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Intensity and Frequency of Yoga Practice Associated with Enhanced Cognitive Flexibility in Healthy Adults

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Objective: We hypothesize that the intensity and frequency of yoga practice (i.e., average times per week and average length of sessions) as well as current perceived stress will predict cognitive flexibility (i.e., the ability to freely shift between cognitive tasks/demands) among healthy individuals currently practicing yoga. Method: 53 participants recruited from yoga studios completed the Cognitive Flexibility Inventory (CFI), the Perceived Stress Scale, and recorded their past 30 day practice of Yoga (average length of sessions and average times per week) using the Timeline Follow-back Method. Regression analyses were conducted to determine whether intensity and frequency of yoga practice and stress levels predicted cognitive flexibility. Results: Multiple linear regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting cognitive flexibility from intensity and frequency of yoga practice and stress levels. The model containing intensity of yoga and level of stress accounted for 28% of the variance in overall cognitive flexibility, $F(2, 46) = 8.67, p < .01, R^2 = .28$. Both predictors displayed significant beta weights. Conclusion: Individuals who practice yoga more intensely display more adaptive problem-solving strategies including greater ability to perceive multiple alternative explanations to difficult situations. Interestingly, only intensity of practice but not weekly frequency of practice was associated with greater cognitive flexibility, suggesting that a certain “dose” of yoga may be important to enhance cognitive flexibility. Finally, high stress may contribute to weakened cognitive flexibility even when yoga is practiced.