

Diabetes

Diabetes in various forms affects up to 5 percent of the world population with 12 million diabetics in Western Europe alone. Of the different ways in which diabetes presents, noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) is probably the most commonly encountered genetic disease. NIDDM or Type II diabetes is multifactorial, depending also on environmental factors including obesity, sedentary lifestyles and nutritional imbalances.

Yoga has shown some beneficial results in curing diabetes. The yoga exercises that are prescribed for curing diabetes is different from hatha yoga exercise because it involves positions tailored to treat certain conditions, as well as meditation, relaxation and stretching exercises.

One of the studies conducted to cure diabetes was the one set up by the Yoga Biomedical Trust, founded in 1982 by biochemist Dr Robin Monro, and an Indian yoga research foundation which discovered that practicing yoga for 30 minutes a day for one month helped reduce blood glucose levels in some diabetics.

The yoga patients took part in one or two 90-minute sessions a week and were asked to practice at home. The classes included the specific yoga exercises of the spinal twist, the bow and abdominal breathing.

At the end of the 12 weeks blood sugar levels fell significantly in all patients in the group and were slightly raised in a control group which had not joined in the yoga sessions. Three yoga students managed to reduce their medication, including one man who had not changed his drug regime for 20 years.

It has been known for a long time that exercise is helpful for diabetics. Yoga therapy may help reduce stress levels which could play a part in maturity onset diabetes. But one drawback is that some patients would find it hard to keep up the regular sessions needed to sustain the benefit. All the patients said they would like to see these classes set up on a permanent basis but we don't have the money.

It is not necessarily the exercise component of the yoga therapy package which is most important, because there is not enough physical exercise to account for the changes, but stress reduction has a lot to do with it. Stress hormones increase sugar levels in the blood. People also benefit from the stabilization of their moods which yoga brings, an increased feeling of well-being and a feeling of being more in control, which may help with their diet control.