Sudarshan Kriya Yoga and its effects on sleep: a systematic review of a breathing technique for sleep improvement

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OBJECTIVE & INTRODUCTION

Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY) is a rhythmic breathing technique which consists of four stages, takes approximately 30 minutes to complete, and can be self-administered after training.

In this study, we performed a systematic review of the current literature looking for evidence of SKY’s effectiveness when sleep quality is directly measured.

METHODS

The review procedure followed PRISMA methodology. Articles of interest were identified using PubMed, Cochrane Review, and expert recommendation. The search terms used were SKY, Sudarshan Kriya, sleep, breathing, and meditation. Inclusion criteria required that the article use SKY as an intervention with sleep as a measured outcome.

RESULTS

Sleep was assessed by 4 studies using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), 1 using the Epworth Sleepiness Scale (ESS), 3 using their own study-specific survey, and 1 using polysomnography.

All 9 studies showed some sleep benefit immediately after SKY training. However, return to baseline sleep patterns were noted in 2 of the studies. Sleep quality improved with the regular and more frequent practice of SKY in a cross-sectional study. SKY was also shown to reduce the time of REM onset and increase slow-wave sleep.

CONCLUSION

Sleep is often disturbed in many individuals at various times in their lives and it is estimated that 50-70 million adults in the USA alone report chronically disturbed sleep.¹

In some studies, SKY has been shown to have beneficial effects on sleep in terms of latency and overall sleep quality.²

All studies included in this review showed some benefit to participants who learned the technique suggesting SKY provides a way for individuals to improve their sleep quality.

However, a strong recommendation is difficult to offer based on the small nature of the trials, lack of systematic controls in many, and some trials showing a return to baseline sleep quality after a latent period.

Further investigation through controlled and prospective studies specifically designed to measure sleep quality with this technique are needed.

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REFERENCES

¹Common Sleep Disorders in Adults: Diagnosis and Management. S Holder, DO, AND NS. Narula, MD, MBS. Am Fam Physician. 2022;105(4):397-405