



Subject Area : Swasthavritta

THERAPEUTIC ROLE OF YOGA IN AUTOIMMUNE DISORDERS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received 15 th March 2024 Received in revised form 25 th March, 2024 Accepted 17 th April, 2025 Published online 28 th April, 2025	Autoimmune disorders are characterized by the immune system attacking the body's own tissues, leading to chronic inflammation and tissue damage. Conventional treatments primarily aim at symptom suppression and immune modulation. Yoga, an ancient system of holistic health, offers a complementary approach by addressing the root causes related to stress, lifestyle imbalance, and systemic inflammation. This article explores the therapeutic applications of Yoga in managing autoimmune conditions like Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE), Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, and more.
Key words:	
Autoimmune disorders, Yoga therapy, Immune modulation, Stress management, Chronic inflammation, Mind-body medicine.	
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INTRODUCTION

Autoimmune disorders affect millions worldwide, with a higher prevalence in women. Common symptoms include fatigue, joint pain, inflammation, skin disorders, and cognitive fog. Chronic stress is a known trigger and exacerbating factor in autoimmunity. Yoga's role as a mind-body therapy has been increasingly recognized for its ability to modulate stress responses, improve immune regulation, and enhance quality of life.

Pathophysiology (Modern & Yogic View):

- Modern Perspective: Dysregulation of immune checkpoints, chronic inflammation, and genetic/environmental triggers.
- Yogic Perspective: Autoimmune diseases arise due to imbalance of prana, disturbed manovaha srotas (mind-body channels), and excessive rajas and tamas.

Key benefits of yoga in autoimmune disorders:

Immunomodulation

- Regular Yoga practice reduces pro-inflammatory markers like CRP and TNF-alpha.

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- Enhances regulatory T-cell function which is vital for immune tolerance.

Stress Reduction (Psychoneuroimmunology)

- Yoga balances the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and reduces cortisol levels.
- This in turn reduces flare-ups triggered by psychological stress.

Joint Mobility & Pain Reduction

- Gentle asanas improve flexibility, reduce stiffness, and enhance blood circulation—particularly beneficial in RA and lupus.

Gut Health & Autoimmunity

- Practices like Nauli, Agnisara, and dietary mindfulness improve digestion, which is linked to immune health (70% of immunity originates in the gut).

Emotional Resilience

- Yoga improves mood, reduces depression/anxiety, and helps patients better cope with chronic illness.

YOGA PRACTICES RECOMMENDED

Asanas (Postures):

- Tadasana, Vrikshasana – grounding and balancing
- Marjariasana, Bhujangasana, Setu Bandhasana – gentle spinal flexion

- Viparita Karani, Shavasana – restorative, calming

Pranayama (Breathing):

- Anulom-Vilom – balances nervous system
- Bhramari – reduces anxiety and inflammation
- Ujjayi – improves oxygenation and vagal tone

Meditation & Mindfulness

- Yoga Nidra, OM chanting, and mindfulness meditation decrease sympathetic arousal and support immune recalibration.

Clinical Evidence & Research

- Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA):
- A study in International Journal of Yoga (2015) showed significant improvement in pain, DAS-28 scores, and quality of life in RA patients after 8 weeks of Yoga.
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS):
- Yoga improved fatigue, mobility, and mood in MS patients (published in Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 2014).
- Lupus (SLE):
- Mindfulness-based Yoga interventions have been shown to improve depression and immune markers.
- Hashimoto's Thyroiditis:
- Yoga reduced TSH levels and improved mood in hypothyroid patients (Indian Journal of Endocrinology & Metabolism, 2019).

PRECAUTIONS AND CUSTOMIZATION

- Avoid strenuous asanas during flare-ups.
- Personalize practice depending on mobility, fatigue levels, and comorbidities.
- Always ensure supervision by a certified Yoga therapist.

CONCLUSION

Yoga offers a non-invasive, low-cost, and empowering therapy for patients with autoimmune diseases. By calming the nervous system, regulating immune responses, and enhancing quality of life, Yoga serves as a vital integrative tool in the long-term management of autoimmune conditions.

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