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THE ROLE OF YOGA AND AYURVEDA IN ENHANCING CARDIAC FUNCTION FOR TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES: A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE AND APPLICATIONS

Biswajit Sharma
Research Scholar,
Shri Venkateshwara University,
Gajraula, Dist. Amroha (Uttar Pradesh, India)

Dr. Sangeeta Gupta
Ph.D. Supervisor,
Shri Venkateshwara University,
Gajraula, Dist. Amroha (Uttar Pradesh, India)

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Abstract:

Cardiovascular efficiency plays a vital role in determining performance outcomes in track and field athletes. This review examines the role of Yoga and Ayurveda in enhancing cardiac function and overall cardiovascular health in athletes. Yogic practices provide physiological benefits such as improved heart rate variability, enhanced blood circulation, and reduced blood pressure, contributing to better endurance and recovery. The effects of Hatha Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, and Restorative Yoga on cardiac health are discussed. Ayurvedic principles, including dosha balance, dietary regulation, lifestyle modification, and herbal interventions, are also explored for their cardioprotective potential. The integration of Yoga and Ayurveda offers a holistic and individualized wellness strategy for athletes. Coaches and athletes are encouraged to adopt customized Yoga protocols and Ayurvedic nutritional plans, with regular monitoring and adjustments. Future research should focus on longitudinal and comparative studies to further elucidate the long-term benefits of these traditional systems on cardiac function and sports performance.

Keywords: *Yoga, Ayurveda, Cardiovascular Health, Track and Field Athletes*

1. Introduction:

Cardiovascular health is fundamental to athletic performance, particularly in track and field events that demand both aerobic and anaerobic capacities. Efficient cardiac function ensures optimal oxygen delivery, nutrient transport, and metabolic waste removal. Endurance events such as the marathon and 5000 meters require sustained oxygen utilization, while sprinting and jumping demand rapid cardiovascular responses during high-intensity activity [1,2]. Measures such as heart rate variability (HRV), maximal oxygen uptake (VO_2 max), and reduced cardiovascular disease risk are strongly associated with athletic performance [3].

Yoga originated in ancient India, with roots tracing back to the Indus–Saraswati civilization around 2700 BCE. Traditionally attributed to Lord Shiva (Adiyogi), yogic knowledge was transmitted through sages and codified during the classical period by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras. Over time, Yoga

evolved through Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, gaining global recognition through modern proponents [4]. Ayurveda, a holistic medical system over 5000 years old, emphasizes disease prevention and health promotion through individualized diet, lifestyle practices, herbal medicine, and detoxification therapies [5].

In recent decades, both Yoga and Ayurveda have gained attention for their role in improving cardiovascular health and athletic performance. Yoga integrates postures, breathing techniques, and meditation to enhance flexibility, strength, autonomic regulation, and psychological resilience [6]. Ayurveda complements this approach by restoring dosha balance (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) through nutrition, lifestyle regulation, and herbal support [7]. This review explores evidence supporting the combined application of Yoga and Ayurveda in optimizing cardiac function among track and field athletes.

2. Physiological Benefits of Yoga:

Intensive athletic training can lead to "athlete's heart," characterized by structural and functional cardiac adaptations such as increased cardiac output and reduced resting heart rate. While often benign, excessive training stress may predispose athletes to autonomic imbalance. Yoga serves as a restorative modality that enhances parasympathetic dominance and cardiovascular recovery without additional cardiac strain [8].

2.1 Heart Rate Variability:

Heart rate variability reflects autonomic nervous system regulation and is a marker of cardiovascular resilience. Higher HRV is associated with improved stress tolerance and reduced cardiovascular risk [9]. Yogic breathing and meditation practices have demonstrated significant improvements in HRV by enhancing parasympathetic activity [10,11]. Yoga also reduces sympathetic overactivation and cortisol secretion, contributing to autonomic balance [12].

2.2 Blood Circulation:

Yoga enhances systemic circulation by improving vascular tone and cardiac efficiency. Postures involving spinal extension and inversion promote venous return and oxygen delivery to tissues [13]. Improved circulation has also been linked to enhanced immune function and recovery [14].

2.3 Blood Pressure Regulation:

Hypertension is a major cardiovascular risk factor. Multiple studies and meta-analyses indicate that regular yoga practice significantly reduces systolic and diastolic blood pressure, particularly when relaxation and breath regulation are incorporated [15,16]. These effects are largely mediated through stress reduction and autonomic modulation [17].

2.4 Overall Cardiovascular Health:

Yoga contributes to improved heart rate recovery, endothelial function, psychological well-

being, and stress management, all of which are essential for long-term cardiac health and athletic sustainability [18,19].

3. Types of Yoga and Their Cardiovascular Effects:

3.1 Hatha Yoga:

Hatha Yoga emphasizes slow movements and controlled breathing, promoting relaxation and cardiovascular regulation. Evidence suggests that long-term Hatha Yoga practice improves HRV and reduces cardiovascular risk while enhancing muscular recovery and flexibility [6,20].

3.2 Vinyasa Yoga:

Vinyasa Yoga involves continuous movement synchronized with breathing, resulting in moderate cardiovascular stimulation. Studies indicate improvements in aerobic capacity and reductions in systolic blood pressure, although HRV responses may vary [21,22].

3.3 Restorative Yoga:

Restorative Yoga focuses on passive poses supported by props to induce deep relaxation. It is particularly effective for recovery, pain reduction, and stress management following intense training or competition [20].

4. Ayurvedic Concepts and Cardiac Function:

Ayurveda attributes cardiovascular health to the balanced interaction of the three doshas. Imbalances may lead to conditions such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, and coronary artery disease [7,23].

4.1 Ayurvedic Diet:

Ayurvedic dietary recommendations emphasize whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fiber, and healthy fats to reduce inflammation and improve lipid profiles. Foods rich in antioxidants support vascular health and reduce cardiovascular risk [24–26].

4.2 Lifestyle and Stress Management:

Stress management is central to Ayurvedic cardiac care. Practices such as yoga, meditation, adequate sleep, and dosha-specific physical activity help maintain emotional and physiological balance, reducing cardiovascular strain [27–29].

4.3 Herbal Interventions:

Herbs such as *Terminalia arjuna* and *Withania somnifera* are widely used for cardio protection. Arjuna supports myocardial function and lipid regulation, while Ashwagandha reduces stress and inflammation. Ginger and turmeric further contribute antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits [30–32].

5. Integrated Wellness Strategies:

The integration of Yoga and Ayurveda offers a comprehensive and individualized approach to athlete health. Yogic practices improve autonomic regulation and circulation, while Ayurvedic

interventions address dietary and lifestyle imbalances that contribute to cardiovascular strain [15,33].

5.1 Application for Athletes:

Customized yoga routines incorporating strength-enhancing postures and pranayama can improve endurance and recovery. Ayurvedic nutrition plans emphasizing whole foods and adequate protein intake further support cardiovascular and athletic performance [25,34].

5.2 Monitoring and Adaptation:

Regular monitoring of blood pressure, lipid profiles, HRV, and subjective recovery allows for ongoing optimization of integrated wellness programs. Evidence suggests that combined Yoga–Ayurveda interventions improve flexibility, endurance, and recovery outcomes [20,35].

6. Future Research Directions:

Future studies should focus on long-term, controlled trials evaluating the sustained impact of Yoga and Ayurveda on cardiovascular adaptations in athletes. Comparative studies with conventional training methods would further clarify their efficacy and mechanisms [15,34].

Conclusion:

The integration of Yoga and Ayurveda into athletic training offers significant benefits for cardiovascular health and performance. Yoga enhances heart rate variability, circulation, and blood pressure regulation, while Ayurveda provides individualized dietary and lifestyle strategies that support cardiac resilience. Together, these traditional systems form a holistic framework that promotes optimal recovery, mental well-being, and long-term athletic sustainability. Continued research will strengthen evidence-based implementation in sports training programs.

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