

Yoga eases physical and mental menopause symptoms

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Yoga can reduce hot flashes and night sweats among women going through menopause, and also appears to sharpen their mental function, researchers from India report.

To investigate whether yoga would help women with physical and cognitive symptoms of menopause, they randomly assigned 120 menopausal women, 40 to 55 years old, to yoga practice or simple stretching and strengthening exercises five days a week for eight weeks.

The postures, breathing and meditation included in the yoga intervention were "aimed at one common effect, i.e. 'to develop mastery over modifications of the mind' ... through 'slowing down the rate of flow of thoughts in the mind,'" the researchers explain.

Women in the yoga group also listened to lectures on using yoga to manage stress and other yoga-related topics, while those in the control group heard lectures on diet, exercise, the physiology of menopause, and stress.

After eight weeks, women in the yoga group showed a significant reduction in hot flashes, night sweats, and sleep disturbances, while the women in the control group did not, Dr. R. Chattha, of the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana in Bangalore, India, and colleagues found.

Both groups showed improvements in a test of attention and concentration, although improvement in the yoga group was significantly greater. In a test of memory and intelligence with 10 components, the yoga group improved on eight, while the

control group improved on six. Improvements were significantly greater in the yoga group than in the control group on seven of the subtests.

"The present study shows the superiority of yoga over physical activity in improving the cognitive functions that could be attributed to emphasis on correctness in breathing, synchronizing breathing with body movements, relaxation and mindful rest," the researchers suggest.

SOURCE: BJOG, August 2008.

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