

Integrative Yoga Therapy Lifestyle Practices for New Mothers

K. de Araujo, November 2009

Australian Institute of Yoga Therapy & the Centre for Adult Education

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Objective:

This research explored whether integrative yoga therapy lifestyle management techniques can improve the quality of life for new mothers.

Methods:

This was a multiple subject case study of 10 postnatal women who had given birth to a child in the previous 12 months and who were currently looking after their child. Each participant was assessed for her needs, abilities and interests and an individualised Yoga therapy program was developed to integrate into her lifestyle. Integrating the Yoga therapy practices into their lifestyle was premised on an understanding that new mothers are often 'time poor' and that trying to add a 'stand alone' Yoga practice into their schedule is difficult.

Subjective Quality of Life questionnaires were administered at the beginning and end of the study and a post-test interview was undertaken to gain subjective, qualitative feedback. The subjective quality of life questions were adapted from Cummins' ComQOL-A5-Adults Quality of Life Scale (1997, 2002), using a scale of 0 to 10.

Results:

Nine subjects completed the 4-week study.

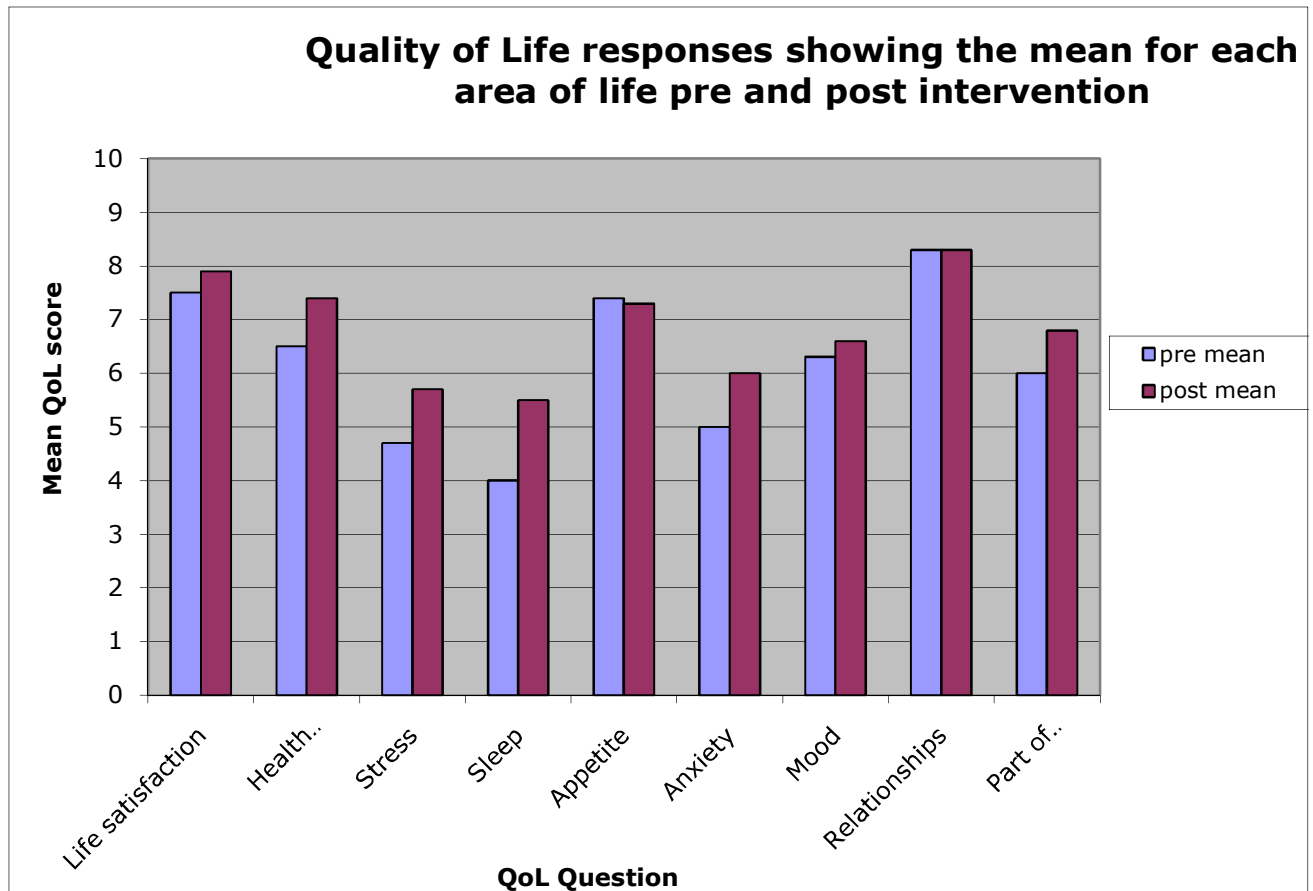
The pre and post test mean scores (n=9) for each area of QoL was tabulated and improvements were shown in 7 of the 9 areas. Results for questions on stress and anxiety were inverted so that a higher score represents a more positive outcome

On the scale of 0 to 10 positive mean differences were reported for:

- * Life satisfaction (0.33)
- * Health satisfaction (0.83)
- * Stress (Higher Score indicates 'less stress') (1.1)
- * Quality of sleep (1.5)
- * Anxiety level (Higher score indicates lower anxiety) (0.95)
- * Mood level (0.22)
- * Feeling part of your community (0.83)

Fig. 1 shows the graph of the mean pre and post study scores for all the areas of QoL

Fig 1



Responses to the post-test interview suggest the yoga therapy may have increased subjects' quality of life in a number of different ways. The most common themes reported were that the individualised, integrative Yoga therapy:

1. Provided an opportunity for new mothers to become more aware of their own wellbeing, which resulted in re-prioritising of their lifestyle choices and actions.
2. Provided practices that calmed the mind and/or emotions.
3. Re-contextualised yoga so that its benefits could be seen as accessible through integrating practices into daily life.
4. Provided asana practices to relieve physical strain to common problem areas for new mothers such as neck and shoulder tension and weakening of the abdomen.

Discussion

Quality of Life results were not tested for statistical significance due to small sample size. While there were improvements in Quality of Life measures reported after the trial, these may not have been statistically significant. Further, due to the absence of a control it is unclear from the quantitative data whether the observed changes were the result of the Yoga Therapy or simply random variations. However the final interview for each individual provides a clearer picture of how the yoga therapy may have related to improvements in Quality of Life.

Conclusion:

The Yoga-based lifestyle practices that were used in this study to integrate into the lives of postnatal women were not finite. There is no set of specific practices because each new mother may have a circumstance or need that may make some practices more integrative to her than others. However, this study did find a number of preferred practices that may be more accessible or enjoyable for postnatal women.

Subjects were introduced to the idea that yoga practices do not always require a special location or equipment, and found that there are benefits in doing just a few minutes or even seconds of a practice. They were also introduced to the Yogic principles of Yama and Niyama, with the concepts of kindness to self and self-reflection being regarded as valuable in the busy life of a new mother.

This study suggested that integrative, Yoga therapy lifestyle practices may contribute to improving a new mother's quality of life.