

Benefits of Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand)

(From the book, "A Systematic Course Yoga and Kriya", Bihar School of Yoga, India)

The benefits of sarvangasana are vast. The following is merely a brief resume.

The Thyroid Gland and the Endocrinial System

The direct influence on the thyroid gland helps to remove many diseases and generally maintain good health of the entire body. The aging process is very much associated with the endocrinial system. One can help to maintain youthfulness and rejuvenate an aging body by regular practice of sarvangasana.

The thyroid gland controls the metabolism of the body. Therefore, by improving the efficiency of the thyroid gland through sarvangasana one can maintain the correct body weight. Of course, this assumes that one does not consume excessive amounts of food. Many people are overweight because of hormonal imbalance, not specifically because of overeating. Sarvangasana helps to normalize the body weight by balancing the endocrinial system.

The endocrinial system is in a continual state of fluctuation because of adaption to both inner and outer environment. If the endocrinial system is malfunctioning, then the body is unable to adjust to these continual changes and illness can result. Sarvangasana acts on the thyroid gland, the pituitary and the brain. All these are mutually independent organs. By simultaneously balancing them sarvangasana helps to balance the entire endocrinial system as well as all the systems that are dependent on the hormonal system, such as the circulatory, respiratory, digestive and reproductive systems. The body is a total unit and though it is composed of different systems, they are all mutually dependent on each other. They do not act separately. They are only discussed as distinct systems in books for easy understanding. If one system is out of balance then the other systems will also become imbalanced. Sarvangasana helps to integrate all the systems of the body, improving health and removing disease.

The Brain

Sarvangasana improves the blood supply to the brain. This is the master controller of the entire body organs, muscles, nerves, etc. If the brain cells are not healthy, how can the rest of the body be healthy? The motor car, for example, cannot run without the engine. If the engine does not receive sufficient oil or petrol then its body, the car shell and moving parts cannot possibly work. It is the same with the human brain. If the brain is malfunctioning then the rest of the body must also function incorrectly. Sarvangasana helps to rectify this situation and in this way, many seemingly obscure ailments can be eliminated.

Parathyroid Glands

The influence of sarvangasana on the parathyroid glands helps to ensure normal bone growth and regeneration and can prevent premature ossification (hardening) of the bones.

Neck and Spine

Many asanas bend the spine forwards, but few of them specifically bend the cervical (neck) region of the spine in a forward direction. Sarvangasana does this very effectively and improves the flexibility of the vertebrae and tone of the nerves that pass through the neck to and from the brain. Furthermore, the nerves in this region receive a fresh supply of oxygenated blood which helps to keep them in good condition. These nerves penetrate the entire body and so their good health again leads to improved health of the whole body. The bending of the spine at the neck also helps to remove backache and headache.

Abdominal Breathing

The pressure of the chin against the chest in the final pose forces the practitioner to breathe abdominally. It is physically impossible to breathe from the chest in this position. Most people breathe very superficially and suffer bad health as a consequence. They don't breathe from the abdomen, and it is this type of breathing that is most important in the breathing process. This abdominal breathing during sarvangasana encourages the individual to breathe abdominally throughout the day. This is merely a matter of training, nothing more. But this simple training can radically improve health. Firstly, it improves the intake of air and secondly, it ensures that the abdominal organs are given the continual massage that they require. The improved respiration is of great help in treating bronchitis.

Asthma

Sarvangasana is very useful for asthmatics. These people tend to breathe superficially by moving their shoulders and their chests - they tend to avoid abdominal breathing. Sarvangasana helps to remedy this situation and habit. Some asthmatics have also said that sarvangasana should be done immediately before an attack as a preventive measure.

Blood Pressure

Sarvangasana reduces blood pressure by acting on the carotid sinuses in the neck. Therefore, sarvangasana is a useful practice for those people who have slightly high blood pressure. However, those people who have excessively high blood pressure should not do the asana for initially the blood pressure is increased.

Hemorrhoids

Sarvangasana is very useful for treating piles (hemorrhoids) and varicose veins, for it helps to drain accumulated blood from these areas. People who suffer from these ailments should practice both in the morning and evening for at least five minutes, more if possible. Those who have piles should rhythmically contract and relax their anal muscles, for this helps to remove the blood from the area.

This asana is also very useful for toning the legs and removing fatigue.

Digestion

Regular practice helps to remove various type of digestive ailments, especially where they are caused by blood congestion or general inefficiency of organs. Diabetics are advised to practice sarvangasana for it

not only influences the pancreas but also the entire endocrinal system. If you suffer from visceroptosis (displacement of the abdominal organs), then you should practice sarvargasana to rectify this situation.

Reproductive Organs

Sarvargasana tones the reproductive organs and helps to prevent degeneration of the testes, gonads and ovaries as well as the other sexual organs, male and female. It has been found useful in helping to relieve menopausal and other general sexual disorders. It helps to alleviate hydrocele, leucorrhea, spermatorrhea, etc.

Oxygenated Blood

During sarvargasana the whole region of the neck, throat and face is flooded with fresh oxygenated blood which helps to improve the nourishment of the entire area and the many organs in the vicinity. The tonsils (important lymph nodes for ensuring protection against infection), the ears, the eyes, the lungs, the thymus and so forth all benefit from improved blood supply. The thymus is believed to play an important part in the normal growth of children. It also has an immunological role and so sarvargasana increases the resistance of the body to disease by influencing both the tonsils and thymus. The salivary glands in the mouth also work more efficiently, which in turn aids digestion. Wrinkles and spots on the face are also reduced by improved blood supply. Facial complexion is generally improved. In general, we can say that sarvargasana helps to eliminate and prevent various types of throat and nose ailments, including the common cold.

Calm the Mind

Finally sarvargasana is an excellent method of tranquilizing the mind and helps to bring harmony and peace into one's life. This is also useful for obtaining the most out of other yogic practices. If you perform sarvargasana before meditational techniques it will greatly help you to benefit fully from your practices.