

# WOMEN'S HEALTH



The Yoga Institute

# WOMEN'S HEALTH & YOGA

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## Introduction

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## Acknowledgement



# INTRODUCTION

This book especially features yoga to boost women's health and addresses related issues. A handy guide during the COVID pandemic will surely help you to boost your overall fitness.

Women experience various health related challenges. They are more likely to be diagnosed with certain diseases compared to men. Many chronic ailments and conditions—such as irregular or missed periods, weight gain, fatigue, excess facial hair growth, thyroid problems, sleep apnea, PCOs, PCODs, stress, pregnancy, heart diseases, and hormonal disorders etc. are commonly experienced by women. In many cases, there is no known cure or rigorous hormonal therapy or birth control pills etc. are prescribed. These impact women health adversely and can have long term side-effects.

Yoga gives in the much-needed reliefs for women of all ages. The different techniques described here are based on ancient yoga practices, hatha yoga texts, yoga philosophies and our experience of being the oldest yoga institute in the world.

This is an initiative by The Yoga Institute to bring to light, different women related health issues and yoga methods to keep us strong and overcome the present COVID adversity.

Easy to follow guidelines and tips can be practiced by women of all age groups and from diverse walks-of-life. This book is deep-rooted in scientific facts, data and experiences. The principles are just as an advisory to maintain a healthy way of life, not a prescription for any medical condition.

Wishing you a healthy and happy life!

Sattvik diet or Vegetarian diet is recommended, and it should be nutritious, fresh, non-spicy and less oily. Eating meals at regular intervals is a must. Eating on time is important. Stale, over-heated and processed foods should be avoided.

## Yoga prescribes the food consumption as below

- Chew each morsel of food well until it becomes a paste in the mouth mixed with saliva.
- Ensure you fill your stomach half with solid foods, 1/4th with liquids and leave remaining 1/4th empty for better digestion.
- Eat light dinner and sleep minimum 2 hours post-dinner

## Recommended foods to boost overall and hormonal health

1. **Iron Deficiency** is a common symptom experienced by many women across the world especially due to hormonal changes and blood loss because of the menstrual cycle, and an array of ailments women experience throughout their lifetime due to hormonal changes. Iron rich foods such as spinach, beans, dark green leafy vegetables, pea's etc., dried fruits such as raisins and apricots. All iron-fortified millets like bajra, ragi, jowar, rotis, cereals, breads and pastas etc.

2. Select your **protein** right. Consume protein rich pulses like moong dal, tofu, chickpeas, peanuts, dairy products like fresh butter milk and paneer etc. If you prefer vegan diet then replace dairy products with soya beans, tofu and soya milk.

3. **Vitamin C, Vitamin A, Vitamin E and minerals** plays an important role in repairing tissues, anti-oxidants and improve hormonal health. Every day diet should include natural sources of vitamins and minerals thus include fruits like lemon, oranges, tomatoes, gooseberry (amla), milk, pumpkin, carrots and sweet potato etc.

4. **Drink ample of liquids** - your daily intake of liquids should be around eight to ten glasses example; butter milk, green tea, soups etc. This will

keep the digestion adequate and flush out all the impurities and toxins.

5. **Antioxidants and omega-3** rich foods help to fight against infections and thus boosting overall hormonal health. These foods also possess anti-inflammatory properties; some essential sources are almonds, peanuts, cooking oil like sunflower oil and peanut oil.

6. **Folates or folic acid** intake in adequate amounts is necessary to keep the menstrual cycle healthy. Some of the natural sources are legumes, dal, beetroots, different nuts and seeds.

7. **Chamomile or Green tea** with honey as natural sweetener helps to soothe the menstrual aches and pains.

8. **Clarified butter or Ghee** prepared from cow's milk is rich in Omega Fatty acids, vitamins A, E, K and conjugated linoleic acid. All these nutrients are useful for losing excess fat, prevent bloating, and ovaries are benefitted immensely.

## Avoid

- Overeating, (eat only when you feel hungry)
- Processed foods, junk foods, refined flours, polished grains
- Sugary, carbonated drinks
- Spicy, deep fried and oily foods
- Preserved foods and pickles, jams etc.

# 2 NATURAL SUNLIGHT TO FIGHT ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

We often hear symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression experienced by most women during the menstrual cycle, pre-menopause and post-menopause stages. Commonly most women undergo **mood swings, cramps, emotional issues, insomnia, weight gain and disturbed sleep.** Sunlight has **vitamin D**, which is very essential for hormonal and emotional health.

Everyday 15 to 20 minutes soak in early sun rays or evening sun rays by going outside and exposing your arms, face and back to the sunrays.

**Serotonin levels** are improved by exposure to sunlight daily. Mood, emotional health improves and quality of sleep is better.

Sunlight and nature is known to boost overall health, improve conditions like low blood pressure, anxiety and depression. Being in nature also helps to relax. Sunlight also has a positive and soothing effect on the nervous system and reduces stress.

**Stronger Bones-** Women as they age due to lower Vitamin D levels; they tend to experience common conditions like rickets, osteoporosis, dental problem, widening of gaps between teeth etc. Vitamin D from natural sunlight, thus helps to maintain stronger bones and teeth.

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“Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny.”

Thus positive thinking with good motivational thoughts plays a significant role in relaxing the mind, calming emotions and taking care of hormonal health.

We generally feel insecure, sad, depressed and anxious because we have expectations from others. Wasteful thoughts like “I am correct and the other person has to understand this and that”. However, in reality, these thoughts really generate negativity and emotionally bring you down. You are left fatigued and tired.

#### To stay hormonally fit and calm,

- Accept people as they are and do not try to change them
- Reflect and let go of unnecessary feelings.
- Limit your expectations
- Help yourself and be your own healer.
- Do your duties to self and others without expectations.
- Past is of no use and future is yet to come. Live in present

- All are surrounded by criticism but you pay attention to constructive criticism
- Our mind is full of thoughts, moment you encounter a negative thought try to replace with a positive one or keep mind busy with activities or hobbies like painting, playing with your children, meditation, cooking or singing or anything which makes you feel good.





You might think that I breathe every-day. Important question is how do I breathe every-day?

Pranayama is the ancient practice of controlling your breath. The goal of pranayama is to connect your body and mind and helps to deeply relax. Also breathing exercises or pranayamas help to supply your body with adequate amounts of oxygen as well as removing toxins. This provides healing physiological and psychological benefits.

#### Benefits:

- Brings about a balanced state of mind.
- Boosts immunity and increases stamina.
- Helps overcome emotional and hormonal imbalances.
- Concentration which is the crucial objective of Pranayama, "Mind control via breath control"

#### Everyday Try -

## Yogendra Pranayama I or Equal breathing

First thing is to pay attention to the air you inhale into the lungs; it's a conscious effort not just a mechanical process. Breathing is a vital force, which nourishes your body. Deep conscious breathing helps by reducing stress levels and increases oxygen circulation.

#### Method-

If you want to relax quickly; breathe in and breathe out equal amount of air or Yogendra Pranayama I. Breathing should be smooth and non-jerky inhalation and exhalation of air. You can easily do this by sitting in your office chair or from your sofa. Just close your eyes and be comfortable (this can be easily done sitting, standing, or lying down).

## Anuloma Viloma Pranayama

This pranayama is known to balance out the pranic channels i.e. Ida and Pingala Nadis. This, in turn, helps to stimulate the Sushumna Nadi, which is at the centre. This helps in balancing the two hemispheres of the brain. Thus bring about peace, tranquility, healing the body and helps in removing the toxins.

#### Method-

Sit in a comfortable meditative posture, and using your right hand's ring finger, little finger and thumb, control your nostrils alternately. Close the left nostril with the ring finger and inhale for two-seconds from the right nostril. Hold your breath for four-seconds by closing both the nostrils. Open the left nostril and exhale for two-seconds. Inhale immediately from the same left nostril for two-seconds. Hold the breath by closing both the nostril for four-seconds. Open the right nostril and exhale for two-seconds.

This is one round of Anuloma Viloma, you can do 10 rounds sets with normal breathing in between.

**Apart from this Yogendra Pranayama II, Yogendra Pranayama III, Yogendra Pranayama IV, Ujjayi Pranayama can be done to deeply relax and rejuvenate.**

# 5 ASANAS OR YOGA POSES FOR WOMEN & RELATED HEALTH ISSUES

Women go through lots of hormonal changes during their life. To remain fit, it is necessary to remain active by taking regular walks and exercising. Yoga poses for women will help to not only de-stress but also keep the weight in check and make the menstrual cycle and other common ailments like light periods, heavy periods, PCOs, PCODs, thyroid hormone problems, migraines, stiff muscles, excess belly fat, menopause symptoms, hot flashes etc.

## Surya Namaskar

Face the morning sun while standing in a prayer pose. Slowly stretch your folded hands upwards and then backwards in a reclining posture or backward bend and inhale. Now exhale and bring your hands forward touching your feet. Bend your right knee and stretch the left leg behind while placing your right leg forward in an athlete position. Look up. Take the right leg behind and make an inverted V with your body. Now go into ashtanga namaskar pose and then launch into cobra pose. Again go into inverted V pose. Bring your left leg forward bent at the knee in an athlete position. Now bring both legs together forward bending, hands to feet pose. Inhaling slowly lift your both hands go backwards and end on prayer pose. Repeat 5 times.

## Bhujangasana or cobra pose

This asana helps you promote spine flexibility and de-stress. Lie down on your chest with your elbows close to your chest, palms facing down. Inhaling lift your chest off the floor and keep reclining back. Make sure your navel is touching the floor. Hold the posture for 10-15 seconds and gradually exhaling come back down.

Other asanas that can help **Garudasana, Shalabhasana, Naukasana, Ekpadasana, Hastapadangushthasana (I, II, III & IV), Pawanmuktasana**



# 6 KRIYAS TO GET RID OF IMPURITIES AND TOXINS

Kriyas help the body to clear the energy pathways, alleviate various infections, toxins, several ailments and strengthens the immune system. They help in their individual capacities to improve the functioning of the respective organs or body parts. At The Yoga Institute, kriyas are considered as practices that predominantly develop 'aishvarya bhava', those that boost self-confidence and promote vibrant health.

Kriyas are purification techniques used to cleanse one's body and mind. Yogic hygiene includes 'Saucha', one of the most important Niyamas. Kriyas open up the invisible energy pathways of our body known as nadis. When our body and mind are purified, it enables prana to flow freely through our body and strengthen our heart which regulates energy flow throughout our body. Kriyas are performed before you start your Asana and Pranayama practice.

## Kapalrandhra Dhouti kriya

is one such effective tool to combat everyday stressors and pollutants and its harmful effects.

**Note:** Your hands, neck, and face should be clean before you do this kriya; especially before you do Kapalrandhra Dhouti.

### Method-

- Place thumb on one side of your temple. Using forefingers massage your forehead with your fingers
- Massage the area below your eyes in a semi-circular motion using your fore and middle fingers.
- Pinch your eyebrows along their length.
- Massage your cheeks in an upward direction.
- From left to right using your fingers massage the spaces above and below your lips.
- Massage sides of your face and behind your ears back and forth.
- Look upwards and massage your neck with upward strokes.

### Benefits-

1. A natural way to get a glowing skin
2. Reduces dark circles around the eyes
3. Look young and decreases wrinkles
4. Helps in releasing stress and relaxing
5. Improves the blood and oxygen circulation in our body, thereby impacting our mental and physical health positively.

Many scientific studies have indicated that women are twice more likely to experience anxiety and three times more likely to suffer from stress-related disorders compared to men.

Stress affects overall wellbeing. Prolonged stress hinders body's response in releasing hormones which affect physical health and bodily functions. The brain, nervous system and hormonal systems respond to stressful conditions by disturbing functions of the heart, thyroid, gastrointestinal system and the immune system and when the stressful situations continue, it can lead to ulcers, hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism and even heart attacks.

Stress has a direct impact on your hormonal health. The endocrine hormones help to control mood, growth and development, metabolism, organ functions and reproduction. The endocrine system controls how much of each hormone is released. If stress is unchecked, this can in turn play around with your appetite, your moods, and even unnatural weight gain. Also, when the body is under continuous stress, Cortisol hormone- is released causing havoc on your emotional wellbeing and logical thinking goes for a toss.

**Some Yogic Techniques that can help you to de-stress and relax are:**

- **Meditation or Aum Mantra chanting**
- **The Yoga Institute pioneered- Nishpanda Bhava**
- **Anuloma Viloma Pranayama**



**Nishpanda Bhava**

**PCOs (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) and PCODs (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Disorder)** are conditions developed by the imbalances of the endocrine hormones. It is believed that hormonal imbalances and genetics play a vital role in both conditions. Women with these conditions often experience weight gain, irregular or missed periods, fatigue, unwanted facial hair, hair loss and thinning, acne, mood swings etc.

Yoga gives in the much needed reliefs in both PCOs and PCODs conditions. Do try asana, pranayama and relaxation at home.

## Supine Butterfly pose

Lie down on your back and try to relax. Pull your legs close together joining both feet together in a butterfly position. Hold your feet and try to pull it as close to your body. Gently move your legs up-and-down like butterfly wings flapping few times. You can put a cushion under your lower back for support during the asana. Continue for about 5 minutes, take a break, and then repeat.

## Alternate nostril breathing or Anuloma-Viloma pranayama

Sit in a comfortable meditative posture, and using your right hand's ring finger, little finger and thumb, control your nostrils alternately. Close the left nostril with the ring finger and inhale for two-seconds from the right nostril. Hold your breath for four-seconds by closing both the nostrils. Open the left nostril and exhale for two-seconds. Inhale immediately from the same left nostril for two-seconds. Hold the breath by closing both the nostril for four-seconds. Open the right nostril and exhale for two-seconds. This is one round of Anuloma Viloma, you can do 10 rounds sets with normal breathing in between.

## Shavasana

The corpse pose, or Shavasana, can help in relaxing the mind and keeping your cortisol levels in check. Since stress is one of the leading causes of PCODs, PCOs, yoga for PCOs can help you in de-stressing. Lie down flat on your back. Place both your hands on either side of your body with palms facing up. Close your eyes and lie still. Breathe slowly and as deeply as possible through your nostrils. Empty your mind and focus on your breathing. Try to lie in that position for at least 10 minutes without any movement.



**Shavasana**

When we continue doing routine work or performing any activity regularly and continuously for some hours, it gives us stress, physical and mental fatigue. Hobbies or Recreational activity relieve us from feeling fatigue, restores our energy levels and promote a sense of happiness.

### Some ideas to lighten the mood and feel relaxed

- **Meditation** or mantra chanting each day for 10 minutes will help you to reduce stress, lower your blood pressure, strengthen your immune system, and even improve your ability to concentrate.
- **Brisk walk** in garden or nature is a leisure activity that promotes relaxation and rejuvenates the nervous system
- **Gardening** is a beneficial hobby. There's the apparent benefit of growing your own fruits and vegetables, as well as pretty flowers.
- **Cooking** helps to make healthier food choices. In addition, cooking at home helps you to save money and ensures healthy food habits.
- **Spending time with family** helps to relax and strengthen the family ties. Set aside and play some board games together or tell jokes to each other.
- **Playing any musical instrument** helps to calm the senses and promotes happiness and happy hormones.
- **Dancing** hobby helps to reduce daily stress and increases serotonin levels or happy hormones that are linked to feelings of happiness and well-being.
- Take **Online Classes** for **learning new skills** increases feelings of self-efficacy. Learning new skill or language stimulates the brain and keeps your mind sharp.
- **Journaling** is a great way to end the day. You will be able to uncover or do Swadhaya or self study about what makes you happy and what drains your energy. This helps to make better and happier choices.





# 10 IS YOGA SAFE DURING PREGNANCY?

Prenatal, during pregnancy and postnatal yoga classes are important. I advise pregnant women to join yoga classes to stay fit, calm, stress-free and work on healthy delivery. We have classes to prepare the couple for their newborn. The aim of these classes and yoga is to bring their newborn into the world with minimum discomfort, hassle and pain. Yoga also helps to keep in check unreal fears, mood swings, emotions and anxiety. Apart from the mental well-being the moms-to-be are at an advantage to keep their weight in check and remain active.

Many women encounter increased discomfort due to the hormonal, anatomical and physiological changes that happen during pregnancy, regardless of pre-pregnancy conditioning. Many times rigidity, soreness and stiffness of muscles develop in moms-to-be especially if they are not active and it can hamper a smooth delivery.

## Yoga Benefits pre-natal and post-natal care

- Yoga helps to calm and stabilises emotions.
- Better blood circulation for both mother and the baby.
- Yoga helps to boost the functioning of relaxin (a hormone that relaxes the muscles and joints) and makes the muscles strong and flexible
- Ensures good sleep, reduces stress and anxiety.
- Asanas help to increase muscle strength and flexibility and so, helps in birthing.
- Yoga decreases the risk of pre-term labour.
- Postnatal period, yoga strengthens the pelvic floor just like Kegel's exercises. This prevents prolapsed pelvic organs, especially that of the uterus

## The asanas - Trikonasana

**Trikonasana** or the triangle pose Stand straight with your feet apart. Raise your arms at shoulder level and then bring them parallel to the floor. Now exhale and bend from your hip (not waist). Rest your right hand, without distorting your body, on your shin or ankle or on the floor while you stretch your other arm up in a line with your shoulder. Hold this pose for around a minute or less and then inhale as you come up. Reverse and repeat few rounds.

**Benefits:** This works the legs and stretches the body sideways. Helps to open up the shoulders and hips are energised.

## Butterfly pose

**Butterfly pose** Sit with your legs stretched in front of you. Then bend your knees, bring your feet in and let the soles of your feet touch each other. Hold both feet with your hands and keep your back straight. Move your knees up and down like wings of butterfly flap. Each time try touching the ground without releasing the joined feet.

**Benefits:** Stretches the inner thighs and opens up the hips.

## Warrior Pose

Keep a distance of two to three feet between your legs as you stand straight. Turn your left foot by 90 degrees and align the heels of both feet. Lift both your arms together and bring them parallel to the floor. Now exhale as you bend your right knee and look to your right. Your ankle and knee must be in a straight line. Stretch your arms and push down your pelvis without any jerks. Keep breathing go lower. Inhale when you come up and exhale as you bring your hands to your sides. Reverse and repeat. Practise this asana with wall support.

**Benefits:** Women in their second and third trimester should try this beneficial asana. Warrior pose strengthens the limbs, increases stamina, balance is

# 10 IS YOGA SAFE DURING PREGNANCY?

better and releases stress. The lower back flexibility is increased.

## Other Recommended asanas and pranayamas

**Sukhasana, Talasana, Yoga mudra, Shavasana, Anuloma viloma, all upward stretches like Parvatasana, Utkatasana with support, all meditative postures particularly Bhadrasana sitting and lying down.**

**Precaution-** before you begin any yoga classes, ensure you have consulted your doctor before you start on any exercise regimen. Also learn from a qualified and experienced yoga instructor/teacher who has experience in teaching pregnant women.

## Avoid

- Over-stretching
- Stop immediately if there is any discomfort
- Don't lie on your abdomen
- Avoid long duration of activity
- Don't do any asana or breathing exercise continuously or vigorously
- Take it easy.



**Talasana Variation 1-2-3**



## Sukshma Vyayama

### Stretching exercises for better flexibility and to remain fit.

Sukshma vyayama is a very light form of stretching exercise which can be performed by people of every age group. The functioning of muscles and internal organs are slow when you wake up every morning. To bring warmth in the body, massage some important organs of the immune system, it is crucial that sukshma vyayama is practised every morning. This will help ease signs like stiff muscles, sore back and weighty body.

Gentle body warm-up yoga exercises which works on each body part and increases blood circulation and helps to kick-start your day with energy, elevated mood and enthusiasm.

#### Head and neck movements

##### Method-

Sit or stand erect. Inhale, gently drop your head towards your right shoulder without lifting your shoulder. Exhale, bring head back to the centre. Drop it to the left shoulder and return to the centre. Rotate your head in all four directions; Clockwise and anti-clockwise. Repeat few rounds.

#### Shoulder movements

##### Method-

Sit or stand erect. Keeping your hands close at the sides, while inhaling, lift your shoulders as high up as you can towards your ears. While exhaling, relax your shoulders. (Repeat this motion twice.). Practise shoulder rotations taking the rotation from back, down and then upwards while inhaling and as you exhale bring the shoulders down. (Repeat few times.)

#### Spinal movements

##### Method-

Sit or stand erect. Make gentle spinal movement like slowly bending from side to side. Repeat few times.

#### Arms and wrists movements

##### Method-

Wrists- Stretch your arms in front. Make fists. Rotate your wrist in clockwise and anticlockwise direction few times. Stretch your hands out at the shoulder level and gently clench your fists.

Stretch both your hands to the shoulder level with your palms facing down and fingers as wide apart as possible. While inhaling, take your hands to the respective sides and as far back without tilting your body backwards. While exhaling, return to the front. Keeping the hands straight, perform wrist rotation both clockwise and anti-clockwise. (Repeat twice.)

#### Legs and ankle movements

##### Method-

Stand straight and lift one leg at a time and swing it gently front and back and then side to side taking support if required. Then rotate it clockwise and anti-clockwise. Similarly, repeat clockwise and anti-clockwise ankle movements few rounds.

##### Benefits:

1. Stiffness of muscles; aches and pains will go away
2. Helps to strengthens the body's defense mechanism and it is ready to fight infections
3. Toxins and waste are eliminated from the body
4. You feel active and energised each day.
5. Stamina increases.

## **Q What are Fibroids?**

**A** Generally, fibroids are non-cancerous tumor growth in your uterus or womb. Also known as fibromyomas, uterine myomas or leiomyomas. Fifty percent of women are mostly unaware they have fibroids and one in every three women gets them in their life time.

## **Q Can fibroids affect fertility?**

**A** It is best to take specialist advice if you are pregnant and have fibroids. But records show that two-thirds of women with fibroids stay at their present size or have known to reduce in size at pregnancy stage. Generally, it is rare to have miscarriage or premature labour or bleeding due to fibroids.

## **Q Why are my periods irregular and is this normal?**

**A** The average menstrual cycle is between 28 to 30 days, but varies from women to women. Mainly depends on food habits, stressors, illness, weight (gain or loss) and exercise which impacts the menstrual cycle and also if hormonal contraception used. Irregular periods are common during puberty and when approaching or during the menopause phase. If you have bleeding after sex, irregular bleeding between periods, if there are fewer than three weeks between the periods themselves, or there is bleeding after the menopause, then consult your gynecologist for further advice.

## **Q My periods are extremely heavy with lots of clots. Is this anything to worry about?**

**A** Menstrual cycle or periods last from three to seven days with one or two days of heavy flow. Also, the amount of blood loss can vary from month-to-month, and this is normal. The bleeding can have clots and differs from women to women. If you are experiencing heavy period where you

have to change your tampon or pad more than once an hour or the bleeding is lasting for more than seven days, then you should immediately consult your gynecologist for further advice.

## **Q I am having my menopause and am now 53 years old. My main problem is I have lots of hot flashes and feel fatigue.**

**A** During menopause it is normal to have hot flashes or flushes and feel tired. Meditation and breathing exercise or pranayama like chandrabhedan can be done to reduce the discomfort and get a good night restful sleep. Including foods rich in antioxidants, iron and vitamin C like lime, lemons, beetroots, spinach etc.

## **Q How do I get rid of bloating and gases during pregnancy?**

**A** Try to increase intake of fluids throughout the day; hot soups, buttermilk etc. This helps the digestive system and helps to avoid constipation, which can increase bloating. Go in for smaller meals, chew your food properly, try to relax in shavasana and reduce intake of cruciferous vegetables, beans etc.

## **Q Can thyroid problems cause menstrual problems?**

**A** In women, thyroid diseases like hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism can affect your menstrual period making your periods very heavy, light or irregular. Thyroid hormone helps to control your menstrual cycle.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Yoga Institute always believes in serving the society. Owing to the current world scenarios, we wanted to take the science of Yoga to reach every household and help women with their health problems.

The conception of this book is dedicated to women and reviving the ancient yogic techniques that will motivate women to take better care of themselves.

I would like to express my gratitude to Vandana J Desai for editing, and giving an in-depth, expression and meaning to my thoughts as well as compiling this book. I thank The Yoga Institute Publications for ensuring that this profound knowledge reaches out to millions worldwide.

I hope this book benefits all the readers and practitioners. And it takes forward the core vision of The Yoga Institute to spread the awareness and goodness of Yoga to as many householders as possible.

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