

# Pranic Healing as a Complementary Therapy for Insomnia

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## ABSTRACT

Insomnia is a global health problem that has a major impact on the quality of life and productivity of millions of people. Global data recorded that 37% of adults experience insomnia. Management of sleep disorders is multimodal consisting of non-pharmacological and pharmacological approaches. Various complementary therapies are currently being developed to treat sleep disorders with minimal risk of side effects and they can be selected according to patient preference. Pranic Healing (PH) is a complementary energy-based therapy that is increasingly developed in current eras and its effectiveness is reported against insomnia. Pranic meditation is based on the premise that human health is affected by physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. This energy balance is needed to maintain and improve health.

**Keywords:** complementary, insomnia, pranic healing, sleep, therapy

## INTRODUCTION

Sleep is a physiological activity that is very important for human health and survival. Disruption of the quality and quantity of sleep has a significant negative impact on various organ systems. Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder in society with various etiologies. Based on the International Classification of Sleep Disorders (ICSD)-3, the definition of insomnia is a subjective perception of difficulty in sleep initiation, duration,

consolidation, or quality of sleep, even though the patient is given adequate time to sleep.<sup>1</sup>

Management of insomnia is developed over time with various pharmacological, non-pharmacological, complementary, and alternative methods.<sup>2,3</sup> Pranic Healing is one of the complementary biofield therapies that is increasingly recognized in health services and is known to have various benefits.<sup>2</sup> Pranic healing has been widely used to treat depression, anxiety, stress, and to help smoking cessation. It has also been studied and reported to provide benefits in the management of insomnia, either acting directly or indirectly.<sup>4</sup> In this literature review, we will discuss the role of Pranic therapy on sleep disorders, especially insomnia based on case studies and research that has been carried out.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Principles of Insomnia Management

Management of insomnia aims to improve the quality and quantity of sleep and also to treat the negative impacts caused by insomnia. Underlying medical conditions that can trigger insomnia must be traced carefully and given appropriate treatment. Non-pharmacological with or without pharmacological approaches are recommended for insomnia management.<sup>5,6</sup> The most widely used non-pharmacological therapies are Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), sleep hygiene, cognitive therapy,

and relaxation.<sup>1,7</sup>

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is an approved method for insomnia management without using medication. Cognitive Behavior Therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is designed to change sleep habits and behavior as well as misconceptions about sleep and insomnia that will exacerbate sleep difficulties. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) and the American College of Physicians recommend CBT as first-line therapy for chronic insomnia disorders, however, the number of fellowship staff and psychologists specializing in sleep disorders is still limited so alternative options are growing.<sup>8,9</sup>

The use of pharmacotherapy for insomnia may be considered but is not always recommended or ensure a good result. Until now there are only a few hypnotics approved by the FDA for insomnia treatment while other types of drugs are often used off-label. Long-term use of medication is known to have potential side effects of sedation and drug dependence if not used with caution.<sup>9,10</sup>

### **Integrative Medical Therapy Options**

New options have emerged for chronic insomnia treatment. Over the last two decades, the interest in non-pharmacological complementary therapies has increased. Yoga, acupuncture, mindfulness meditation, hypnotherapy, and exercise are some of the complementary interventions for insomnia.<sup>6,11</sup> The practice is carried out solely or in combination with other therapeutic methods. Hypnotherapy carries side effects risks such as headaches, false memory perception, and strong emotional impact due to stressful events that occurred in the past. Along with many cases of insomnia in the general population and patients with neurological disorders, people are starting to look for other alternative methods which are currently available, including biofield therapy.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most commonly recognized types of biofield therapy is pranic healing. Pranic healing uses a standardized process

aimed at complementing allopathic therapy. This method offers a variety of protocols and techniques to help improve various causes of sleep disturbances.<sup>12</sup> Pranic Healing services have now begun to enter the scope of complementary hospital services, including at Sanglah Hospital in Bali, Indonesia.

Pranic meditation is a secular meditation method based on ancient Vedic teachings which describe that pranic imbalance affects various dimensions of human health in terms of physical, mental, and spiritual. Prana uses meditation techniques to balance "subtle energies". This energy balance is needed to maintain and improve health.<sup>4</sup>

Pranic Healing is a synthesis of ancient healing methods that were discovered, studied, retested, and proven successful by the founder of Modern Pranic Healing, Grand Master Choa Kok Sui. This practice is simple but has great significance with immediate benefits to the patient. A person's lifestyle, stress, and anxiety directly affect the body's energy and create toxicity in the body and mind. Pranic therapy is believed to help cleanse one's body, soul, and spirit. Pranic meditation practitioners use easy-to-learn techniques of concentration, breathing, and visualization to restore the patient's energy balance.<sup>13</sup>

Prana or Ki is the vital energy or life energy that maintains life and health of the body. Prana in a plasmic state can be seen with the naked eye and felt by anyone with practice and guidance.<sup>6,14</sup> Prana is a universal energy that can be accessed and transmitted to the subject using specific techniques for certain diseases and conditions. The source of Prana comes from the air, sun, and earth. An important aspect of the pranic body is the Chakras or energy centers located along the spinal line.<sup>2</sup>

A multidisciplinary research team at the University of Brasilia has been conducting a scientific evaluation of this method for 6 years and found that the usefulness of Prana appears very early in just a few weeks of practice, which is expressed by increased mental concentration, physical

improvement, quality of life, and decreased pain, anxiety, and depression.<sup>15</sup> Intervention studies using PH to treat chronic musculoskeletal pain also indicated a significant reduction in pain and sympathetic activity in the PH group.<sup>16</sup> Several Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) studies using PH as adjuvant therapy for several diseases have been conducted. Pranic Healing is widely used as a complementary therapy for mild to moderate depression, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and visual impairment.<sup>17-19</sup> RCT studies in depressed patients showed significant improvement in middle insomnia in the PH group compared to the control group ( $p < 0.001$ ).<sup>18</sup> An RCT study has also been conducted in Denpasar, Bali on insomnia patients. The results showed that complementary pranic therapy could improve sleep quality and reduce the severity of insomnia compared to the control group. Significant improvement in sleep quality in the group of inmates in a prison was also observed after the PH session with normalization of the basic chakras and solar plexus.<sup>20</sup>

Chakra comes from the Sanskrit word which means wheel or cycle. There are seven main chakras located along the spine. Chakras are believed to provide subtle energy that helps the body's organs, mind, and intellectual functions work at their best. Chakras have not been examined in depth in medical studies but they can aid in thinking about the inner soul and body as well as beliefs.<sup>21</sup> There are 7 main chakras in our body, consisting of:

#### 1. Basic Chakra (Muladhara)

This chakra is believed to be located at the base of the spine. The basic chakra is associated with the red color and the earth element which functions to control feelings of sustainability, ambition, dependence, and stability.

#### 2. Sacral Chakra (Svadhishthana)

The Sacral Chakra is located below the navel and emits an orange color that

represents the water element. This chakra is believed to be responsible for sexuality, creativity, intuition, self-esteem, caring, and adaptability.

#### 3. Solar Plexus Chakra (Manipura)

This chakra is believed to be located between the ribs and the navel and represents the yellow color or the fire element. This chakra is believed to be the center of self-confidence and emotions.

#### 4. Heart Chakra (Anahata)

The heart chakra is believed to be located in the middle of the cardiovascular system. The color of this chakra is green with the air element. This chakra is considered to be a connection between caring, trust, passion, and love for oneself and others.

#### 5. Throat Chakra (Vishuddha)

Vishuddha is believed to control the neck, mouth, tongue, and other parts of the throat area. The color of this chakra is blue with the element of ether. The function of this chakra is self-expression, communication, and self-confidence.

#### 6. Third eye Chakra (Ajna)

This chakra is located between the eyebrows and has no elemental association but represents the color indigo. The Ajna Chakra is believed to control self-intellect, intuition, wisdom, and spiritual power.

#### 7. Crown Chakra (Sahasrara)

The crown chakra, located at the top of the head, represents the color violet or white and is considered the most spiritual center chakra. This chakra is believed to be a place of spirituality, enlightenment, and energetic thinking.<sup>21</sup>

### **Pranic Healing in Insomnia**

Pranic meditation which is practiced in a static sitting position uses attention-focused exercises to achieve inner calm and encourages the practitioner to master his abilities to absorb, focus, balance, and project prana, and use them to improve and

maintain health.<sup>4</sup> Pranic meditation practitioners showed a trend of decreased plasma cortisol levels, increased salivary melatonin levels, phagocytic capacity of blood monocytes and neutrophils, as well as increased hydrogen peroxide production.<sup>22</sup>

A study conducted by Castellar and colleagues in 2014 on breast cancer survivors regarding the impacts of pranic meditation on mental health and quality of life gave a significant improvement in the sleep disturbances aspect ( $P=.01$ ).<sup>4</sup> There are several different mechanisms underlying the beneficial effects of pranic healing on breast cancer survivors. Focused attention with breathing and visualization techniques promotes anxiety reduction, which positively affects fatigue, sleep disturbances, pain, depression, psychosomatic disorders, and immunity.<sup>23</sup> This Pranic energy can be emitted intentionally to decrease pathological manifestations (pain, inflammation, anxiety, depression) or to further enhance favorable conditions (immunity, viability, sleep, calmness).<sup>4</sup>

A recent study in 2020 by Amritha and colleagues aimed to prove the ability of pranic healing to overcome sleep problems, specific sleep latency disorders, and habitual sleep efficiency. Researchers conducted a pre-test/post-test randomized experimental-controlled study on adult female subjects with sleep quality disturbances using the PSQI (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index) sleep variable. The results of the study showed a significant difference in the mean value of the experimental group (with Pranic therapy) between the pre-test and post-test.<sup>13</sup> Researcher Nishant Lama conducted a case series on the effectiveness of PH for insomnia in two adult patients in Nepal. In his case series, it was assessed that the cause of the patient's insomnia was due to the overactivation of the basic and the Solar plexus Chakras. The basic chakra when activated will trigger hyperactivity, restlessness, and insomnia. The Solar plexus chakra controls the gastrointestinal and adrenal organs, when over-activated it will

cause digestive and adrenal function disorders<sup>24,25</sup>. Various studies have shown that hyperactivity of the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis is associated with metabolic, cognitive, psychiatric, and sleep disorders. The Pranic healer cleanses, energizes, and balances the patient's chakra with Pranic energy during and after the two healing episodes.<sup>2</sup>

A case study with PH intervention was also presented by Aithal R and colleagues in 2010. The authors report the use of PH in adult women who experienced insomnia, irritability, daytime sleepiness, and depressive mood for 6 months. After six PH sessions of 20 minutes each, the Athens Insomnia Scale score decreased to a normal sleep pattern. Follow-up carried out 6 months after therapy also showed normal sleep conditions in the patient.<sup>6</sup>

Psychiatric disorders are one of the most common etiologies of chronic insomnia. Anxiety, mood, personality, panic disorders, and alcoholism underlie insomnia in some populations. This population is also susceptible to new psychiatric disorders after experiencing insomnia for years. Pranic healing is widely used to treat depression, anxiety, stress, and excessive worries so it also indirectly helps prevent and treat insomnia.<sup>1,26</sup>

## CONCLUSION

An integrative therapy of mental and physical healing is needed in the treatment of various medical conditions including insomnia. Nowadays pranic healing as one of the complementary therapies has been increasingly recognized and is reported to have great potential for insomnia management. Case reports and several clinical studies have proven the usefulness of pranic healing in insomnia cases with early benefits that can be obtained, a good safety profile, and affordability. Large-scale experimental studies are still needed to further validate the applicability of pranic healing for insomnia.

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