

Yogic Practices for Ocular Health

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Abstract

Yoga therapy can be utilized for maintaining the ocular health. Due to over exposure of computer screen or mobile screen eye gets fatigue; there is pain and watering in the eyes. Technically it is known as Computer Vision Syndrome. Astānga Yoga found out to be useful in one or another way for ocular health. Certain Asana has direct or indirect benefits for eyes. In this paper certain Yogic procedures as mentioned in the Hathayogic Texts such as Hathapradīpikā and Gheranda Samhitā was considered. Prānāyāma are useful in reducing stress and anxiety due to eye diseases. Śuddhīkriyās like Jala Netī, Trātaka are useful in ophthalmic conditions.

Keywords: Yoga; Ocular health; Netī; Trātaka; Āsana; Prānāyāma; Drstī Computer Vision Syndrome; Refractive errors.

Key Messages: This paper deals with how yogic practices can be helpful in maintaining one's ocular health. It discusses about common causes for eye problems and discuss about Āsana, Prānāyāma, and Śuddhīkriyās especially about Netī and Trātaka with special reference to ocular health.

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Introduction

Now a days yoga has become extremely popular amongst masses. One of the important reasons for yoga becoming much popular is the usefulness of yoga as a therapeutic tool. Yoga has been found out to be useful in various diseased conditions. One might have heard about using yoga for controlling or preventing Diabetes or Hypertension or for managing one's stress and anxiety. Similar way yoga can be of great use in maintaining one's ocular health. Yoga therapy is now also utilized for the ophthalmic conditions.^{1,2} Many patients do complain about weakness or fatigue of eyes due to overstraining of eyes on computer or laptop screen.³ In Covid-19 pandemic lock down and post lock down period, most of the employees are doing work from home. They stay in front of their computer screen for long period. Which give rise to headache, blurring of vision, pain in the eyes, eye fatigue etc. Also they get pricking sensation in the eyes due to dry eye. All these signs and symptoms can be understood as a 'Computer Vision Syndrome'.⁴

There are other ocular conditions like refractive errors like Hypermetropia, Myopia etc. In these conditions as well yoga therapy is of some value if practiced along with orthoptic exercises.^{5,6} Certain even more dreadful conditions like Glaucoma, Retinopathies, Maculopathies, Optic Atrophy etc. Yoga therapy is of immense help in controlling patient's stress and anxiety. Yoga can be also being useful for them to cope up with these stressful conditions. At the same time one need to keep in mind that there are limitations to the application of Yoga Therapy in the ophthalmic conditions. One should not claim false claim or tall claims of curing cataract or glaucoma or similar conditions. Even in cases of very high refractive errors yoga is not useful in the reduction of the number of glasses although few organizations claim that way.

In this paper certain Yogic procedures as mentioned in the Hathayogic Texts such as Hathapradīpikā and Gheranda Samhitā was considered. Prānāyāma are useful in reducing stress and anxiety due to eye diseases. Śuddhīkriyās like Jala Netī, Trātaka are useful in ophthalmic



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conditions. Yogic practices like certain Kriyās, Āsanas, or Drstis, Prānāyāma have been found out to be of great use to these cases.⁷

As discussed earlier, let us review certain Hathayogic textual practices and few institutional practices which are known to be beneficial for ocular health. The practices consists of the following lists –

1. Āsana-Like Sukhāsana, Swastikāsana, Ardhapadmāsana, Padmāsana, are useful while undertaking other important practices like Trātaka.
2. Mudrā-Viparitakarnī Mudrā, Shanmuḡī Mudra, Brahma Mudrā, Datta Mudrā, Simha Mudrā, Padmāsanaśtha Yogamudrā, Vajrāsanaśtha Yogamudrā. These mudras can be used in getting required benefit with reference to ocular health. Interestingly one may not get any direct reference of their use in ocular health in any ancient text or even for that matter in the contemporary yoga therapy texts. But if we look into the applied anatomy of these poses, one may understand this point. For example, when we do Brahmamudrā, patient is turning his head to extreme right, holding that position for a while then turns it to the neutral position in front for a while and then turn it to the extreme left. Hold it for a while come back to neutral. Then goes back, hold come forward to the neutral. Then come forward and try to touch his chin to his sternal notch. Hold that position for a while and then go back to the neutral position. All this has to be undertaken in a very slow, rhythmic manner with closed eyes. When that patient is turning his head to the extreme right, the position of his left neck is getting stretched gently giving stretch on his 'left sternocleidomastoid muscle' so happen when he turns left then right sternocleidomastoid muscle comes into action. This facilitates circulation. Similar we can understand in the process of Padmāsanaśtha Yoga Mudrā or Vajrāsanaśtha Yoga Mudrā. In either case when patient is bowing forward and try to touch his head to the ground, blood flow towards eyes gets facilitated.
3. Prānāyāma-Anuloma Viloma Prānāyāma, Equal breathing, Sectional breathing. This can be of use in controlling the anxiety and stress related to ophthalmic conditions.⁸ It has been stated by Hathapradipika (H.Pr.) that if one undertakes Pranayama in a correct way, it can control or destroy all diseases but if done wrongly it may create all kinds of diseases as can be learnt from the following verses -

“Prānāyāmen Yukten Sarvarogaksayo Bhavet I

Ayuktābhyasa yogen Sarvarogasamudbhavah II” (H.Pr. 2/16).⁹

4. Kriya- Hathayogic texts like Hathayoga pradīpika describes six types of cleansing processes. They are termed as Śuddhikriyā or Satkarma. H.Pr. discuss it in detail giving the names of those six procedures in the text such as –

“Dhāutih Basti tathā Neti Trātakam Naulikam tathā I

Kapālabhātih ca etani Satakarmāni pracakśate II” (H.Pr. 2/21-22).¹⁰

Thus there are 1. Dhāuti 2. Basti, 3. Neti, 4. Trātaka, 5. Nāuli and 6. Kapālabhāti these six types of cleansing processes (Śuddhikriyā or Satkarma). Of which Jala Neti was studied to evaluate its effect on Myopia along with Kapāla Randhra Dhāuti and Trātaka in comparison to Ayurvedic oral therapy by Dr. C.Bansal.¹¹ Dr. Kamakhya Kumar and group studied the effect of Jala Neti and Sūtra Neti on Optic Nerve conduction velocity.¹² One may see an elaborate discussion of Neti in Hathayogic texts such as Hathayogapradīpikā (H.Pr.). The verse from the H.Pr. states.¹³

“Sootram Nihanti Susnigdham Naasanale pravesayet I

Mukhanirgamayet cha Neti sidhau Nigadyate II

Kapalashodhani chaiva Divyadrishsti pradayini I

Urdhwajatarogghau Netihi Ashu Nihanti cha II (H.Pr.2/30 - 31)

As per Gheranda Samhitā, Neti kriyā¹⁴ is advocated for -

“Sadhanāt Netikāryasya Khecharisiddhim Āpnuyāt I

Kaphadosha vinaśyanti Divyadrsti prajāyate II” (Gh.S.1/51)

Divyadrsti Prajayate: Improvement of visual acuity or as per certain ancient text says that it helps in initiation of the third eye. With reference to Trātaka, we can get references in Hathapradipika and Gheranda Samhitā. H.Pr. & Gh.S. explains the procedure of Trātaka in a very elaborate way. The references from these texts stated as follows -

“Nirikśet Niścal Drsā Sukśma Lakśyam Samāhitah I

Aśru sampātaparyantam Ācāryaih Trātakam smrtam II” (H.Pr. 2/31).¹⁵

“Mocanam Netrarogānām Tandrādinām Kapātakam I

Yatnatah Trātakam Gopyam yathā Hātaka Petakam II” (H.Pr. 2/32).¹⁶

“Evam Abhyāsayogen Śāmbhavi Jāyate Dhrvam I Netradosāh vinaśyanti Divyadrstih prajāyate II” (Gheranda Samhitā 1/54).¹⁷

Phadke A.S. reported the beneficial effects of usage of Jala Netī followed by Nasya therapy along with other oral intake of Ayurvedic therapy and Trātaka in the management of refractive errors of the eye.¹⁸ S. Madankumar evaluated the effect of Eye exercises and Trātaka along with Herbal Eye Wash on conditions such as Refractive errors.¹⁹ Gopinath G, Dhiman K.S. and Manisha R. conducted a clinical study to evaluate the effect of Trātaka and eye exercises as non-pharmacological method in the management of Timira (Ammetropia and Presbyopia).²⁰ A lot of work has been already published on Netī, Trātaka with specific use in Ophthalmic conditions.

Thus by appropriate use of Yogic practices one can take care of one’s ocular health.

5. *Dristi*: Vividhā dristi like Brahma dristi, Jatru dristi, samīp dristi, Nāsāgra dristi etc. If these practices are properly utilized along with orthoptic exercises, they are found out to be useful with special reference to minor degree refractive errors.
6. Institutionalized Eye exercises clubbed with yogic practices like Trātaka.
7. *Pancakarma therapies with certain Yogic Satkriyās*: It has been observed that the use of Netī (Jala Netī) followed by Nasya in different indications including ophthalmic conditions. It was observed that when patient is doing sessions of Jala Netī for first five days followed by instillation of medicated oil in the nostrils (Nasya) then thereafter days, there seems to have better absorption of the drug. Also combined use of Nasya and Netī along with Trātaka was found out to be useful in the management of refractive errors as reported earlier.²¹

Conclusion

Thus if one use correct yogic practices in an appropriate way, one can certainly take care of one’s ocular health. Yoga can be useful in controlling, preventing and treating refractive errors, increased intra ocular pressure as seen in glaucoma, useful in computer vision syndrome.

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