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A Summary of a Cochrane Review: Yoga for epilepsy

Nancy Santesso, RD, MLIS, PhD

McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada

1. Introduction

Review authors in the Cochrane Collaboration conducted a review of the effects of yoga for epilepsy. After searching for all relevant studies, they identified two studies. In these two studies, people with epilepsy were randomly selected to either do yoga or sham yoga (or receive psychological therapy) for 5 weeks to 6 months. This summary presents the findings of these studies.

1.1. Yoga and epilepsy

Epilepsy is a chronic condition in which people are prone to have seizures. Although people have different types of seizures and the number of seizures can vary per month or per year, epilepsy can affect their personal lives, health and work. There are a variety of medications available to help people control seizures and the goal of any treatment is to reduce the number of seizures, the duration of the seizures, and improve overall quality of life. As many medications have side effects, it would be ideal to find treatments that could control epilepsy and reduce the need for anti-seizure medications.

Researchers are exploring whether yoga could be an alternative treatment for epilepsy. Yoga includes breathing exercises, meditation and holding specific body positions. It is thought that doing yoga could be relaxing and reduce stress. It is also thought that it could have an effect on brain wave activity and arousal levels.

2. What does the research say?

Two small studies with a total of 50 people evaluated the effects of yoga in people who did not have well-controlled epilepsy. One study compared people doing yoga to people receiving psychotherapy (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) for five weeks and measured what happened after 12 months. The other study compared people doing yoga to people doing a sham yoga or no treatment for 6 months.

The evidence from the studies was very low quality because there were very few people in the studies and it was unclear whether the studies were well-conducted. For example, it was unclear whether people or researchers could tell ahead of time whether people would be

Correspondence: Nancy Santesso, santesna@mcmaster.ca.

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selected to do yoga or not. The people and researchers in the studies were also probably or definitely aware of whether they were doing yoga or not and this awareness could affect how well they thought the treatments were working. For these reasons, we are uncertain about the effects of yoga (see Table 1).

From this review, we see that there are few studies using good study design to evaluate the effects of yoga for epilepsy. More randomised controlled trials, in which people are randomly selected to do yoga or not do yoga need to be carried out. Studies should also measure the effects of yoga that are important to people with epilepsy, such as changes in overall quality of life and whether antiseizure medications are reduced.

3. Where does this information come from?

This summary is based on a Cochrane systematic review: Panebianco M, Sridharan K, Ramaratnam S. Yoga for epilepsy. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2015 May 2;5:CD001524. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD001524.pub2.

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Table 1

What was measured	Effect when not doing yoga or when receiving psychological therapy	Effect when doing yoga	Quality of the evidence ^a	What happens when doing yoga
Number of people who did not have a seizure (2 studies, 50 people)	One study found that yoga may increase the number of people who do not have a seizure compared to not doing yoga. The other study found that there may be little to no effect on the number of people who do not have a seizure compared to psychological therapy.		⊕⊕⊕⊕ very low	It is uncertain whether yoga increases the number of people who do not have a seizure.
Number of seizures per month (1 study, 32 people)	1 to 3 seizures per month	1 to 2 fewer seizures per month	⊕⊕⊕⊕ very low	It is uncertain whether yoga reduces the number of seizures per month.
Number of people with a 50% reduction in the duration of a seizure (2 studies, 50 people)	One study found that yoga may increase the number of people with shorter seizures. The other study found that yoga may not increase the number of people when compared to psychological therapy.		⊕⊕⊕⊕ very low	It is uncertain whether yoga increases the number of people with shorter seizures.
Quality of life (1 study, 18 people)	The effects on quality of life were not consistent when comparing yoga to psychological therapy using different quality of life scales.		⊕⊕⊕⊕ very low	It is uncertain whether yoga improves quality of life.
Dosage of anti-seizure drugs	–	–	–	Not measured in the studies.

^a Details about the quality of the evidence: Evidence was very low quality because it is unclear if the studies were well-conducted and there were very few people in the studies.