

## CHRONIC ANXIETY

We become anxious when we perceive danger (fight or flight response). This is stress. Even minor stress can be devastating to the adrenal glands. Because most stress is psychological, fighting or fleeing usually is of little value. We build up tension fueled by the release of adrenaline and cortisone from the adrenal gland. Eventually the internal physiology of this reaction becomes pathological and we become more susceptible to anxiety and other diseases. We can stop the cycle of over-response to stress through slow, deep breathing.

### **ANNAMAYA KOSHA:**

Separation occurs as a lack of body awareness. It is as if the person is not 'in' their body, except to notice symptoms of possible illness or doom. The person is hypervigilant, looking outside of the self, not able to see the inner self. Vata is out of balance—too much air and space, fanning out the fire. Symptoms include rapid heart beat, perspiring, excess adrenaline and cortisone, tightness in the neck, chest and shoulders, short shallow breath, G.I. complaints (diarrhea, gas), tension headaches, grinding teeth, and overall muscle tension.

Interventions: asanas that ground and stabilize the body. The need is to bring the adrenals back into balance, energize the root chakra and calm the mind. Since there is an over exaggeration of vata, asanas with strong earth or water content, such as warrior II are especially useful. Balancing poses will help improve concentration; asanas placing pressure on the pelvis, such as the Boat and asanas with slow, steady breath will calm and ground. Some recommended asanas are: mountain (at first try it lying on the ground), sun salutation, cat, sun bird, child, seated forward bend, warrior II, locust, tree, supine crescent moon, cobra, bridge, half shoulderstand, triangle, savasana, boat, bound angle.

### **PRANAMAYA KOSHA:**

The breath is rapid and shallow, in the chest—all pranavayus are effected. Sometimes the breath is held. The person will feel restless and have 'rajas' energy. Often the energy does not flow in harmony—it is disoriented. The heart (anahata) chakra is closed.

Recommended is pranayama that grounds, brings focus into the body and those that calm the mind. Pranayamas and bandhas for balancing excess Vata: nadi shodhana, diaphragmatic breathing, focusing on exhale, left nostril breathing, ujjayi, gentle kapalabhatti, mula bandha.

### **MANOMAYA KOSHA:**

In the anxious person, this kosha is deeply affected. The manifestations are racing thoughts and chronic worrying. Instead of being in the present moment and in their bodies, they are almost always in their head—worrying and/or thinking about past and future events. This body is always in the 'doing mode'. It is running toward those things that it desires—rajas, and avoiding what is feared, dveshas. This body is in a constant state of agitation and motion. It fears that if it slows down and is quiet, it will have to look at painful, uncomfortable emotions which have been repressed. This body has difficulty focusing, concentrating, and completing projects. An anxious person can be irritable, compulsive and pessimistic in outlook. This body is a human 'doing' instead of human 'being'. It needs to learn to just be, present in silence and stillness.

Interventions for emotional/mental body: chanting—Lam, Ram, Sham, mudras, kalesvara mudra, shakti mudra, mahasirs mudra, matangi mudra, mushti mudra.

### **VIJNYANAMAYA KOSHA:**

This body tends to be underdeveloped in the chronically anxious person. There are often racing thoughts and poor concentration, a tendency to be reactive to events also. There may be little time between an event and the reaction; when anxious, listening skills may be poor and pressure is felt to talk and respond without fully receiving. There may be a lot of focus on symptoms with little ability to put life into perspective. Lack of rest or even sleep deprivation can compromise mental focus.

Interventions for the Witness body: again, the person suffering from chronic anxiety will benefit from being brought into feeling their physical body—recommended is savasana, going through parts of the body, feeling, sensing each part while doing 3 part breath. Also, guided imagery. Focusing on the 5 senses and referring to nature (the ground, earth, water, sunlight) will warm and calm. Helping the person to feel safe and warm is key. Use blankets and supports.

### **ANANDAMAYA KOSHA:**

For the anxious person, there will likely be little awareness of the bliss body. The chronically tense and worried individual feels alienated and cut off from the source. They may have an intellectual belief in unity, but lack a sense of it in their life.

Interventions for the Bliss body: useful for balancing excess Vata in the anxious person, are meditations which enhance concentration and focus. Suggested is focusing on a candle or actual visual of light or the breath, with eyes open, repetition of affirmations about safety and security, practicing with a set time and place and meditations with a specific beginning, middle and end.

### **EIGHT WEEK COURSE:**

1. Introduction to program and the benefits of yoga
2. Listening to your body
3. Exploring breath
4. The dance of energy
5. Releasing Stress
6. Yoga for a healthy neck and back
7. Yoga for better sleep
8. Yoga for balancing

### **Week 2 ‘Listening to the Body’:**

- Chant om
- Educational component on class theme—our bodies are always speaking to us; usually we do not pay attention. When we become more aware of the messages we have opportunities to relieve aches and pains and feel greater well being.
- Body awareness—lead a scan of the physical body, ask students to notice any and all sensations in each part mentioned.
- Breathing practice—the belly breath, let students rest on back with hands on belly.
- Asana practice—mountain on the ground (full body stretch on the back) 3x’s apasana. Roll head very slowly from side to side. Slow gentle spinaltwist. Table, cat, slowing in and out of child. Standing—mountain, sun breath, half moon, forward fold, warrior II, stork (emphasis on grounding), sphinx, cobra, boat.
- Mudras—kalesvara mudra
- Restorative Pose—seated forward fold with head on bolster.
- Guided imagery—relax each part of body.
- Deep relaxation—in savasana, watching the breath, walk along the beach to the mountains and back.

Closing—chant om, feel the sound from the toes to the top of the head. Notice how you feel!