



International Yoga Day 2025: Can this ancient practice help beat OCD? Experts recommend 5 poses that may make a difference

Sneha Kumari | Jun 18, 2025, 18:21 IST

Yoga is a set of physical and mental health practices, and it is also believed to support Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Experts share 5 key poses that can turn out to be an effective treatment. Read here.



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Yoga is a set of spiritual, physical, and mental health practices that originated in ancient India. It has been found to help people manage their stress levels, improve their mood, and even reduce symptoms of depression, but can yoga beat OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder)?. Ahead of International Day of Yoga, let's find out what experts say.

OCD is a mental health condition that is characterised by persistent unwanted thoughts and repetitive behaviours or mental acts (compulsions) that a person feels driven to act on. "Yoga can be a beneficial complementary approach for managing symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), but it is not a standalone cure," says Dr Shorouq Motwani, psychiatrist, Lilavati Hospital, Mumbai.

Numerous studies suggest that yoga may help reduce anxiety and improve overall mental well-being, which can be particularly advantageous for individuals grappling with OCD.

Can yoga help beat OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder)?

The practice of yoga emphasises mindfulness, breath control, and physical postures, all of which can foster greater awareness and self-regulation. "Mindfulness techniques cultivated during yoga can help individuals observe their thoughts and compulsions without immediate reaction, potentially reducing the urge to engage in compulsive behaviours," explains Dr. Motwani.



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Additionally, the physical aspects of yoga can help alleviate stress and promote relaxation, leading to an improved mood and increased emotional resilience. "Engaging in regular yoga sessions may help individuals develop healthier coping mechanisms and enhance their ability to manage OCD symptoms," adds Dr. Motwani.

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However, it's essential to note that yoga should be considered as part of a broader treatment plan, which may include therapy (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) and medication.

Consulting with a mental health professional is crucial to create an effective treatment strategy tailored to the individual's needs. According to Dr. Motwani, "While yoga can provide valuable support, it is not a replacement for traditional OCD treatments."


5 yoga poses to beat or manage OCD

According to Vidya Jha, Yoga Guru – Aatma Yog Studio, Karampura, New Delhi, "There are certain yoga poses to help manage symptoms of OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) by reducing anxiety and promoting mental clarity."

Here are 5 poses that can help manage OCD:

1. Balasana (Child's Pose)

Why it's recommended: It's a soothing, grounding pose that activates the parasympathetic nervous system (rest-and-digest state) and supports the reduction of intrusive thinking and compulsive worry.

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Tip: In this pose, practise deep belly breathing for 3–5 minutes each day to ground attention in bodily sensation as opposed to obsessive thinking.

2. Viparita Karani (Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose)

Why it's recommended: This restorative inversion softly balances the nervous system and is frequently employed by therapists to support patients in moving out of repetitive thinking loops. According to Jha, "Somatic-oriented neurologists have noted that this posture reduces cortisol and norepinephrine—both elevated in OCD—and increases limbic system stability."

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Tip: Place a bolster under your hips and remain for 10 minutes to allow deep nervous system repair.

3. Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Why it's recommended: Although not a pose, this pranayama can be highly recommended by integrative psychiatrists. It harmonises the left and right hemispheres of the brain, soothing repetitive thought patterns and compulsive behaviours. Anecdotal case reports have established that daily practice (10 minutes/day) results in enhanced response inhibition, a cognitive impairment present in OCD.

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Tip: Always begin and conclude with the left nostril for a soothing effect.

4. Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose)

Why it's recommended: This position releases tension accumulated in the pelvic and abdominal area and heightens present-moment awareness.


“Physicians highlight that backbends such as this one engage the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain involved in regulating impulses and executive functioning, commonly under pressure in OCD,” says Jha.

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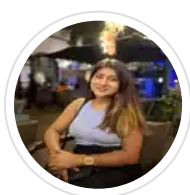
Tip: Pay attention to synchronising breath with movement to interrupt obsessive focus loops.

5. Padmasana with Jnana Mudra (Lotus Pose + Gesture of Wisdom)

Why it's recommended: Seated in meditation with a mudra representing wisdom assists in developing a non-reacting awareness, which is essential in dealing with intrusive thoughts. “Psychotherapists applying mindfulness in OCD therapy observe that this coupling enhances metacognition—your capacity to monitor thoughts yet refrain from interacting with them,” he adds.

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Advice: Even when full lotus is challenging, any cross-legged seated pose with Jnana Mudra can aid self-regulation. Always combine yoga practice with professional mental health care, particularly Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), which is the gold standard for OCD.



GENERAL

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Sneha is a dedicated writer with a passion for storytelling that enthralls and inspires the readers. With a background in Health and Lifestyle, she brings a unique perspective to ev...

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