

## CANCER CARE

## Yoga for Cancer



ANNE PITMAN

If you have ever had a great yoga class, you will remember that glorious feeling of well-being and calm. Aside from the benefits of stretching and, breathing, research is showing

the health benefits of yoga for people living with cancer. Practicing yoga consistently, decreases distress, anxiety, depression, and fatigue. A study published in 2014 in the Journal of Clinical Oncology supports these results and reports that yoga practice also reduces inflammation in the body.

In a controlled trial – using a combination of simple, easy poses, stretches and breath practice – one trial group practiced yoga for 90 minutes, twice a week for 12 weeks, while another group did not. After the 12 weeks and again after three months, fasting blood samples were drawn. At three months post-treatment, biological markers of inflammation decreased significantly for the yoga group. These markers further decreased with only a 10 minute increase in practice time, showing a remarkable healing effect through the impact of yoga on inflammation.

## PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

At the root of this biological change in the body is relaxation through breath. This type of practice creates a dominance of the parasympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic state is one of rest and restore, as opposed to the sympathetic state, which is one of fight or flight anxiety. Because we live in a sympathetic world – high energy, constant on the go – we hardly ever get a break from constant stimulation. This keeps us in that activated state, almost all the time. This way of living seems to activate inflammation in the body, which seems to be implicated in many diseases – one of which is cancer.

## YOGA HELPS THOSE FACING CANCER

A cancer diagnosis is always a shock. What can follow is a dizzying flurry of appointments and decisions to be made. All of this continues to stimulate the fight-flight or sympathetic side of our nervous system. Fear and anxiety become prevalent. Arguably, this can keep our body in an inflamed state. Yoga is deep breath - it can help to balance the nervous system by releasing tension, gently pulling apart patterns of stress through movement and returning us to a calmer place. We have known for a while that the gentle practice of yoga can help you feel like yourself again, whole and healing, and we now have the science to prove it.

## YOGA CLASSES SPECIFIC TO CANCER

People facing cancer are looking for ways to manage the anticipation and stress of a cancer diagnosis and treatment. When we assist people in acknowledging what they are feeling, then get them back to their more grounded selves, they feel better, their body is healthier, and treatment is more endurable.

## GENTLE AND RESTORATIVE YOGA CLASSES

There are many types of yoga, from vigorous to gentle. Softer forms of yoga are most beneficial, especially to the nervous system. Gentle classes are just that – a more gentle practice of easy forward bends, back bends, twists, safe inversions, and breathing. Relaxation and mindfulness are important to any yoga practice.

Restorative classes are even easier than gentle styles and no experience is required. Restorative classes use pillows, blankets, and blocks to support the body in gentle poses. The feeling is like being held, which allows the body to relax and release. Meditative breath work is common in restorative classes. Participants can feel restored on all levels – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

## YOGA THERAPY

Yoga therapy is a one on one yoga experience, with an accredited teacher. It may include a

full physical yoga practice or it may be more about psychological or spiritual support. More time is spent with a client's story and a modified individual yoga practice is developed to suit a client's specific needs. Often there is a specific situation someone needs help with – facing a particular medical test or needing a simple breath practice to help recover from chemotherapy. We begin with the body, learning to listen deeply, acknowledging the experience held in the body, and following the body as a client moves toward healing.

## YOGA AT HOME

It is sometimes helpful to engage in a simple home yoga practice. If you do not know where to start, a yoga therapist can help. At its most simple, breath practice may be all that is needed for stabilization and to bring awareness to the whole self. With the added shock and anxiety from a cancer diagnosis, it can be challenging to breathe easily. While there are many breath practices in yoga that help to re-establish this balance, the simplest is to focus on the exhalation, letting the inhalation take care of itself. 🌿

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## MINDFULNESS

## What is Self Alignment?



MOIRA HUTCHISON

When I talk about the concept of alignment, I am referring to the synchronizing of our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual facets. When we allow ourselves to express ourselves as a complete spiritual, emotional and physical entity – all working in concert, all focused on the highest good – the joy we experience and express is incredible.

I believe that when any part of our being falls out of alignment, it is at that point that struggle and strife starts to develop and, once started, it can be used as proof or justification of why things like the law of attraction or ask and you will receive, do not work for you.

Our feelings can guide us into a sense of alignment. The fact is – in this human experience that we are all sharing – the ultimate goal is to feel good, to experience joy, peace and fulfillment.

*“Hard work is not the path to Well-Being. Feeling good is the path to Well-Being. You don't create through action; you create through vibration. And then, your vibration calls action from you.”*

Abraham-Hicks



Some people work hard at accumulating wealth, material gain, qualifications, etc. I am suggesting is that we stop looking outside of ourselves for a sense of fulfillment. We cannot always control our environment or the reactions and actions of those around us, but we can control our own actions and reactions in our environment. It is important to learn to trust yourself and keep an open dialogue going with yourself. You are answerable to no one else before yourself.

So if something does not feel right or it does not seem to sit right in any way – that is normal. It simply means whatever is bothering you, is not right for you. Things will change and that

is okay too. Just because some form of perceived authority tells you to think or behave in a certain way, you must check in with yourself and operate from a space of self integrity.

It can actually be quite exciting when you find that you do not agree or conform with everything you see and hear around you. It allows for your own expression and development. Fear and guilt are two strong forces which can throw you out of alignment and then shows up as choices and decisions that are not always based upon what is going to serve you better, or is really an expression of what you really want.

Ask yourself three questions when you find yourself in a situation that does not feel supportive or nurturing to you.

1. is this good for me?
2. will this bring me closer to what I really want?
3. what do I need to change?

Based upon your answers, you will be able to make the changes and choices required to bring you closer to who you really are – which is alignment with yourself.

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