

For epilepsy, yoga may be good for your mind

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For people with epilepsy, doing yoga may help reduce feelings of stigma about the disease along with reducing seizure frequency and anxiety, according to new research published in *Neurology*.

"People with epilepsy often face [stigma](#) that can cause them to feel different than others due to their own health condition and that can have a significant impact on their [quality of life](#)," said study author Manjari Tripathi, MD, DM, of All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi.

"This stigma can affect a person's life in many ways including treatment, emergency department visits and poor mental health. Our study showed that doing yoga can alleviate the burden of epilepsy and improve the overall quality of life by reducing this perceived stigma."

For the study, researchers looked at people with epilepsy with an average age of 30 in India.

Researchers measured stigma based on participants' answers to questions such as: "Do you feel other people discriminate against you?" "Do you feel you cannot contribute anything in society?" and "Do you feel different from other people?"

Researchers identified 160 people who met the criteria for experiencing stigma. Participants had an average of one seizure per week and on average took at least two anti-seizure medications.

Researchers then randomly assigned participants to receive yoga therapy or sham yoga therapy. Yoga therapy included exercises in loosening muscles, breathing, meditation and positive affirmations. Sham yoga consisted of exercises that mimic the same yoga exercises, but participants were not given instructions on two key components of yoga believed to induce a relaxation response: slow and synchronized breathing, and attention to the body movements and sensations during practice.

Each group received seven supervised group sessions of 45 to 60

minutes over three months. Participants were also asked to practice sessions at home at least five times a week for 30 minutes. They tracked seizures and yoga sessions in a journal. After the three months of therapy, participants were followed for another three months.

Researchers found when compared to people who did sham yoga, people who did yoga were more likely to reduce their perceived stigma of the disease. People who did yoga had an average score of seven at the start of the study and an average score of four at the end of the study, while people who did sham yoga had an increase from an average score of six at the start of the study to an average score of seven at the end.

Researchers also found that people who did yoga were more than four times as likely to have more than a 50% reduction in their [seizure frequency](#) after six months than the people who did sham yoga.

In addition, people who did yoga were more than seven times more likely to no longer have seizures than those who did sham yoga.

There was also a significant decrease in anxiety symptoms for people who did yoga versus people who did not. They saw improvements in quality of life measures and mindfulness.

"These study findings elevate the need to consider [alternative therapies](#) and activities for people with [epilepsy](#) facing stigma," said Tripathi. "Yoga may not only help reduce stigma, but also improve quality of life and mindfulness. Plus, [yoga](#) can be easily prerecorded and shared with patients online using minimal resources and costs."

A limitation of the study was that participants self-reported their seizure frequency and they may not have remembered all the information accurately.

More information: *Neurology* (2023).
[dx.doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000207944](https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000207944)

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