

Yoga for Cancer and Chronic Illness

There is much more to battling cancer than just destroying the cancer cells through chemotherapy and radiation. Cancer centers, with yoga programs, have oncology-trained yoga therapists with proper certifications and experience. One such program is The CompleteLife program at Indiana University Health Simon Cancer Center. It offers complementary therapies and patient support programs for the patient and their family members. With a focus on the holistic approach to treatment, this program aims to treat the patient as a whole as opposed to just treating their disease. Inpatient yoga services are available for patients with cancer, as well as other chronic conditions that require long hospital stays.

A cancer patient's quality of life may be enhanced with yoga therapy through the promotion of healing and recovery measures designed to decrease the stress, anxiety and physical discomfort that often accompany cancer treatment. This same yoga therapy can also benefit patients with chronic conditions that can include: heart disease, multiple sclerosis, COPD, cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer's, arthritis, Parkinson disease.

Facing cancer or a chronic illness is stressful and can cause anxiety, which can interfere with the healing process. Yoga can help to relieve stress, as well as manage side effects of the illness and the treatments. More importantly, yoga can help patients regain a sense of control. Patients who are facing cancer or chronic illnesses often become the passive object of treatments, appointments, decisions by their doctors and so on. Yoga offers tools they can use to reacquire some feeling of control over their healing process. They can use the practices to find relief from anxiety, depression and other psychosocial issues, or relief from pain, fatigue and other physical issues. Through practicing awareness, patients may become more aware of poor habits, such as unhealthy eating, negative thought patterns and aberrations of the breath and naturally begin to make changes to these unhealthy patterns. In this way, yoga can be transformative, as healthy changes can come to a person more easily through simply practicing awareness. The patient also receives support from their fellow yoga students because classes can begin to form a supportive community. A yoga practice can improve a patient's quality of life through their treatment.

Even though yoga is a 5000 year old practice, it is just now beginning to undergo validation studies. The International Association of Yoga Therapists established strict guidelines for yoga therapy training programs. My daughter-in-law, Stella Snyder, is an oncology-trained yoga therapist at IU Health CompleteLife Program. Individuals with cancer and chronic illness have very specific needs when it comes to yoga practice, and it is necessary for yoga therapists to be certified in working with this population she cautions that people going through treatment need to conserve energy for the healing process and stay in the parasympathetic mode of the nervous system as much as possible. But, people who have completed treatment might be interested in regaining health and strength and may be searching for a new normal.

A review on the efficacy of complimentary health approaches published in 2014 in Journal of the National Cancer Institute showed yoga, meditation and relaxation with imagery were recommended for anxiety and stress reduction. This is a good representation of the first steps of showing that yoga produces positive benefits, and it may move into being an accepted part of our mainstream health care system.

In the Houston area:

Yoga for Cancer Survivors classes, are for people going through treatment, surgeries and recovery

Memorial Hermann

Events, classes & support groups:

<http://www.memorialhermann.org/cancer/events/>

For more information: call 281-540-7808

In the Dallas/Fort Worth area:

Yoga Bridge Yoga for Cancer - Denton.
Denton Regional Medical Center (Education Bldg)
3535 South Interstate 35
Denton, TX 76210

Yoga Bridge Yoga for Cancer - Lewisville.
Medical Center of Lewisville, 2nd Floor
500 W Main St.
Lewisville, TX 75057

For information email: yogabridge@hotmail.com

In the San Antonio area:

Empowering cancer patients and survivors to thrive

ThriveWell Cancer Foundation 210-593-5949

P. O. Box 29331
San Antonio, TX 78229

Located in The START Center for Cancer Care
4383 Medical Drive, Suite 4078
San Antonio, TX
For information email: info@thrivewell.org

In the Austin area:

Certified YMCA fitness instructors will deliver the physical activity portions of the program. Instructors are trained in the elements of cancer, post-rehab exercise, and supportive cancer care.

Registration & Questions

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