaḥ: Breathe out; bend forward from the waist, keeping the spine erect. As you exhale completely, bring the hands down to the floor, beside the feet.

4) Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian pose) om bhānave namaḥ: Breathing in, push your right leg back, as far back as possible. Bring the right knee to the floor and look up.

5) Dandasana (Stick pose) om khagāya namaḥ: As you breathe in, take the left leg back and bring the whole body in a straight line.

6) Ashtanga Namaskara (Salute with Eight Parts or Points) om pūṣṇe namaḥ: Bring your knees down to the floor gently and exhale. Take the hips back slightly, slide forward, rest your chest and chin on the floor. Raise your posterior a little bit. The two hands, two feet, two knees, chest and chin (eight parts of the body touch the floor).

7) Bhujangasana (Cobra pose) om hiraṇya garbhāya namaḥ: Slide forward and raise the chest up into the Cobra posture. Keep your elbows bent in this pose, the shoulders away from the ears. Look up.

8) Parvatasana (Mountain pose) om marīcaye namaḥ: Breathe out, lift the hips and the tail bone up, chest downwards in an 'inverted V' posture.

9) Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian pose) om ādityāya namaḥ: Breathe in, bring the right foot forward in between the two hands, left knee down to the floor, press the hips down and look up.

10) Hasta Padasana (Hand to Foot pose) om savitre namaḥ: Breathing out, bring the left foot forward. Keep the palms on the floor. You may bend the knees, if necessary.

11) Hastauttanasana (Raised Arms pose) om arkāya namaḥ: Breathe in, roll the spine up, hands go up and bend backwards a little bit, pushing the hips slightly outward.

12) Tadasana om bhāskarāya namaḥ: As you exhale, first straighten the body, and then bring the arms down. Relax in this position; observe the sensations in your body.

Shavasana is practiced to take rest after Surya Namaskar. Add the attitude of gratitude to your Sun Salutation practice with sun salutation mantras. Through Surya Namaskar, you can honor not only the Sun but also the whole Nature. Surya Namaskara is performed facing in the direction of the rising (east) or setting (west) sun. According to the scriptures one who performs the Surya Namaskaras daily does not get poor in a thousand births. There are 5 ways in which breathing should be done during Surya Namaskar.

Benefits of Surya Namaskar

1. Improves Blood Circulation of the Body: The lungs are constantly ventilated and the blood remains oxygenated, Due to the active process of inhalation and exhalation. It's a great way of detoxicating your body and getting rid of excess carbon dioxide and other toxic gases.

2. Weight loss: It is a great cardiovascular workout that stretches the abdominal muscles while simultaneously helping you reduce excess weight around your stomach, when done at a fast pace. It also results in toning your arms, abs and giving great flexibility to your spine. It also helps to strengthen your entire skeletal system including your ligaments.

3. Promotes a Regular Menstrual Cycle: If you're facing the problem of an irregular menstrual cycle, these asanas will help you suppress this irregularity and if practiced daily, it ensures an easy childbirth.

4. Benefits your Skin and Hair: By incorporating it in your routine it will keep you youthful and healthy even in old age. It improves your blood circulation that aids in bringing back the glow on your face; preventing the onset of wrinkles, making your skin look ageless and radiant. It also prevents hair loss and the ageing of hair.

5. Anti-anxiety and Calming Properties: Surya Namaskar helps to improve memory and the nervous system. It stabilizes the activity of the endocrine and thyroid glands, hence reducing anxiety and inducing the sensation of complete calmness and tranquility.

6. Tones up the digestive system: Due to the alternate stretching and compression of abdominal organs, it activates digestion and gets rid of constipation and dyspepsia.

7. Strengthens abdominal muscles.

8. Thoroughly ventilates the lungs, and oxygenates the blood.

9. Promotes sleep and calms anxiety.

10. Refreshes the skin. Prevents Skin disorders.

11. In women, stimulates the breasts to help firmness normally. Restores any lost elasticity, through stimulation of glands and the strengthening of pectoral muscles.

12. Prevents loss of hair and graying.

13. Helps reduce fat.

14. Reduces abnormal prominence of the Adam's apple.

15. Eliminates unpleasant smells from the body.

16. Lends grace and ease of movements to the body.

17. Revives and maintains the spirit of youthfulness.

- 18. Broadens chest and beautifies arms.
- 19. Makes the spine and waist flexible.
- 20. Produces health, strength, efficiency and longevity.

How respiration (Breathing) should be done during a Surya Namaskar

- 1. Purak – Taking in a long breath.
- 2. Rechak – Leaving out a long breath.
- 3. Kumbhak –Holding the breath.
- 4. Aantar Kumbhak – Holding the breath after breathing in.
- 5. Bahir Kumbhak – Holding the breath after breathing out.

How Women Can Be Benefitted By Surya Namaskar:

The art of exercise known as yoga was developed in ancient India, and has a wide variety of well-known benefits. Yoga has a large range of benefits; women who suffer from irregularities in their period have made an attempt at regulating the menstrual cycle through yoga exercises that have been recommended by people who practice this form of exercise. One of the most probable causes of irregularities in the menstrual cycle is physical and mental stress. When the body is relaxed, the hormonal balance is restored in the body and menstrual or ovulation cycles are regulated to a certain extent. Regulating the period through yoga is extremely beneficial to the woman’s reproductive system because it does not involve the ingestion of chemically produced medications. The intake of chemical medication could further have side effects, causing increased problems to a woman’s menstrual cycle. Practicing

the Surya Namaskar during your period is a matter of personal choice. There is no real risk attached to doing any of these poses or asanas. In fact the meditative nature and strengthening poses can actually relieve symptoms such as crankiness, mood swings and cramps. If, however, you suffer from heavy bleeding, severe cramps or lower back pain, you could skip the Sun Salutation on the days of your period. Alternatively you could just do one round of all the exercises on day one of your period and work your way up to four or five rounds on the fourth and fifth days of your period respectively. Slowly stretch your muscles this way without causing any extra discomfort. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, stop what you are doing and resume your regular routine only after your period. Yoga helps the body to relax, while exercising every muscle present in the body itself. Yoga exercise also provides mental relief from stress, thereby enabling your body and mind to work in unison with each other.

Surya Namaskar is quite a complete workout for the physical system – a comprehensive exercise form without any need for equipment. But above all, it is an important tool that empowers human beings to break free from the compulsive cycles and patterns of their lives.

**Aadityasya namaskaram ye kurvanti dine dine |
Janmaantarsahasreshu daridryam nopajaayate||**

(It is said that the person who does Surya Namaskar is untouched by poverty for his thousand lifetimes.)

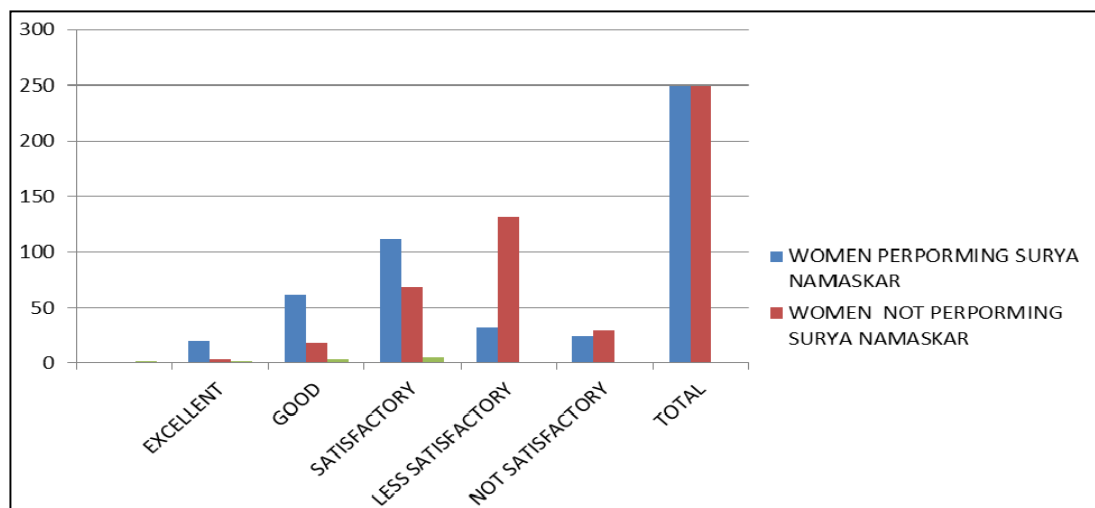
Data Analysis

Table Showing Comparison between Women Performing Surya Namaskar & Non-Performers

Level of social Adjustment	Women Performing Surya Namaskar		Women not Performing Surya Namaskar		Z	P
	No. of Students	%	No. of Students	%		
Excellent	20	8	3	1.2	-1.3538	NS
Good	62	24.8	18	7.2	-6.4233	< 0.05
Satisfactory	111	44.4	68	27.2	4.0112	< 0.05
Less Satisfactory	32	12.8	132	52.8	2.087	< 0.05
Not Satisfactory	25	10	29	11.6	4.279	< 0.05
Total	250	100	250	100		

From the above table it was observed that the social adjustment in women doing Surya Namaskar (< 0.05) was better than the women who did not perform Surya Namaskar

Graphical Representation of the Above Table



Discussion

From the above findings it is observed that the level of social adjustment in women performing Surya Namaskar is higher than women not performing Surya Namaskar. It was also observed that the performing women were healthier, focused and had a positive attitude. They were cheerful and active throughout the day. It is clear that doing Surya Namaskar helps participants to reach the state of a quiet mind and level of stress was very less. It was observed that their menstrual cycle was regular and they were not a victim of depression. The women in the menopause phase were not facing the problems women generally suffer from.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The present study shows that Surya Namaskar has positive physiological benefits. Women practicing this ancient art were found to be more sound and stable. It is recommended that Surya Namaskar should be practised by women to improve their physical fitness. As age advances she reaches an important stage that brings many changes in her physical and mental state, the menopause stage. The menstrual cycle becomes irregular, hormonal variations occur, depression, mood swings become common and women are now exposed to a host of new diseases, of which diabetes, hypertension and cancer are very common. Many women neglect this phase and become victims. Support of every family member and society is needed. It has been observed that if women regularly practice Surya Namaskar, it will be easier for them to handle this important phase of their life with a smile on their face.

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