

Breast Cancer Patients Benefit From Yoga

Article Date: 05 Jun 2006

Breast cancer patients who do yoga tend to enjoy better health, less fatigue and experience less daytime sleepiness - this applies to women who are undergoing radiotherapy for their breast cancer, say scientists from the University of Texas, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, USA.

Lorenzo Cohen, study leader, said even a short yoga program - including meditation, relaxation, breathing exercises, stretching, imagery and physical movements - can be very useful at reducing the side effects that come with breast cancer treatment.

The study looked at 61 women who were undergoing a six-week radiotherapy course after breast cancer surgery. Half of them attended a twice-weekly yoga class, the other half didn't. At the end of the courses - radiotherapy and yoga courses - they had to fill in a questionnaire.

The questionnaire asked how well they coped with lifting shopping bags, walking a mile, how tired they felt (fatigue), how well they felt - other questions were also asked, all related to their general well being and ability to carry out certain physical functions.

Depending on how the women answered the questionnaire, points were attributed, up to a maximum of 100. The yoga group scored an average of 82 points while the non-yoga group scored 69.

What is Yoga?

Yoga is a Sanskrit word that means **Union**. Sanskrit is an ancient language from India. It refers to the union of the body, mind and spirit.

There is much more to Yoga than just sitting in certain positions and stretching the body. The physical postures and poses of yoga are called **Asana**, also a Sanskrit word. Asana is one of eight aspects, or limbs, of yoga. Yoga has much more to do with a human's spiritual and mental well being than many people realise.

An important part of yoga involves the creation of a balance in the body through the development of strength and flexibility. This is achieved mainly through performing certain poses - each pose has benefits. The poses can be done rapidly, one after the other - this creates heat in the body as a result of movement. It is also possible to perform the movements slowly, this raises stamina - the person in this case is also improving the alignment of the pose. Yoga experts may disagree on how each pose should be ideally performed.

People who practise Yoga say it is never boring as one's experience with yoga develops over time.

Yoga is for everyone, say people who practise it. You do not need to have a flexible body to start. Yoga is entirely non-competitive - each person just does his/her best.

Yoga is open to people of both sexes, all ages, any level of fitness, and people of any weight.

Yoga classes can include:

- Physical movements including poses and postures
- Instruction on breathing
- Call and response chanting
- Meditation
- Inspiration reading

Whether the emphasis may be more on physical movements, meditation or one of the other factors will depend on the teacher's background.

How yoga can help you cope with breast cancer

Daily Mail - Tuesday 7 April 2006

A new study in the journal, Psycho-Oncology, says that yoga can halve symptoms of depression in women with breast cancer. Recent studies found yoga classes improved patients' emotional health and increased feelings of peace.

