

Role of Yogic Practices and Panchakarma on Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Research Article

Jhanvi Shah¹, Sparsh Kakkar², Umesh Kumar^{3*}, Garima Jaiswal³

1. PG Scholar (Yoga), 2. Ph.D. Scholar, 3. Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Indian System of Medicine, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Sector 125, Noida- 201313, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of an 8-week intervention combining yogic practices and Panchakarma treatments in alleviating symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and improving overall quality of life. IBS is a chronic gastrointestinal disorder characterized by abdominal pain, bloating, and irregular bowel movements, which can significantly affect both physical and psychological well-being. Traditional management strategies primarily include dietary modifications, medications, and stress reduction techniques, but these do not always provide comprehensive relief. In this context, the study explored the potential benefits of integrating holistic approaches, specifically yoga and Panchakarma, as complementary therapies for IBS. Participants underwent an 8-week program involving daily yoga practices designed to reduce stress and improve digestive function, alongside Panchakarma treatments aimed at detoxification and balancing the body's internal energies (Doshas). The study assessed changes in IBS symptoms, including pain, bloating, and bowel irregularities, as well as overall quality of life. Data were collected through self-reported symptom diaries, questionnaires, and clinical assessments. Results indicated significant improvements in IBS-related symptoms and a notable enhancement in participants' physical and emotional well-being. The findings suggest that combining yogic practices with Panchakarma therapies may offer a promising alternative or adjunct to conventional IBS treatments, offering a holistic approach to managing this complex condition.

Keywords: Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Yogic Practice, Panchakarma, Gastrointestinal Disorders, Holistic Health, Detoxification, Well-Being.

Introduction

It is a gastrointestinal disorder that affects approximately 10-15% of people globally (1). This means it affects about 1 in 7 or 1 in every 20 individuals worldwide (2). Its chronic abdominal pain causes bloating alongside changed bowel habits thus making it difficult for people living with this illness to lead normal healthy lives like other populations do. Despite extensive research, little is known about its causes.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing interest in mind-body interventions like yoga and traditional Ayurvedic practices (Panchakarma) used to manage chronic conditions. Yoga, involving physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation, is known for its holistic benefits including reduction of stress and improvement of gastrointestinal function. Panchakarma is a detoxification procedure in Ayurveda that aims at cleansing toxins from the body while restoring balance.

* Corresponding Author:

Umesh Kumar

Assistant Professor,
Amity Institute of Indian System of Medicine,
Amity University Uttar Pradesh,
Sector 125, Noida- 201313,
Uttar Pradesh, India.
Email Id: ukumar1@amity.edu

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

IBS is considered as a functional GI disorder with no identified structural or biochemical abnormalities; mainly it diagnosed using Rome IV criteria for recurrent abdominal pain associated with defecation or change in bowel habits (3).

Objectives

These are the primary goals of this study:

- To investigate how an 8-week yogic intervention can help alleviate IBS symptoms.
- To assess if Panchakarma therapy together with yoga is effective in managing IBS.

Pathophysiology

The exact cause of IBS is not well understood, but it is thought to arise from a myriad of underlying factors such as:

- Weakened motility of the digestive tract
- Visceral hypersensitivity
- Factors to do with the Mind (e.g., stress, anxiety)

Literature Review

IBS affects approximately 10-15% of the global population, with variations in prevalence across different regions and demographic groups. The disorder is more common in women and younger individuals. The diagnosis of IBS is clinical, based on symptom

criteria such as the Rome IV criteria, which include recurrent abdominal pain associated with defecation or changes in bowel habits. These criteria have been developed and refined to improve the accuracy of IBS diagnosis while minimizing the need for extensive diagnostic testing (3).

The pathophysiology of IBS is multifactorial and involves a complex interaction between the gut-brain axis, visceral hypersensitivity, altered gastrointestinal motility, and dysbiosis. Recent studies have highlighted the role of psychological stress, diet, and inflammation in exacerbating IBS symptoms. Although several theories have been proposed, including disturbances in gut microbiota and immune dysregulation, a unified explanation for the etiology of IBS remains elusive (1).

Current treatment strategies for IBS are focused on symptom management and improving quality of life. These include dietary modifications (e.g., low FODMAP diet), pharmacotherapy (e.g., antispasmodics, laxatives, and antidepressants), and psychological therapies (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy) (4) (5). There is growing interest in mind-body interventions, such as yoga and Ayurvedic practices like Panchakarma, for their potential in managing chronic conditions like IBS. Yoga, which incorporates physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation (6), is known for its holistic benefits, including stress reduction and improved gastrointestinal function (7) (8). Panchakarma, an Ayurvedic detoxification procedure, aims to cleanse the body of toxins and restore balance, showing promise as an adjunct therapy for IBS (9).

Conventional Treatment

The standard treatment for IBS is dietary changes, pharmacotherapy (e.g. laxatives and antidepressants) or psychological therapies (cognitive-behavioral therapy). But these interventions frequently deliver only modest relief, prompting patients to turn to more unconventional treatment options.

Integrative Approach

Yogic practices combined with Panchakarma are the holistic management strategies that can work for IBS sufferers by touching all aspects-physical and even psychological. This holistic treatment is targeted towards offering a complete cure from the symptoms and improving quality of life.

Mechanisms of Action

Yogic Practices

Physical postures (asanas) breathing exercises (pranayama), and meditation will all be done in yoga. Studies show that yoga can help improve gut motility, reduce stress and promote general well-being.

- Physical Postures (Asanas) - To enhance GI motility and function.
- Breathing Exercises (Pranayama): Help increase feelings of relaxation, as stress can aggravate symptoms associated with IBS.
- Meditation - helps in improving mental health and lowering down anxiety & depression.

Panchakarma

Ayurvedic detoxification and rejuvenation therapy includes five major procedures known as the *Vamana* (therapeutic vomiting), *Virechana* (therapeutic purgation), *Basti* (medicated enema), *Nasya* (nasal administration) and *Raktamoskshna* (bloodletting).

- Detoxification- Eliminates toxins (ama) from the body which got accumulated over months & years.
- Restores Balance: Rebalances the doshas (Vata, Pitta and Kapha) for better health.
- Improved Digestion: Increases the efficiency of digestion and metabolism.

Methodology

Twelve participants diagnosed with IBS following the Rome IV criteria were recruited. The participants were 18 to 50 years old and had a history of IBS symptoms for at least six months.

Intervention

Table 1: Showing an 8-weeks program consisting of different yogic practices and Panchakarma therapy:

	Therapy	Time for holding / Duration/ Frequency
Asana*	Ardh Matsyendrasana	30 sec * 2
	Bhujangasana	30 sec * 2
	Ustrasana	30 sec * 2
	Tadasana	30 sec * 2
	Malasana	1 min * 2
	Paschimottasana	30 sec * 2
	Supta Matsyendrasana	30 sec * 2
	Dhanurasana	30 sec * 2
	Vajrasana	10 min after every meal
	Pawanmuktasana	30 sec * 2
	Tiryak Tadasana	30 sec * 2
	Naukasana	30 sec * 2
	Trikonasana	30 sec * 2
	Setu Bandhasana	30 sec * 2
	Parivritt Trikonasana	30 sec * 2
Jathara Parivrittasana	30 counts * 2	
Parivritt Sukhasana	30 sec * 2	
Anada Balasana	30 sec * 2	
Pranayama*	Shavasana	10 min
	Kapalbhati	3-4 min
	Nadi Sodhan	3-4 min
	Brahmari	3-4 min
Meditation	Ujjayi	3-4 min
	Om Chanting	20 times
Panchakarma Therapy	Mantra Chanting (Mahamrutyunjaya Mantra)	4-7 min
	Vamana	As per recommendation by the physician
	Virechana	As per recommendation by the physician
	Basti	As per recommendation by the physician
	Abhayanga	As per recommendation by the physician
Swedan	As per recommendation by the physician	

*Note: Yogic practices (Asana etc.) and Panchakarma therapy would be selected and recommended by the experts by assessing the condition of patient.

Assessment Tools

IBS Severity Scoring System (IBS-SSS): Used to evaluate the severity of IBS symptom.

Link: https://repository.niddk.nih.gov/media/studies/ibsos/Forms/IBSOS_IBS_Symptom_Severity_Scale_IBSSSS_Form.pdf Feedback.

Result

Table 2: Showing the pre and post intervention score on symptoms of IBS changed after yoga and Panchakarma therapy:

Parameter	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Change
Abdominal Pain (IBS-SSS)	8	4	-4
Bloating (IBS-SSS)	7	3	-4
Bowel Habits (IBS-SSS)	6	2	-4
Quality of Life (scale)	5	9	+4
Stress Level (scale)	7	3	-4

Notes:

- The scores can be based on a specific scale (e.g., 0-10 for severity).

- "Change" represents the difference between pre- and post-intervention scores, indicating improvement or worsening of symptoms.

Among these respondents, subjective improvements were reported in areas such as:

- Abdominal pain and bloating was less.
- Improved bowel habits.
- Increased sense of well-being and energy.
- Improves stress and emotional management.

Discussion

Impact of Yogic Practice

Yogic techniques, especially asanas & pranayama significantly helped in the management of IBS. The physical postures played a role in promoting gastrointestinal function, and the breathing exercises had effects on reducing stress - which can trigger IBS symptoms.

Role of Panchakarma

This was followed by some form of Panchakarma therapy that further detoxified the body and created a foundation conducive for developing better health through yogic practices. The ancient therapies-Vamana, Virechana and Basti; Raktmokshan, Nasya provide a

holistic therapeutic approach to IBS by having a major influence in both the physical manner agni & mental (sattva gyan).

Stress Reduction: Both yoga and Panchakarma encourage relaxation thus reducing stress which is one of the major causes of triggering IBS symptoms.

Better Gut-Brain Function: Yoga (particularly pranayama and meditation) can improve gut-brain signaling, regulating gastrointestinal function accurately.

Conclusion

Panchakarma is a series of detoxifying procedures that purify the body and bring doshas back into balance, potentially enhancing digestion & health index. The findings indicate that significant improvements occurred for IBS symptoms, psychological well-being as well as the overall quality of life thereby proving the potential benefits that integrative therapies can have in managing IBS.

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