Impact of Long Term Meditation Practice on Sleep:
A Matched Controlled Trial

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Objectives: To evaluate the effect of long term practice of Isha yoga meditation technique on sleep patterns in healthy male meditators.

Methods: Whole night polysomnography measures were recorded in 21 male meditators (group mean age ± S.D., 35.14 ± 7.98) with a minimum experience of 3 years in Isha yoga meditation. These meditators were compared to 21 male non meditators (group mean age ± S.D., 35.19 ± 8.18) matched for their age and education. Meditators and non-meditators underwent independent polysomnographic recordings. Recordings were from the F4, C4 and O1 electrode sites (International 10-20 system of electrode placement) referenced to linked earlobes and bipolar electroculeography and electromyography sites.

Results: The percentage of REM sleep, REM latency (Independent samples t-test, p < 0.001, t = -5.346 and 3.800 respectively) and sleep onset latency (p < 0.05, t = 2.677) was significantly higher in meditators compared to the non–meditators. A non significant improvement in sleep efficiency in meditators was seen. The 95% confidence intervals for the difference in REM sleep, REM latency and sleep onset latency between meditators and non meditators were [-63.42, -28.61], [21.90, 72.02] and [1.57, 12.22] respectively.

Conclusion: A consistent practice of Isha yoga meditation technique appeared to have a positive impact on sleep as signified by better sleep onset latency and sleep efficiency.

Keywords: Polysomnography, sleep, meditation