

SKM YOGA

Yoga Teacher Training Programme

YOGA AND HEALTH

A Comprehensive Study Guide for Aspiring Yoga Teachers

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Published by

SKM YOGA

Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

www.skmyoga.in

Foreword

This comprehensive study guide on Yoga and Health has been compiled specifically for the students of SKM Yoga Teacher Training Programme. It serves as a thorough academic and practical reference to deepen the understanding of health from both modern scientific and traditional yogic perspectives.

The wisdom of yoga is ancient, yet ever relevant. In today's fast-paced world, stress-related ailments, lifestyle diseases, and mental health challenges are on the rise. This book bridges the classical yogic understanding of health with contemporary frameworks so that future yoga teachers are equipped not just with asana knowledge, but with a holistic philosophy of wellness.

This text covers the World Health Organization's dimensions of health, the Indian classical systems of medicine including Ayurveda and Naturopathy, the profound yogic concepts of Adhi and Vyadhi, the Trigunas, Pancha-Mahabhutas, Prana, Pancha-Koshas, and Shat-Chakras. It further explores the role of Yoga in preventive healthcare, the Yogic Diet (Ahara), and the Principles of Yogic Living.

It is our sincere hope that every student of SKM Yoga will use this guide not just to pass examinations, but to internalize its wisdom and become a beacon of health and transformation for all whom they teach.

— *Dr. Shivam Mishra*
Founder, SKM Yoga

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Chapter 1: Yoga and Health – Definition & Dimensions

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." – World Health Organization, 1948

1.1 Definition and Importance of Health According to WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health in its landmark 1948 Constitution as: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.' This definition was revolutionary because it shifted the paradigm from a purely biomedical understanding (health as the mere absence of illness) to a holistic, positive conception of well-being. In 1986, the WHO further expanded this idea in the Ottawa Charter, emphasizing that health is a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living.

The importance of health cannot be overstated. Without health, no other aspect of human life can be fully enjoyed. Good health enables individuals to pursue their personal goals, contribute meaningfully to society, experience joy, and grow spiritually. From the yogic perspective, health is not just a physical condition but the harmonious integration of body, mind, and soul — a state of Svasthya, meaning 'being established in oneself'.

Modern medicine and Yoga converge in recognizing that disease prevention is superior to cure. Both emphasize lifestyle modification, mental well-being, and social harmony as indispensable components of genuine health. For yoga teachers, understanding this broad definition is essential because every class they teach must aim at nurturing the complete well-being of the student.

Why Health Matters in Yoga Teacher Training

As a yoga teacher, you are not merely an asana instructor — you are a guide to holistic living. Students come to yoga studios with a wide variety of health challenges: musculoskeletal pain, anxiety, depression, insomnia, digestive disorders, hormonal imbalances, and more. A thorough understanding of health from both modern and classical perspectives allows you to design classes that truly serve their needs.

The WHO definition is particularly significant because it highlights three core domains — physical, mental, and social — that yoga addresses simultaneously. The spiritual dimension was formally added to the WHO definition in later discussions, making it even more aligned with yoga's holistic

framework. When we teach yoga as merely physical exercise, we do it a great disservice. True yoga teaching must encompass all four dimensions.

1.2 Dimensions of Health: Physical, Mental, Social and Spiritual

Physical Health

Physical health refers to the optimal functioning of the body's physiological systems. It includes cardiovascular health, musculoskeletal integrity, immune efficiency, metabolic balance, neurological function, and reproductive health. Physical health is maintained through adequate nutrition, regular exercise, adequate sleep, hygiene, and the avoidance of harmful substances.

Yoga contributes enormously to physical health. The practice of asanas (postures) improves flexibility, muscular strength, joint mobility, and postural alignment. Pranayama (breathing practices) enhances lung capacity, oxygenates the blood, and calms the nervous system. Shatkarmas (cleansing practices) detoxify the body's organs and support immunological health. Scientific research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of yoga in reducing blood pressure, improving heart rate variability, managing type-2 diabetes, and alleviating chronic pain.

- Improved musculoskeletal flexibility and strength
- Enhanced cardiovascular and respiratory efficiency
- Strengthened immune response
- Better endocrine balance and hormonal regulation
- Healthy body weight and metabolic function

Mental Health

Mental health encompasses emotional stability, cognitive clarity, psychological resilience, the ability to manage stress, and the capacity for meaningful relationships. The WHO defines mental health as 'a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.'

Mental illness affects over one billion people globally, making it one of the most pressing public health challenges of our era. Yoga has emerged as a powerful tool for mental health promotion. Practices such as meditation (Dhyana), relaxation techniques (Yoga Nidra), and breath-awareness (Pranayama) regulate the autonomic nervous system, reduce cortisol levels, and increase the production of GABA — an inhibitory neurotransmitter linked with reduced anxiety.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali address mental health extensively. Patanjali identifies nine Chittavikshepa (distractions of the mind) as the root causes of mental suffering. These include

illness, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, sensuality, delusion, inability to progress, and instability — all of which have clear parallels in modern psychiatric classifications.

- Reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms
- Improvement in cognitive focus and concentration
- Enhanced emotional regulation and resilience
- Better quality of sleep
- Reduction in PTSD symptoms and trauma responses

Social Health

Social health refers to the quality of an individual's relationships with others, their integration within community structures, and their ability to function effectively within social roles. It encompasses interpersonal skills, communication, empathy, and the ability to build and maintain meaningful relationships.

Yoga fosters social health through the cultivation of Maitri (friendliness), Karuna (compassion), Mudita (joy in others' happiness), and Upeksha (equanimity) — the four Brahmaviharas or 'divine abodes' described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (1.33). These attitudes, when developed through consistent yoga practice, naturally transform the quality of one's relationships and social engagement.

Furthermore, the practice of yoga in community (Satsanga) itself is profoundly healing. Collective chanting, group meditation, and shared asana practice build bonds of solidarity and compassion. Community yoga programs in prisons, hospitals, schools, and disaster relief zones have demonstrated remarkable results in social rehabilitation and healing.

Spiritual Health

Spiritual health is the most subtle yet arguably the most foundational of all health dimensions. It refers to the sense of meaning, purpose, connection to something greater than oneself, inner peace, and alignment with one's deepest values. Spiritual health does not necessarily imply religious belief; it speaks to the existential dimension of human experience.

In the yogic tradition, spiritual health is the ultimate aim. All practices of yoga — whether physical, mental, or ethical — are directed toward Kaivalya (liberation), Moksha (freedom from suffering), or at minimum, a state of Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha (cessation of the disturbances of the mind). The Bhagavad Gita teaches that a person grounded in spiritual health is one who has attained Sthitaprajna — steadiness of wisdom, unshaken by joy or sorrow.

For yoga teachers, nurturing their own spiritual health is essential. A teacher who is internally integrated, compassionate, and purposeful creates a field of healing that students feel even before

a single instruction is given. This is the dimension of health that yoga uniquely addresses — the realm of Atman, the universal Self.

Chapter 2: Concept of Health and Disease in Indian Systems of Medicine

"Swasthasya swasthya rakshanam, aturasya vikara prashamanam cha."

– (The goals of Ayurveda: to maintain the health of the healthy and to cure the disease of the diseased.)

2.1 Ayurveda – The Science of Life

Ayurveda, literally meaning 'the science of life' (Ayur = life; Veda = knowledge), is one of the world's oldest and most comprehensive medical systems, with origins in the Atharva Veda and codified texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridayam. It is a system that does not merely treat disease but aims at the preservation of health, the promotion of longevity, and the attainment of a life in harmony with nature.

Ayurveda's fundamental premise is that human beings are microcosmic reflections of the macrocosm (the universe). Every person is composed of the same five elements that constitute the cosmos — Prithvi (earth), Jala (water), Agni (fire), Vayu (air), and Akasha (space). The unique configuration of these elements in a person constitutes their Prakriti (individual constitution).

Concept of Health in Ayurveda

Charaka Samhita offers the following comprehensive definition of health: 'Sama dosha sama agnischa sama dhatu mala kriyaah / Prasanna atma indriya manah swastha iti abhidhiyate.' Translation: 'One is in perfect health when the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), the digestive fire (Agni), the seven bodily tissues (Dhatu), and the three wastes (Malas) are in equilibrium, and when the soul, the sense organs, and the mind are joyful.'

This definition is remarkable in its comprehensiveness. Unlike the biomedical model that focuses only on the body's physical functioning, Ayurveda explicitly includes the well-being of the Atma (soul), the Indriyas (sense organs), and the Manas (mind) as essential components of health. This multi-dimensional view closely parallels the WHO's definition.

The Three Doshas

The concept of Tridosha is the cornerstone of Ayurvedic theory. The three doshas — Vata, Pitta, and Kapha — are bio-energetic forces that govern all physiological and psychological processes.

- **Vata (Vayu + Akasha – Air + Space):** Governs all movement in the body — nerve impulses, blood circulation, respiration, peristalsis, and the movement of thoughts.

Qualities: dry, light, cold, rough, subtle, mobile. Location: colon, pelvic region, bones, skin, ears, thighs.

- **Pitta (Agni + Jala – Fire + Water):** Governs transformation — digestion, metabolism, hormonal function, visual perception, and intelligence. Qualities: hot, sharp, light, liquid, oily, spreading. Location: small intestine, stomach, liver, spleen, blood, eyes, skin.
- **Kapha (Prithvi + Jala – Earth + Water):** Governs structure and lubrication — providing substance to cells, maintaining immune function, and governing emotional stability. Qualities: heavy, slow, cool, oily, dense, soft, stable. Location: chest, lungs, throat, head, joints, stomach.

Concept of Disease in Ayurveda

Disease (Vyadhi) in Ayurveda arises from the imbalance (Vikruti) of the doshas from their natural proportion in one's Prakriti. The causes of such imbalance are classified as: Asatmyendriyārtha Samyoga (improper use of the sense organs), Prajnaparadha (intellectual errors — making choices that one knows are harmful), and Parinama (effects of time and season).

The disease process in Ayurveda follows a six-stage model called Kriyakaala or Shadkriyakala: (1) Sanchaya (accumulation), (2) Prakopa (aggravation), (3) Prasara (spreading), (4) Sthana Samshraya (localisation), (5) Vyakti (manifestation), (6) Bheda (differentiation/chronicity). Yoga intervention is most effective in the early stages before the disease fully manifests.

For the yoga teacher, an understanding of Ayurveda is invaluable because it provides a framework for individualising yoga practices. A Vata-dominant student needs grounding, warming, and stabilizing practices. A Pitta-dominant student benefits from cooling, relaxing, and heart-opening practices. A Kapha-dominant student needs energising, stimulating, and invigorating practices.

2.2 Naturopathy – The Science of Natural Healing

Naturopathy, or Naturopathic Medicine, is a system of healthcare that employs natural agents and processes — food, water, air, sunlight, earth, exercise, rest, and the healing power of the mind — to support and stimulate the body's own inherent self-healing capacity. The foundational philosophy of naturopathy is *Vis Medicatrix Naturae* — 'the healing power of nature.'

Though naturopathy as a formal school of medicine emerged in Europe and America in the 19th century (through figures such as Benedict Lust and Henry Lindlahr), its roots are deeply connected to the ancient Indian traditions of Panchakarma, therapeutic fasting, sunbathing (Atapa Seva), mud therapy, and water therapy (Jala Chikitsa) — all of which have their parallels in the classical texts.

Fundamental Principles of Naturopathy

- **First, Do No Harm (Primum Non Nocere):** Naturopathy uses the least forceful and most natural therapies that minimise the risk of harmful side effects.
- **The Healing Power of Nature:** The body has an inherent ability to heal itself when given appropriate support.
- **Identify and Treat the Root Cause (Tolle Causam):** Rather than suppressing symptoms, naturopathy seeks to identify and eliminate the underlying cause of disease.
- **Treat the Whole Person:** Naturopathy recognises that health and disease arise from a complex interaction of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, environmental, and social factors.
- **Prevention:** Naturopathy emphasises the prevention of disease through healthy lifestyle choices, appropriate diet, and stress management.
- **Doctor as Teacher (Docere):** The naturopathic physician educates the patient to take responsibility for their own health.

Naturopathy's View of Disease

From the naturopathic perspective, disease is primarily the result of violations of natural laws — particularly in the domains of diet, rest, exercise, and mental hygiene. Disease is seen not as an enemy to be suppressed but as a signal from the body that something in the lifestyle needs to be corrected. The accumulation of toxins (Ama in Ayurvedic parlance) resulting from improper digestion, sedentary living, and negative emotions is considered the fundamental cause of most chronic ailments.

Naturopathy prescribes clean, simple, plant-based food; therapeutic fasting; hydrotherapy; mud therapy; sunlight; fresh air; physical activity; and mental peace. These prescriptions align remarkably well with yoga's recommendations for Sattvic diet, Pranayama, and meditation. Indeed, Yoga and Naturopathy have been integrated in India's National Health Systems as Yoga and Naturopathy (Y&N) — a testament to their complementarity.

Chapter 3: Yogic Concept of Health and Disease

"Yogash chitta vritti nirodhah." – Patanjali Yoga Sutras 1.2 "Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind."

3.1 Concept of Adhi and Vyadhi

The yogic understanding of disease is deeply psychological in its orientation. Unlike conventional medicine that primarily focuses on physical pathology, yoga holds that most diseases originate in the mind. The Sanskrit terms Adhi and Vyadhi capture this essential understanding.

Adhi – Primary Disease (Mental/Psychic Origin)

The word 'Adhi' comes from the Sanskrit root meaning 'primordial' or 'mental affliction.' Adhi refers to the primary or mental disease — the psychological disturbances that are the root cause of physical illness. According to Swami Swatmarama in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and various other classical texts, the fluctuations of the mind (Chitta Vrittis), when unchecked, create psychological stress that then manifests as bodily dysfunction.

Adhi is of two types: Samanyaja Adhi (ordinary mental disease) arising from normal life stressors, and Sara Adhi (essential mental disease) arising from the fundamental ignorance of one's true nature (Avidya). Sara Adhi is considered the deepest form of disease — the existential suffering rooted in the mistaken identification of the Self (Atman) with the non-Self (body, mind, and ego).

In modern psychological terms, Adhi corresponds to chronic stress, anxiety disorders, depression, neurosis, and existential crises. The recognition that mental disturbance precedes physical disease is a profound insight that is only now being validated by psychosomatic medicine and neuroscience (through the field of psychoneuroimmunology).

Vyadhi – Secondary Disease (Physical Manifestation)

Vyadhi refers to physical disease — the somatic manifestation of unresolved Adhi. When mental disturbances (Adhi) are not addressed, they cascade into disruptions of Prana (vital energy), which then disturb the balance of the Doshas (in Ayurvedic terms), leading to organic disease. Vyadhi thus represents the secondary, downstream consequence of Adhi.

The relationship between Adhi and Vyadhi demonstrates the psychosomatic unity that yoga has always recognised. Contemporary medicine has amply confirmed this relationship: chronic stress elevates cortisol and adrenaline, suppresses immune function, inflames vascular walls, disrupts gut microbiome, and alters gene expression — all contributing to a wide spectrum of physical diseases.

The yoga teacher's role is therefore not merely to address the physical symptoms (Vyadhi) but to help students trace the disease back to its mental roots (Adhi) through self-awareness, meditation, and the gradual removal of Kleshas (afflictions). This is why yoga is described as both preventive medicine and a path to radical self-transformation.

3.2 Trigunas, Pancha-Mahabhutas, and Pancha-Prana

Trigunas – The Three Qualities of Nature

The Samkhya philosophy, upon which classical yoga is based, describes all of manifest existence — including the human mind and body — as composed of three fundamental qualities (Gunas). These are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. The Gunas are not fixed properties but dynamic, interweaving forces that are in constant flux. The relative proportion of these three qualities in an individual's mind and body determines their health, temperament, and spiritual orientation.

- **Sattva (Clarity and Harmony):** Sattva represents purity, clarity, luminosity, lightness, and harmony. A Sattvic state of mind is characterised by mental clarity, equanimity, compassion, wisdom, and joy. Physiologically, Sattva is associated with balanced neuroendocrine function, strong immunity, and vitality. A predominantly Sattvic diet, lifestyle, and mental orientation constitute the foundation of yogic health.
- **Rajas (Activity and Passion):** Rajas represents activity, motion, passion, desire, and restlessness. A Rajasic state of mind is characterised by ambition, agitation, aggression, craving, and attachment. Physiologically, Rajas corresponds to heightened sympathetic nervous activity, elevated stress hormones, and inflammatory tendencies. While some degree of Rajas is necessary for action in the world, its excess leads to burnout, anxiety, and psychosomatic disease.
- **Tamas (Inertia and Heaviness):** Tamas represents inertia, darkness, heaviness, dullness, and obstruction. A Tamasic state of mind is characterised by lethargy, ignorance, depression, and excessive sleep. Physiologically, Tamas corresponds to metabolic sluggishness, impaired digestion, and depressed immune function. While Tamas is necessary for rest and consolidation, its excess leads to sloth, depression, and chronic fatigue.

For the yoga teacher, the Trigunas provide an elegant framework for understanding the health and temperament of students. Practices can be prescribed to increase Sattva (meditation, Trataka, Sattvic diet, Mantra), reduce excess Rajas (slow Pranayama, restorative yoga, silence), or overcome Tamas (vigorous asana, Kapalabhati, cold shower, intermittent fasting).

Pancha-Mahabhutas – The Five Great Elements

The Pancha-Mahabhutas (five great elements) are the fundamental building blocks of all physical matter, including the human body. They are Prithvi (earth), Jala (water), Agni (fire), Vayu (air), and Akasha (space). These elements are not to be understood merely as the physical substances we encounter in nature, but as abstract principles that govern different aspects of both the cosmos and the body.

- **Prithvi (Earth):** Represents solidity, structure, mass, and stability. In the body, it constitutes bones, muscles, tendons, skin, and nails. Psychologically, it governs groundedness, patience, and endurance. Its corresponding chakra is Muladhara.
- **Jala (Water):** Represents fluidity, cohesion, and adaptability. In the body, it constitutes blood, lymph, saliva, synovial fluid, and all other body fluids. Psychologically, it governs emotions, creativity, and intuition. Its corresponding chakra is Swadhisthana.
- **Agni (Fire):** Represents transformation, heat, and luminosity. In the body, it constitutes the digestive fire (Jatharagni), metabolic enzymes, body temperature, and visual perception. Psychologically, it governs will, intelligence, and discernment. Its corresponding chakra is Manipura.
- **Vayu (Air):** Represents movement, communication, and vitality. In the body, it constitutes all movements — from motor nerve impulses to intestinal peristalsis to the circulation of breath. Psychologically, it governs communication, curiosity, and adaptability. Its corresponding chakra is Anahata.
- **Akasha (Space/Ether):** Represents expansion, infinite potential, and the medium through which all other elements operate. In the body, it constitutes the spaces within cells, organs, blood vessels, and the nervous system. Psychologically, it governs consciousness, intuition, and spiritual awareness. Its corresponding chakra is Vishuddha.

Understanding the Pancha-Mahabhutas enables the yoga teacher to relate specific health conditions to elemental imbalances and prescribe practices accordingly. Excess earth (Kapha imbalance) leads to congestion and lethargy; excess fire (Pitta imbalance) leads to inflammation and irritability; excess air (Vata imbalance) leads to instability and anxiety. Yogic practices that balance the elements include asanas targeting specific Chakras, Pancha Tattva meditations, and element-specific Pranayama techniques.

Pancha-Prana – The Five Vital Life Forces

Prana is the universal life force that animates all living beings. In the human body, it manifests as five distinct functional expressions called Pancha-Prana or Pancha-Vayu. These are not separate entities but the same vital energy performing different functions.

- **Prana Vayu (Inward-moving force):** Located in the chest region, Prana Vayu governs inhalation, reception, and all inward movements. It controls the intake of food, water, air, and sensory impressions. When Prana Vayu is balanced, there is vitality, enthusiasm, and receptivity. Its imbalance is linked to heart and lung disorders, anxiety, and exhaustion.
- **Apana Vayu (Downward-moving force):** Located in the pelvis and lower abdomen, Apana Vayu governs elimination — of wastes (urine, faeces), reproductive functions, and the downward movement of energy. It represents the releasing principle. Its imbalance leads to constipation, urinary problems, reproductive disorders, and feelings of heaviness or depression.
- **Samana Vayu (Equalising force):** Located in the navel region, Samana Vayu governs digestion, assimilation, and the metabolism of food, emotions, and experiences. It is the force of integration and balance. Its imbalance leads to digestive disorders, inability to process emotions, and metabolic disease.
- **Udana Vayu (Upward-moving force):** Located in the throat and head, Udana Vayu governs speech, expression, upward growth, and the upward movement of consciousness. It controls the thyroid, memory, and the ability to express oneself. Its imbalance leads to speech disorders, thyroid problems, and spiritual stagnation.
- **Vyana Vayu (Pervasive force):** Pervading the entire body, Vyana Vayu governs circulation, coordination, and the distribution of energy throughout all systems. It integrates all the other Pranas. Its imbalance leads to circulatory disorders, lack of coordination, and overall physical and mental fragmentation.

Pranayama practices directly influence the Pancha-Prana. Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing) balances all five; Kapalabhati and Bhastrika stimulate Prana Vayu and Udana Vayu; Ashwini Mudra and Mula Bandha strengthen Apana Vayu; abdominal breathing practices nourish Samana Vayu; and relaxation practices like Yoga Nidra harmonise Vyana Vayu.

3.3 Pancha-Koshas and Shat-Chakras

Pancha-Koshas – The Five Sheaths of Being

The Taittiriya Upanishad, one of the most important Vedantic texts, describes the human being as constituted of five concentric sheaths or layers of existence, called Pancha-Koshas. These koshas envelop the Atman (the pure Self) like the layers of an onion, and disease can manifest at any or multiple levels simultaneously. True healing requires addressing the relevant kosha(s).

- **1. Annamaya Kosha (Physical/Food Sheath):** The grossest layer — the physical body nourished by food (Anna). All physical diseases originate at this level. Yoga practices such as Asana, Shatkarmas, and dietary regulation address this kosha.

- **2. Pranamaya Kosha (Vital/Energy Sheath):** The layer of Prana — the vital energy that animates the physical body. Disruptions in Pranamaya Kosha manifest as fatigue, breathlessness, hormonal imbalances, and impaired organ function. Pranayama, Bandhas, and Mudras are the primary tools to heal this layer.
- **3. Manomaya Kosha (Mental Sheath):** The layer of ordinary mind (Manas) — thoughts, emotions, desires, and perceptions. Most psychosomatic diseases have their origin here. Meditation, Mantra, Dharana, and Kirtan are practices that heal the Manomaya Kosha.
- **4. Vijnanamaya Kosha (Intellectual/Wisdom Sheath):** The layer of intellect (Buddhi) and discriminative wisdom. Imbalances here manifest as poor judgment, confusion, existential crisis, and inability to discern between the real and the unreal. Philosophical study (Swadhyaya), Self-inquiry (Jnana Yoga), and deep meditation heal this layer.
- **5. Anandamaya Kosha (Bliss Sheath):** The subtlest layer — the body of deep joy and unconscious impressions (Samskaras) experienced in deep dreamless sleep and states of Samadhi. Unresolved Samskaras (deep-seated impressions) at this level are considered the ultimate cause of spiritual suffering. Practices like Yoga Nidra, Samadhi, and Bhakti Yoga work at this deepest level.

The Pancha-Kosha model provides yoga teachers with a framework for multidimensional health assessment. A student complaining of chronic back pain may need both physical intervention at the Annamaya Kosha (corrective asanas) and emotional healing at the Manomaya Kosha (stress reduction, trauma-informed practices). A student with insomnia may need Pranayama at the Pranamaya Kosha and meditation at the Manomaya Kosha.

Shat-Chakras – The Six Energy Centres

The chakra system, described in texts such as Sat-Chakra-Nirupana (by Purnananda Swami, 16th century) and the Gorakshashataka, identifies six primary energy centres (plus the crown — making seven in total) located along the Sushumna Nadi (the central energy channel running through the spinal column). The term 'Chakra' means 'wheel' in Sanskrit, referring to these spinning vortices of energy.

- **1. Muladhara Chakra (Root Centre):** Located at the base of the spine (perineum). Element: Prithvi (Earth). Bija Mantra: LAM. Associated with survival, safety, groundedness, and basic physical health. Imbalance: fear, anxiety, immune weakness, lower back pain, constipation.
- **2. Swadhisthana Chakra (Sacral Centre):** Located two fingers above the root, in the sacral region. Element: Jala (Water). Bija Mantra: VAM. Associated with creativity, sexuality, pleasure, and emotional fluidity. Imbalance: reproductive disorders, urinary issues, emotional numbness, or excessive sensuality.

- **3. Manipura Chakra (Solar Plexus Centre):** Located at the navel. Element: Agni (Fire). Bija Mantra: RAM. Associated with will-power, self-esteem, digestion, and personal power. Imbalance: digestive disorders, diabetes, liver problems, lack of confidence, or aggression.
- **4. Anahata Chakra (Heart Centre):** Located in the chest. Element: Vayu (Air). Bija Mantra: YAM. Associated with love, compassion, empathy, and respiratory health. Imbalance: cardiovascular disease, asthma, inability to love or receive love, grief.
- **5. Vishuddha Chakra (Throat Centre):** Located at the throat. Element: Akasha (Space). Bija Mantra: HAM. Associated with communication, self-expression, thyroid function, and creativity. Imbalance: thyroid disorders, throat problems, inability to communicate authentically.
- **6. Ajna Chakra (Third Eye Centre):** Located between the eyebrows. Element: Mind (Manas). Bija Mantra: OM. Associated with intuition, perception, intelligence, and the pituitary gland. Imbalance: headaches, vision problems, poor intuition, confusion.
- **7. Sahasrara Chakra (Crown Centre):** Located at the crown of the head. Element: Consciousness (Chit). Not given a Bija Mantra in the traditional texts. Associated with enlightenment, spiritual connection, and the pineal gland. When Kundalini reaches Sahasrara, the individual consciousness merges with universal consciousness.

The Chakras are not merely metaphorical concepts. They correspond to the major nerve plexuses and endocrine glands of the body, and their activation through Yoga practices has measurable physiological effects. Balancing the chakras through specific asanas, Pranayama, Mudras, Bandhas, and meditations is a comprehensive approach to restoring health at all levels of being.

Chapter 4: Yoga as Preventive Health Care

"Heyam dukham anagatam." – Yoga Sutras of Patanjali 2.16 "The suffering that is yet to come should be prevented."

4.1 Heyam Dukham Anagatam – Yoga as a Way of Life

This single sutra — Heyam dukham anagatam (YS 2.16) — encapsulates the entire preventive health philosophy of yoga. Patanjali, the sage who codified the Yoga Sutras approximately 2000 years ago, declares that future suffering is avoidable. This is a profoundly optimistic statement. It implies that human beings are not helpless in the face of illness and suffering; they have the knowledge, tools, and capacity to prevent a vast amount of future disease.

In the context of modern healthcare, this sutra is revolutionary. Current healthcare systems are predominantly oriented toward treating disease after it has occurred — the curative model. Yoga, by contrast, is fundamentally a preventive science. By optimising lifestyle through asana, pranayama, meditation, ethical living, and appropriate diet, yoga reduces the allostatic load on the body and mind, preventing the cascade of events that leads to chronic disease.

Yoga as a way of life means integrating yogic principles into every aspect of daily existence — not just for one hour on a mat, but through the food one eats, the thoughts one cultivates, the relationships one maintains, and the purpose one serves. This comprehensive lifestyle approach is what distinguishes yoga from mere physical exercise. The yoga teacher who embodies this understanding becomes a living model of preventive healthcare.

The Eight Limbs as a Framework for Preventive Health

Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga (Eight-Limbed Yoga) provides a complete framework for preventive health at all levels of being:

- **Yama (Universal Ethical Restraints):** Non-violence (Ahimsa), truthfulness, non-stealing, sexual responsibility, and non-possessiveness reduce interpersonal conflict and psychological stress, thereby preventing mental and social diseases.
- **Niyama (Personal Observances):** Purity, contentment, discipline, self-study, and surrender to a higher principle build positive health habits and psychological resilience.
- **Asana (Physical Postures):** Maintain physical health, flexibility, strength, and neuromuscular coordination.
- **Pranayama (Breath Regulation):** Optimises respiratory function, balances the autonomic nervous system, and promotes cardio-vascular health.

- **Pratyahara (Sensory Withdrawal):** Reduces overstimulation and promotes neurological recovery — particularly relevant in today's screen-dominated world.
- **Dharana (Concentration):** Strengthens cognitive function and promotes neuroplasticity.
- **Dhyana (Meditation):** Reduces cortisol, improves immune function, and promotes emotional regulation.
- **Samadhi (Absorption):** Represents the pinnacle of health — a state of complete integration in which suffering ceases entirely.

4.2 Tapatrayas and Kleshas as Root Causes of Ill-Health

The Tapatrayas – Three Sources of Suffering

Classical yoga and Vedanta identify three primary sources of suffering in human existence, known as the Tapatrayas (three-fold affliction):

- **1. Adhyatmika Tapa (Intrinsic/Self-Generated Suffering):** This refers to suffering arising from within the individual — physical ailments (fevers, injuries, organ dysfunction) and mental afflictions (depression, anxiety, grief, desire, anger). This is the domain of personal health and psychology.
- **2. Adhibhautika Tapa (Extrinsic/Environmental Suffering):** This refers to suffering caused by external agents — other living beings (bacteria, viruses, animals, other people) and environmental factors (pollution, climate, accidents). This is the domain of public health, ecology, and social justice.
- **3. Adhidaivika Tapa (Supernatural/Cosmic Suffering):** This refers to suffering arising from forces beyond individual or collective control — natural disasters (earthquakes, floods), fate, genetic predisposition, and the inherent impermanence of all conditioned existence. This is the domain of existential coping and spiritual resilience.

Yoga addresses all three Tapas. Asana, Pranayama, and Shatkarmas address Adhyatmika Tapa at the physical level; meditation and ethical living address it at the mental level. Knowledge of the environment and Ahimsa toward all living beings reduce Adhibhautika Tapa. Philosophical wisdom and surrender (Ishwara Pranidhana) equip the practitioner to face Adhidaivika Tapa with equanimity.

The Kleshas – Five Afflictions of the Mind

Patanjali in Yoga Sutra 2.3 identifies five Kleshas (afflictions or causes of suffering) that are the root of all mental disease and, through it, physical disease: 'Avidya asmita raga dvesha abhinivesha pancha klesha.'

- **1. Avidya (Ignorance):** The fundamental misidentification of the changeless Self with the changing body-mind complex. Avidya is the root from which all other Kleshas spring. It is not mere intellectual ignorance but an existential blindness that makes us seek permanent happiness in impermanent things. All suffering, according to yoga, ultimately arises from Avidya.
- **2. Asmita (Ego/I-Am-ness):** The secondary illusion that the pure Witness-Self is identical to the intellect or mind. Asmita creates the inflated or deflated sense of self that drives ego-based suffering — comparison, competition, pride, shame, and the fear of loss of identity.
- **3. Raga (Attachment/Craving):** The mental tendency to cling to pleasant experiences and seek their repetition. Raga drives addiction, materialism, and the inability to be present with life as it is. Physiologically, chronic craving creates hyperactivation of the reward pathways (dopaminergic circuits) that underlies addiction.
- **4. Dvesha (Aversion/Hatred):** The opposite tendency — the mental habit of rejecting unpleasant experiences, people, or situations. Dvesha drives chronic anger, resentment, prejudice, and interpersonal conflict. Physiologically, chronic aversion maintains the body in a state of sympathetic arousal (fight-or-flight), contributing to cardiovascular and inflammatory disease.
- **5. Abhinivesha (Fear of Death/Clinging to Life):** The deepest and most universal Klesha — the instinctive clinging to existence that pervades all living beings. It is the root of existential anxiety. Even the wisest person, says Patanjali, is subject to this Klesha. Yoga practices that cultivate awareness of the eternal Self gradually loosen its grip.

4.3 Physical and Physiological Manifestations of Disease

The Yoga Sutras (1.30-31) describe specific manifestations of disease that obstruct the practice of yoga and indeed the enjoyment of healthy life. These fall into two categories: the Antarayās (nine obstacles) and their accompaniments (Sahabhūvas).

Vyadhi – Physical Disease

Vyadhi refers to physical or organic disease — dysfunction of the body's systems. In the context of Patanjali's sutras, Vyadhi is listed as the first and most fundamental obstacle to yoga (YS 1.30). When the body is diseased, it cannot comfortably sustain the postures, breathing practices, and meditative states that constitute yoga practice. The management of Vyadhi through yogic means — appropriate asana, Pranayama, Shatkarmas, diet, and rest — is therefore a prerequisite for deeper practice.

Alasya – Lethargy and Laziness

Alasya refers to physical and mental inertia — the inability or unwillingness to make effort. It corresponds to a dominance of the Tamas guna and reflects metabolic sluggishness, lack of motivation, and depressive tendencies. In modern healthcare, Alasya is associated with sedentary behaviour, the leading modifiable risk factor for chronic disease. Yoga addresses Alasya through dynamic practices (Surya Namaskar, Vinyasa), Kapalabhati, and Shatkarma practices like Nauli.

Angamejayatva – Restlessness of the Body

Angamejayatva refers to trembling, fidgeting, and inability to hold the body still — a manifestation of excess Rajas (hyperactivity) or Vata imbalance. It reflects a nervous system in chronic stress — hypervigilance, anxiety, and motor restlessness. Angamejayatva is associated with anxiety disorders, ADHD, tremor disorders, and the initial stages of neurological diseases. Yoga addresses this through slow, grounding asanas, restorative yoga, Nadi Shodhana, and Yoga Nidra.

Shvasa-Prashvasa – Irregular Breathing

Shvasa-Prashvasa refers to disturbed or irregular breathing — laboured inhalation (Shvasa) and disturbed exhalation (Prashvasa). This is both a symptom of underlying disease (respiratory conditions, anxiety, cardiac disease) and a cause of further dysfunction, as irregular breathing creates imbalances in CO₂/O₂ ratios, pH, and sympathetic/parasympathetic tone. Pranayama directly targets Shvasa-Prashvasa, and respiratory training is one of yoga's most clinically validated therapeutic modalities.

4.4 Mental and Emotional Ill-Health: The Nine Chittavikshepa

Patanjali lists nine Antarayas (obstacles) in Yoga Sutra 1.30, along with four accompanying symptoms in YS 1.31, that represent the manifestations of mental and emotional ill-health. These constitute yoga's comprehensive nosology of mental disease.

The Nine Obstacles (Antarayas)

- **1. Vyadhi (Physical Disease):** Though primarily physical, disease always has a psychological dimension — the fear, grief, or resistance it evokes.
- **2. Styana (Mental Languor/Dullness):** Lack of motivation and mental heaviness; corresponds to Tamas in the mind. Associated with depression, chronic fatigue, and burnout.
- **3. Samshaya (Doubt):** Persistent, debilitating doubt — about oneself, one's practice, one's teacher, and one's purpose. Samshaya prevents commitment and undermines the sustained effort necessary for yoga and for healing. Associated with indecision, ambivalence, and anxiety.

- **4. Pramada (Negligence/Carelessness):** The tendency to neglect one's practice, health, and responsibilities due to distraction or overconfidence. Pramada is a major cause of lifestyle disease — the knowing that something is harmful and yet continuing to do it.
- **5. Alasya (Physical and Mental Laziness):** Inertia and unwillingness to make effort. Described above. Corresponds to Tamasic mental state.
- **6. Avirati (Sensory Overindulgence):** Excessive indulgence of the senses — overconsumption of food, sexual activity, entertainment, and sensory stimulation. Avirati drives addiction, obesity, and the diseases of excess (metabolic syndrome, liver disease, cardiovascular disease).
- **7. Bhrantidarsana (False Perception/Delusion):** Misperception of reality — seeing things as they are not. In clinical terms, this corresponds to cognitive distortions, delusions, and the misinterpretation of experience that characterises many psychiatric conditions.
- **8. Alabdha-Bhumikatva (Inability to Progress):** The repeated failure to advance in practice despite sincere effort, often due to accumulated karma (Samskaras) or unresolved emotional blocks. Associated with hopelessness, learned helplessness, and treatment-resistant conditions.
- **9. Anavasthitatva (Instability/Inconsistency):** The inability to maintain any level of progress achieved — fluctuation between health and disease, practice and neglect. Associated with bipolar tendencies, erratic behaviour, and instability.

The Four Accompanying Symptoms (Sahabhuvas)

Patanjali describes four symptoms that accompany these obstacles (YS 1.31): Duhkha, Daurmanasya, Angamejayatva, and Shvasa-Prashvasa.

- **Duhkha (Pain/Sorrow):** The pervading experience of suffering — physical, mental, and existential. Duhkha is the fundamental problem that yoga seeks to resolve. It includes grief, loss, frustration, loneliness, and physical pain.
- **Daurmanasya (Despondency/Depression):** Deep-seated depression and hopelessness — the loss of the will to live fully. Daurmanasya is the most debilitating of the emotional symptoms, and yoga's role in addressing it through movement, breathwork, community, and meaning-making is increasingly validated by research.

Yoga offers the path from Duhkha (suffering) to Sukha (happiness) — not through bypassing reality but through the gradual transformation of the mind, the cultivation of Sattva, and the direct experience of the Self that is forever free.

Chapter 5: Yogic Diet (Ahara)

"Ahara shuddhou sattva shuddhah, sattva shuddhau dhruva smritih."

"When the food is pure, the mind becomes pure; when the mind is pure, memory becomes steady." – Chandogya Upanishad 7.26.2

5.1 General Introduction and Mitahara

Ahara (food and diet) occupies a position of supreme importance in the yogic system. The ancient seers recognised that the body is literally built from food ('Annam Brahma' — food is Brahman, says the Taittiriya Upanishad). The quality, quantity, and manner of eating profoundly influence not just the physical body but the mind, emotions, and even the spiritual states one can access. Yoga did not separate nutrition from spirituality; it recognised food as the interface between the outer world and the inner life.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika (1.57) states: 'Mitahara vihina yastapasvi dridha nischayah / Na siddhimabhavaptoti, tena yoga nirarthaka.' — 'A person who does not observe Mitahara (moderate eating), even if performing austerities with firm resolve, cannot attain Siddhi (perfection); for him, yoga becomes fruitless.'

Mitahara – The Principle of Moderate Eating

Mitahara is the cornerstone of yogic dietary wisdom. The word derives from 'Mita' (measured, moderate) and 'Ahara' (food, nourishment). Mitahara does not mean starvation or deprivation; it means eating the right amount of the right food at the right time in the right state of mind.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika (1.58) defines Mitahara as: 'Sukham stadyam tatha grasyam suvarna prakshalanaat / Bhunjita jatharaardham cha Shivaaraadhana karanat.' — 'One should eat nourishing, sweet food, leaving one quarter of the stomach empty, dedicating the meal as an offering to Shiva (the Divine).' This division — half the stomach for food, one quarter for water, one quarter for air — ensures proper digestive space.

Modern nutritional science has validated the concept of Mitahara. Caloric restriction studies consistently demonstrate enhanced longevity and reduced chronic disease risk. Intermittent fasting research confirms the benefits of allowing the digestive system regular periods of rest. The mindful eating movement in psychology mirrors the yogic emphasis on eating in a calm state with full presence.

5.2 Classification of Yogic Diet

Classical yoga texts classify food according to the three Gunas — Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas — and according to their effects on the mind and body. The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 17, verses 8-10) provides the most celebrated classification.

Sattvic Food – The Diet for Yoga

Sattvic food increases clarity, purity, vitality, and serenity of mind. The Bhagavad Gita (17.8) describes it as: 'Ayuh sattva balarogya sukha priti vivardhanah / Rasyah snigdham sthira hridya aharah sattvika priyah.' — 'Food that increases life span, mental clarity, strength, health, happiness, and love; that is juicy, smooth, firm, and wholesome — such food is dear to the Sattvic person.'

Examples of Sattvic foods include: fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains (rice, wheat, millet), legumes (lentils, chickpeas, mung dal), dairy (milk, ghee, fresh yoghurt), nuts and seeds (almonds, sesame), natural sweeteners (jaggery, honey in moderation), and herbs and mild spices. Sattvic foods are generally fresh, light, easy to digest, grown in harmony with nature, and prepared with love and intention.

Sattvic foods nourish the Annamaya Kosha (physical body), stabilise the Pranamaya Kosha (vital body), and purify the Manomaya Kosha (mental body) — creating conditions conducive for sustained meditation and spiritual practice.

Rajasic Food – The Diet of Activity and Agitation

Rajasic food stimulates and agitates the mind, creating restlessness, passion, and desire. The Bhagavad Gita (17.9) describes it as: 'Kativ amla lavanaty ushna tikshna ruksha vidahina / Ahara rajasasyeshta dukkha shokamaya prada.' — 'Food that is bitter, sour, salty, excessively hot, pungent, dry, and burning — such food is preferred by the Rajasic person and produces pain, grief, and disease.'

Examples of Rajasic foods include: excessively spicy and pungent foods, sour foods consumed in excess, salted and preserved foods, caffeinated beverages (coffee, energy drinks), fermented foods, fried and oily foods, stimulant herbs, and eating in haste or with agitation. Such foods are not inherently evil — they are part of life for most people — but their excess disturbs the mind's equilibrium and makes sustained concentration and meditation difficult.

Tamasic Food – The Diet of Inertia and Dullness

Tamasic food dulls the mind, promotes lethargy, and depletes vital energy. The Bhagavad Gita (17.10) describes it as: 'Yata yamam gata rasam puti paryushitam cha yat / Uchchishtha mapi cha ashuchyam bhojanam tamasa priyam.' — 'Food that is stale, tasteless, putrid, rotten, left overnight, impure, and unfit — such food is dear to the Tamasic person.'

Examples of Tamasic foods include: stale, overcooked, or reheated food; processed and packaged food with preservatives; meat (especially red and pork), fish, and eggs (as classified in traditional yoga — though modern yoga teachers may have varying views); alcohol and intoxicants; garlic and onion (in large quantities, as per classical texts); and genetically modified and chemically laden foods. Tamasic foods promote dullness, increase sleep, impair digestion, and cloud mental clarity.

5.3 Diet According to Prakriti – Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and Gunas

Yogic diet, informed by Ayurveda, recognises that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition. Each individual's unique constitutional type (Prakriti) determines their specific dietary needs. The three Ayurvedic Doshas — Vata, Pitta, and Kapha — correspond broadly to the three Gunas (Vata-Vata, Pitta-Rajas, Kapha-Tamas) and require distinctly different dietary strategies.

Diet for Vata Prakriti

Vata individuals are characterised by qualities of dryness, coldness, lightness, and mobility. Their digestion is irregular and they are prone to bloating, constipation, anxiety, and joint pain. The ideal diet for Vata balances these qualities with warmth, moisture, heaviness, and stability.

- Warm, cooked, moist, oily, and easily digestible foods
- Sweet, sour, and salty tastes are beneficial
- Warm soups, stews, khichari (rice and lentil porridge), warm milk with spices
- Regular meal timings are essential for Vata
- Avoid: dry, raw, cold, and light foods; excess caffeine and astringent tastes

Diet for Pitta Prakriti

Pitta individuals are characterised by heat, sharpness, intensity, and liquidity. Their digestion is strong but prone to hyperacidity, inflammation, skin conditions, and liver disorders. The ideal diet for Pitta balances these qualities with cooling, sweet, and calming foods.

- Cool or room-temperature foods; avoid hot, spicy, and oily foods
- Sweet, bitter, and astringent tastes are beneficial
- Fresh fruits (sweet varieties), leafy greens, coconut, cucumber, milk, ghee
- Avoid: hot spices, garlic, onion, vinegar, sour fruits, fermented foods, and alcohol
- Eat at regular times to prevent hyperacidity; never skip meals

Diet for Kapha Prakriti

Kapha individuals are characterised by heaviness, coldness, oiliness, and stability. Their digestion is slow and they are prone to weight gain, congestion, lethargy, and diabetes. The ideal diet for Kapha is light, warm, dry, and stimulating.

- Light, dry, warm, and easily digestible foods
- Pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes are beneficial
- Vegetables (especially bitter greens), spices (ginger, black pepper, turmeric), light legumes, honey
- Avoid: dairy, sweet foods, cold drinks, fried foods, and overeating
- Kapha benefits from intermittent fasting and eating only when genuinely hungry

5.4 Pathya and Apathya – Classical Text References

The concept of Pathya (beneficial diet and behaviour) and Apathya (harmful diet and behaviour) is foundational to both Ayurveda and yoga. Pathya does not only refer to diet but to the entire regime of living that supports health and practice. Apathya refers to habits and foods that obstruct health.

From Gheranda Samhita

The Gheranda Samhita, one of the three most authoritative texts of Hatha Yoga, devotes considerable attention to dietary guidelines. It specifies Pathya (suitable food) as: rice, barley, wheat, lentils (black gram/Mudga), fresh vegetables, pure water, milk, ghee, and honey. It emphasises that the yogi should eat with mindfulness and gratitude.

Gheranda Samhita explicitly warns against Apathya: bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, and astringent foods; stale and reheated food; excessive fasting; sexual excess; gambling; excessive conversation; constant association with worldly people; and particularly, eating incompatible food combinations (Viruddhahara). Incompatible combinations include: milk with fish, fruit with milk, honey with hot liquids, and yoghurt at night.

From Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika (1.57-66) enumerates specific foods recommended for the Hatha Yogi: wheat, rice, barley, Shastika (a type of rice), good grains, Mudga beans, Chana (chickpeas), plantain, fig, cucumber, milk, ghee, and butter obtained from cow's milk. These are described as 'Yogic food' (Yoga-upyogi ahara).

The Pradipika warns the yogi against: bitter food, sour food, pungent food, salt, mustard oil, asafoetida (Hing), alcohol, fish, meat of any kind, curd, buttermilk, horse gram, fruit of the Jujube

tree, oil cake, intoxicants, and stale food. It also warns against: overeating, exposure to cold after bathing, sexual intercourse, fasting, and waking before sunrise in the early stages of practice.

From Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 17) not only classifies food according to the Gunas (as above) but also makes a profound philosophical statement about the relationship between food and consciousness. Sri Krishna's teaching implies that what we eat is not merely a physical act but a spiritual one — the quality of our food shapes the quality of our mind, and the quality of our mind determines the depth of our yoga and the clarity of our spiritual life.

The Gita also teaches the principle of Yajna (sacred offering) in the context of food: eating as an act of gratitude and worship, recognising that all food is a gift of the Divine. This attitude of Yajnashesa-bhojana (eating what remains after offering to the Divine) is the highest yogic relationship with food.

5.5 Importance of Yogic Diet in Yoga Sadhana

The relationship between diet and spiritual practice cannot be overstated. Yoga Sadhana requires a body that is clean, light, and free of excessive toxins (Ama); a Prana that flows freely through the Nadis; and a mind that is calm and clear. A heavy, rajasic, or tamasic diet directly obstructs all three.

In the early stages of yoga practice, dietary purity is especially important because the subtle body is being refined and the Nadis are being cleansed. A clean Sattvic diet supports the flow of Prana through the Sushumna Nadi and creates the internal conditions necessary for the awakening of Kundalini Shakti and the experience of higher states of meditation.

Beyond the mechanics of Sadhana, yogic diet serves as a daily practice of mindfulness, self-discipline (Tapas), and non-harming (Ahimsa). By choosing foods that do not require the suffering of other beings, by eating moderately, by preparing food with love and awareness, and by offering food to the Divine before consuming it — the yogi transforms every meal into a sacred act of worship and self-refinement.

Chapter 6: Yogic Principles of Healthy Living

"Yogah karmasu kaushalam." – Bhagavad Gita 2.50 "Yoga is excellence in action."

6.1 Ahara, Vihara, Achara and Vichara

The four pillars of yogic healthy living form a comprehensive framework for wholesome existence. These four dimensions address every aspect of daily life — what we eat, how we move and rest, how we behave, and how we think. Together, they constitute a complete lifestyle prescription from the yogic tradition.

Ahara – Nourishment and Diet

Ahara, which we have explored in depth in the previous chapter, encompasses not only physical food but all forms of nourishment that we receive through our senses. The eyes consume Ahara through what they see; the ears through what they hear; the skin through what it touches; the nose through what it smells. In this broader sense, Ahara includes: the media we consume, the conversations we engage in, the art and music we surround ourselves with, and the natural environments we inhabit.

A yogic approach to Ahara is one of conscious curation — choosing inputs (physical, sensory, and intellectual) that nourish Sattva and weed out those that increase Rajas and Tamas. The yoga teacher models this comprehensive understanding of Ahara, guiding students not just in dietary choices but in the quality of their entire sensory environment.

Vihara – Recreation, Rest, and Movement

Vihara refers to one's mode of recreation, rest, and physical activity. It encompasses how one spends time outside of work and formal practice. Healthy Vihara includes: adequate sleep (7-9 hours for adults), time in nature, gentle walks (Promenade/Vata-samana), recreation that replenishes rather than depletes, and the observance of seasonal rhythms (Ritucharya).

Classical texts recommend that the yogi arise before sunrise (Brahma Muhurta — approximately 96 minutes before sunrise), engage in early morning practice, take midday rest in summer, and retire at a reasonable hour. This rhythm aligns the human body with the natural cycles of day and night — optimising circadian biology, hormonal cycles, and the Pancha-Pranas.

Modern evidence strongly supports the yogic emphasis on Vihara: sleep deprivation is associated with obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cognitive impairment. Time in nature reduces cortisol and activates the parasympathetic system. Regular, moderate physical activity is the

single most effective preventive health intervention available. Yoga as Vihara is both the formal practice and the playful, joyful engagement with life.

Achara – Conduct and Right Behaviour

Achara refers to one's code of conduct — the ethical and behavioural dimension of healthy living. It is the domain of the Yamas and Niyamas of Patanjali. How we behave toward others, how we handle our responsibilities, how we relate to our environment, and how we conduct our daily activities all constitute our Achara.

Sattvic Achara includes: truthfulness (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), honesty in all dealings, sexual responsibility (Brahmacharya), non-possessiveness (Aparigraha), cleanliness (Shaucha), contentment (Santosh), self-discipline (Tapas), study of sacred texts (Swadhyaya), and surrender to a higher purpose (Ishwara Pranidhana). These are not merely moral injunctions; they are profound psychological hygiene practices. People who live ethically — who do not create cognitive dissonance between their values and their actions — experience measurably lower levels of psychological stress.

The yoga teacher who embodies Sattvic Achara — who is honest, humble, disciplined, and compassionate in all their dealings — teaches far more through their being than through their words. Integrity is the foundation of a sustainable teaching career.

Vichara – Right Thinking and Reflection

Vichara refers to the quality of one's thoughts and the practice of discriminative reflection. It is the intellectual and meditative counterpart to the physical and behavioural dimensions of yogic living. Vichara encompasses: the cultivation of Sattvic thoughts; the practice of self-inquiry (Atma-Vichara, as taught by Ramana Maharshi); philosophical study; meditation; and the habitual questioning of one's assumptions and mental patterns.

The quality of our thoughts profoundly influences our health. Chronic negative thinking — rumination, self-criticism, catastrophising, and cynicism — activates the stress response, suppresses immune function, and is associated with a wide range of physical ailments. Conversely, cultivating optimism, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion, and equanimity has measurable positive effects on health and longevity.

Vichara in practice means: cultivating a regular meditation practice to observe and gradually purify one's thought patterns; studying wisdom texts (Swadhyaya); journaling; seeking wise counsel; and practising Pratipaksha Bhavana (YS 2.33) — the deliberate cultivation of the opposite positive thought when negative thoughts arise.

6.2 Yogic Positive Attitudes: Maitri, Karuna, Mudita, and Upeksha

Patanjali, in Yoga Sutra 1.33, prescribes four mental attitudes that, when cultivated, 'clarify the mind': 'Maitri karuna mudita upekshanam sukha dukha punya apunya vishayam bhavanatah chitta prasadanam.' — 'By cultivating attitudes of friendliness toward the happy, compassion toward the unhappy, joy toward the virtuous, and equanimity toward the wicked, the mind becomes clear and serene.'

These four attitudes — known in Buddhist tradition as the Brahmaviharas or 'divine abodes' — constitute a complete emotional medicine for the human psyche. They address every possible relational situation and provide the practitioner with an emotionally intelligent, compassionate, and stable response to all human encounters.

Maitri – Loving Kindness and Friendliness

Maitri (Sanskrit) or Metta (Pali) means genuine friendliness, goodwill, and loving kindness toward all beings. It is the unconditional wish for all beings to be happy and well. Patanjali prescribes Maitri specifically toward those who are happy (Sukha-vishayam) — because the unhealthy tendency is to feel jealousy or envy toward those who are doing well. By consciously cultivating genuine happiness at others' joy, we free ourselves from the toxic psychology of envy.

Maitri meditation (Metta Bhavana) is one of the most clinically validated practices in the field of positive psychology. Research by Barbara Fredrickson and others has demonstrated that Metta practice increases positive emotions, life satisfaction, social connectedness, and physiological resilience. For the yoga teacher, Maitri is the fundamental attitude that creates a safe, welcoming, and inclusive classroom environment.

Karuna – Compassion

Karuna means compassion — the genuine empathic response to the suffering of others and the wish to help alleviate it. Patanjali prescribes Karuna toward those who are suffering (Dukha-vishayam) — because the natural unhealthy response to another's suffering can be avoidance, judgment, or helplessness. Genuine Karuna does not collapse into pity or overwhelm; it maintains clear-seeing (Prajna) while responding with warmth and helpfulness.

Neuroscience has identified specific neural circuits associated with compassion, centred in the anterior insula and anterior cingulate cortex. These circuits can be strengthened through compassion meditation. Compassionate healthcare providers consistently achieve better patient outcomes. For the yoga teacher, Karuna means meeting every student — regardless of their physical limitations, emotional difficulties, or life circumstances — with genuine care and the sincere desire to serve their well-being.

Mudita – Sympathetic Joy

Mudita means altruistic or sympathetic joy — the ability to genuinely rejoice in the happiness, success, and goodness of others. It is the antidote to jealousy and comparative suffering. Patanjali prescribes Mudita toward those who are virtuous or accomplished (Punya-vishayam) — because seeing others' virtue or success can trigger envy and diminishment of self. By cultivating Mudita, we expand our capacity for joy beyond the narrow confines of personal fortune.

The practice of Mudita is deeply liberating because it breaks the zero-sum thinking that characterises competitive, ego-driven existence — the belief that others' gain is our loss. When we genuinely celebrate another's yoga progress, health recovery, or life success, our own capacity for joy expands immeasurably. For the yoga teacher, Mudita is expressed in celebrating each student's unique journey and progress without comparison.

Upeksha – Equanimity

Upeksha means equanimity, balance, and non-attachment — the ability to remain centred and undisturbed in the face of difficult, complex, or morally ambiguous situations. Patanjali prescribes Upeksha toward those who are wicked or unjust (Apunya-vishayam) — because the unhealthy response to wrongdoing is either angry engagement or fearful withdrawal, both of which disturb the mind's equilibrium. Upeksha is not indifference; it is wise, compassionate non-reactivity.

Upeksha is the mature fruit of spiritual practice — the equanimity that comes from being grounded in the deepest dimension of one's being (Purusha/Atman), which is untouched by the fluctuations of circumstance. For the yoga teacher, Upeksha means maintaining professional and personal composure in all situations — not being unduly elated by praise or deflated by criticism, not reacting with anger to difficult students, and maintaining the clear, stable awareness that is the hallmark of an effective teacher and practitioner.

Together, the four Brahmaviharas create an emotionally resilient, compassionate, and joyful inner life. They are not idealistic aspirations but practical mental training practices that progressively transform the quality of one's psychology and, through it, one's physiology and relationships. Research in positive psychology, mindfulness-based interventions, and compassion-based therapies has consistently validated their therapeutic power.

6.3 Bhavas and Bhavanas – Attitudes, Emotions, and Cultivations

Understanding Bhava and Bhavana

The Sanskrit word 'Bhava' encompasses several related meanings: emotion, state of being, attitude, feeling, and the underlying disposition from which thoughts, words, and actions arise. The word derives from the root 'Bhu' meaning 'to be' or 'to become.' Bhava is thus the very being-

quality that one brings to existence — the emotional and attitudinal texture of one's consciousness.

'Bhavana' means cultivation — the deliberate development of specific inner states through practice, contemplation, and intention. Where Bhava is the naturally arising emotional state, Bhavana is the intentional development of positive emotional states through yogic practices. Together, Bhava and Bhavana represent the emotional and attitudinal dimension of yogic health — perhaps the most underemphasised yet most transformative aspect of yoga practice.

Types of Bhavas in Classical Yoga

In the tradition of Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotional love, five primary Bhavas (emotional relationships with the Divine) are recognised:

- **Shanta Bhava (Peaceful/Serene Love):** The calm, peaceful love of the devotee who relates to the Divine as the Absolute Reality — serene, steady, and free of agitation. This is the Bhava of deep meditative surrender.
- **Dasya Bhava (Servant's Love):** The loving attitude of service — relating to the Divine as a devoted servant. Associated with selflessness, humility, and dedicated service (Seva). This Bhava heals narcissism and self-centredness.
- **Sakhya Bhava (Friendship/Companionship):** The warm, intimate love of friendship — seeing the Divine as one's closest friend, confidant, and companion. This Bhava cultivates openness, trust, and emotional intimacy.
- **Vatsalya Bhava (Parental Love):** The tender, protective love of a parent for a child — relating to the Divine as one's own beloved child. This Bhava awakens unconditional nurturing love and dissolves rigid ego boundaries.
- **Madhura Bhava (Sweetest Love):** The most intense and intimate love — the love of the devoted spouse or beloved for their divine partner. Exemplified by Radha's love for Krishna, this Bhava represents the complete dissolution of separation between the individual soul and the Divine.

Bhavanas for Mental and Physical Health

In Patanjali's system, Bhavana is used more broadly to refer to the deliberate cultivation of specific mental states through contemplation and meditation. Beyond the four Brahmaviharas described above, several other Bhavanas are prescribed for health and well-being:

- **Pratipaksha Bhavana (Cultivation of Opposite Thoughts, YS 2.33-34):** When disturbing thoughts (negative, violent, or deluded) arise, the yogi is instructed to deliberately cultivate their opposite. Hatred is met with love; fear with courage; judgment with acceptance; resentment with forgiveness. This is one of yoga's most practically

useful psychological tools — a form of cognitive restructuring millennia before cognitive-behavioural therapy.

- **Ishvara Bhavana (Contemplation of the Divine):** Holding the awareness of the Divine Presence — the recognition that all beings, all experiences, and all moments are expressions of the same sacred intelligence. Ishvara Bhavana cultivates reverence, wonder, and the dissolution of petty egoic concerns. Research on spirituality and health consistently identifies a sense of meaning and connection as among the most powerful protective factors against disease.
- **Atma Bhavana (Contemplation of the Self):** The practice of identifying with the eternal, unchanging witness-consciousness rather than with the temporary, changing body-mind. This is the highest Bhavana — the direct recognition of one's true nature as pure awareness. Its culmination is liberation (Moksha), but even partial practice creates profound equanimity and freedom from existential anxiety.
- **Shuddhi Bhavana (Cultivation of Purity):** The deliberate cultivation of purity — in thought, word, deed, body, and environment. Shuddhi Bhavana underlies the Niyama of Shaucha (purity) and supports the progressive refinement of the body-mind system.

Role of Bhavas and Bhavanas in Health and Well-Being

The role of Bhavas and Bhavanas in health is both direct and profound. Research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology has established that emotional states directly influence immune function, inflammatory processes, hormonal balance, and even gene expression (epigenetics). Chronic negative emotional states — fear, anger, grief, and shame — suppress immune function, increase inflammation, elevate stress hormones, and shorten telomeres (markers of cellular ageing). Positive emotional states — love, joy, gratitude, and serenity — have the opposite effects.

The cultivation of positive Bhavas through Bhavana practices — Metta meditation, devotional chanting (Bhajan), Kirtan, Japa, Puja, service (Seva), and contemplative prayer — creates a measurable shift in the physiological milieu of the body. Practices like Loving Kindness Meditation have been shown to increase vagal tone (a measure of parasympathetic activity and social engagement), reduce inflammatory markers, lengthen telomeres, and improve immune response.

For the yoga teacher, cultivating their own Bhavas through daily practice is not optional — it is the very foundation of their effectiveness. A teacher who has developed genuine Maitri, Karuna, Mudita, and Upeksha, who approaches each student with authentic love and respect, who radiates the Bhava of Shanta (peace) and Sattva (clarity), creates a healing field that extends far beyond the techniques they teach.

The ancient texts repeatedly remind us that the yoga teacher is not a fitness instructor — they are a Guru, a light-bearer. The word Guru means one who dispels the darkness of ignorance (Gu =

darkness, Ru = light). This role is fulfilled not through information alone but through the quality of one's Bhava — through the radiance of a life genuinely transformed by the practice of yoga.

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

The following glossary provides concise definitions of key Sanskrit terms used throughout this text.

- **Adhi:** Primary disease; mental/psychic affliction that is the root cause of physical disease.
- **Ahara:** Food and nourishment; all sensory and physical inputs that sustain life.
- **Ahimsa:** Non-violence; non-harming in thought, word, and deed.
- **Ajna Chakra:** Sixth energy centre; located between the eyebrows; associated with intuition and perception.
- **Akasha:** Space/Ether; the subtlest of the five great elements.
- **Alasya:** Laziness; lethargy; one of the nine obstacles to yoga.
- **Alabdha-Bhumikatva:** Inability to achieve progress; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Anahata Chakra:** Fourth energy centre; heart chakra; associated with love and compassion.
- **Anavasthitatva:** Instability; inability to maintain progress; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Annamaya Kosha:** Physical body; the grossest sheath, nourished by food.
- **Anandamaya Kosha:** Bliss sheath; the subtlest kosha, associated with deep joy and unconscious impressions.
- **Antarayas:** Obstacles to yoga; the nine disturbances of the mind listed by Patanjali.
- **Aparigraha:** Non-possessiveness; one of the five Yamas.
- **Apana Vayu:** Downward-moving vital force; governs elimination.
- **Apathya:** Foods and behaviours that are harmful or unsuitable for one's constitution and practice.
- **Asana:** Yogic posture; the third limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Asmita:** Ego; I-am-ness; the second of Patanjali's five Kleshas.
- **Ashtanga Yoga:** The eight-limbed yoga of Patanjali.
- **Atman:** The eternal, unchanging Self; pure consciousness.
- **Avirati:** Sensory overindulgence; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Avidya:** Ignorance; fundamental misidentification; the root of all Kleshas.
- **Bhavana:** Deliberate cultivation of a mental/emotional state; contemplative practice.
- **Bhava:** Emotional state; feeling; attitude; the texture of one's consciousness.

- **Bhrantidarsana:** False perception; delusional seeing; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Brahmacharya:** Sexual responsibility; continence; one of the five Yamas.
- **Brahmaviharas:** The four divine abodes — Maitri, Karuna, Mudita, and Upeksha.
- **Chitta Vritti:** Fluctuations of the mind-field.
- **Daurmanasya:** Despondency; depression; one of the four accompanying symptoms.
- **Dharana:** Concentration; the sixth limb of Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Dhyana:** Meditation; the seventh limb of Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Dosha:** Bio-energetic force in Ayurveda; Vata, Pitta, or Kapha.
- **Duhkha:** Suffering; pain; one of the four accompanying symptoms.
- **Dvesha:** Aversion; the fourth of Patanjali's five Kleshas.
- **Gunas:** The three qualities of nature — Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas.
- **Hatha Yoga Pradipika:** A foundational 15th-century Hatha Yoga text.
- **Heyam Dukham Anagatam:** 'The suffering yet to come can be prevented.' (Yoga Sutra 2.16)
- **Ishvara Pranidhana:** Surrender to a higher principle; the fifth Niyama.
- **Jatharagni:** Digestive fire; the metabolic fire in the stomach.
- **Kaivalya:** Liberation; the state of pure consciousness free from all conditioning.
- **Kapha:** The dosha constituted of Earth and Water; governs structure and lubrication.
- **Karuna:** Compassion; one of the four Brahmaviharas.
- **Kleshas:** The five afflictions — Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha.
- **Koshas:** The five sheaths of existence; layers of the human being.
- **Kundalini:** The dormant cosmic energy residing at the base of the spine.
- **Maitri:** Loving kindness; friendliness; one of the four Brahmaviharas.
- **Manomaya Kosha:** The mental sheath; the layer of ordinary mind, thoughts, and emotions.
- **Manipura Chakra:** Third energy centre; solar plexus; associated with will and digestion.
- **Mitahara:** Moderate, measured eating; a cornerstone of yogic diet.
- **Mudita:** Sympathetic joy; rejoicing in others' happiness; one of the four Brahmaviharas.
- **Muladhara Chakra:** First energy centre; root chakra; associated with earth and survival.
- **Nadi:** Energy channel in the subtle body.
- **Niyama:** Personal observances; the second limb of Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Pancha-Mahabhutas:** The five great elements — Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space.

- **Pancha-Prana:** The five vital forces — Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana, and Vyana.
- **Pathya:** Suitable diet and behaviour that supports health and practice.
- **Pitta:** The dosha constituted of Fire and Water; governs transformation.
- **Prakriti:** Individual constitutional nature; also nature in the Samkhya sense.
- **Pramada:** Negligence; carelessness; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Prana Vayu:** Inward-moving vital force; governs inhalation and reception.
- **Pranamaya Kosha:** The vital/energy sheath; layer of Prana.
- **Pranayama:** Breath regulation; the fourth limb of Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Pratipaksha Bhavana:** Cultivation of the opposite positive thought; Yoga Sutra 2.33.
- **Pratyahara:** Sensory withdrawal; the fifth limb of Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Raga:** Attachment; craving; the third of Patanjali's five Kleshas.
- **Rajas:** The guna of activity, passion, and motion.
- **Sahasrara Chakra:** Seventh energy centre; crown chakra; associated with cosmic consciousness.
- **Samadhi:** Complete absorption; the eighth limb; the state of unity-consciousness.
- **Samskaras:** Deep-seated mental impressions from past experiences and actions.
- **Samana Vayu:** Equalising vital force; governs digestion and assimilation.
- **Samshaya:** Doubt; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Santosha:** Contentment; one of the five Niyamas.
- **Satya:** Truthfulness; one of the five Yamas.
- **Sattva:** The guna of clarity, purity, and harmony.
- **Shatkarmas:** Six cleansing practices of Hatha Yoga.
- **Shaucha:** Purity; cleanliness; one of the five Niyamas.
- **Styana:** Mental dullness; languor; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Sushumna Nadi:** The central energy channel running through the spinal column.
- **Svadhyaya:** Self-study; study of sacred texts; one of the five Niyamas.
- **Svasthya:** Health; the state of being established in oneself.
- **Swadhisthana Chakra:** Second energy centre; sacral chakra; associated with water and creativity.
- **Tamas:** The guna of inertia, heaviness, and darkness.
- **Tapas:** Austerity; discipline; purifying effort; one of the five Niyamas.
- **Tapatrayas:** Three-fold suffering — Adhyatmika, Adhibhautika, Adhidaivika.

- **Tridosha:** The three doshas — Vata, Pitta, Kapha — of Ayurveda.
- **Udana Vayu:** Upward-moving vital force; governs speech and expression.
- **Upeksha:** Equanimity; one of the four Brahmaviharas.
- **Vata:** The dosha constituted of Air and Space; governs movement.
- **Vijnanamaya Kosha:** The intellectual/wisdom sheath; the layer of discriminative intelligence.
- **Vishuddha Chakra:** Fifth energy centre; throat chakra; associated with communication.
- **Vyadhi:** Physical disease; somatic manifestation; one of the nine obstacles.
- **Vyana Vayu:** Pervasive vital force; governs circulation and distribution.
- **Yama:** Universal ethical restraints; the first limb of Ashtanga Yoga.
- **Yoga Nidra:** Yogic sleep; a powerful deep relaxation practice.

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