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Original Research

The Acute Effects of Yoga on Executive Function

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Background: Despite an increase in the prevalence of yoga exercise, research focusing on the relationship between yoga exercise and cognition is limited. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of an acute yoga exercise session, relative to aerobic exercise, on cognitive performance. **Methods:** A repeated measures design was employed where 30 female college-aged participants (Mean age = 20.07, SD = 1.95) completed 3 counterbalanced testing sessions: a yoga exercise session, an aerobic exercise session, and a baseline assessment. The flanker and n-back tasks were used to measure cognitive performance. **Results:** Results showed that cognitive performance after the yoga exercise bout was significantly superior (ie, shorter reaction times, increased accuracy) as compared with the aerobic and baseline conditions for both inhibition and working memory tasks. The aerobic and baseline performance was not significantly different, contradicting some of the previous findings in the acute aerobic exercise and cognition literature. **Conclusion:** These findings are discussed relative to the need to explore the effects of other nontraditional modes of exercise such as yoga on cognition and the importance of time elapsed between the cessation of the exercise bout and the initiation of cognitive assessments in improving task performance.

Keywords: aerobic exercise, nontraditional exercise, interference control, n-back task

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