

Yoga and Young Adults: A Systematic Review on Cognitive and Emotional Outcomes

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In recent years, there has been growing interest in mind-body interventions, such as yoga, in the field of psychology. While existing research suggests that yoga provides mental health benefits, studies specifically targeting healthy young adults (aged 18-30 years) remain scarce. This systematic review aims to assess the impact of yoga on cognitive functioning (e.g. attention, executive functions) and emotional well-being (e.g. anxiety, stress) in this population.

The review protocol has been registered on PROSPERO (ID: CRD42024527762). The search was conducted on three databases (PUBMED, PsycINFO, SCOPUS) until February 2024. Initially, 6,148 studies were identified. After applying strict inclusion and exclusion criteria - such as yoga as the only intervention, the presence of a control group and the exclusion of samples with a clinical diagnosis - 9 studies (n = 570 subjects) were deemed eligible for inclusion.

The selected studies featured Yoga styles (e.g. Hatha Yoga, Yoga Nidra), intervention durations ranging from a single day to 20 weeks, and session durations between 15 and 60 minutes. Results indicated improvements in cognitive domains, in particular attention and working memory, as well as significant reductions in anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms and an improvement in emotional regulation.

Despite these promising results, the substantial heterogeneity of intervention protocols, outcome measures, and study designs limits generalisability and comparability of results.

In conclusion, yoga appears to be a promising non-pharmacological strategy to support mental and cognitive health in young adults. However, longitudinal and well-controlled studies are essential to confirm its efficacy and guide its standardised implementation.

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Primary author: RIZZUTI, Martina (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy; Laboratory of Experimental and Behavioral Neurophysiology, IRCCS Fondazione Santa Lucia, Rome, Italy.)

Co-authors: BALSAMO, Francesca (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy.); BALDI, Elisabetta (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy.); MENEIO, Debora (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy.); BERRETTA, Erica (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy.); SERRA, Laura (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy; Neuroimaging Laboratory, IRCCS Fondazione Santa Lucia, Rome, Italy.); BAGLIONI, Chiara (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy; Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychophysiology, Centre for Mental Health (Department), Medical Center –University of Freiburg, Faculty of Medicine, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany.); GELFO, Francesca (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy; Laboratory of Experimental and Behavioral Neurophysiology, IRCCS Fondazione Santa Lucia, Rome, Italy.)

Presenter: RIZZUTI, Martina (Department of Human Sciences, Guglielmo Marconi University, Rome, Italy; Laboratory of Experimental and Behavioral Neurophysiology, IRCCS Fondazione Santa Lucia, Rome, Italy.)

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