

**YOGA & ANCIENT PRACTICES  
IN INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE  
FOR CANCER PATIENTS & SURVIVORS**

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# WHAT IS YOGA?

- Yoga is not just stretching exercises or hot sweaty fitness classes or something you do in stretchy pants
- Yoga includes yoga poses (asana), meditation practices, breathing techniques (pranayama), philosophical study, and techniques that examine the nature of self
- Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which means "to unite"
- "To unite" refers to the union of individual self with higher self or true nature and is often described as the science of self-realization.
- In yoga philosophy the nature of the true self is described in Sanskrit as *sat chit ananda* which means love, consciousness, and bliss
- Yoga practices help us to realize that happiness, well-being, and peace are not found outside of ourselves; rather we have them within. Yoga changes the question from "how do I find happiness & peace?" to "how am I blocking my inherent happiness within?"
- Yoga is a bunch of practices for body, mind, and spirit that make a person feel better. Like a buffet, you can pick what you like, but you may find yourself going for seconds and trying all the options.

# WHAT IS PRANAYAMA?

- *Prana* means essential life force energy; *yama* means control
- Pranayama is the regulation of the breath through certain techniques and exercises
- Often linked to movement when practicing yoga
- Often are an integral part of meditation practices
- Can be done as a practice on its own
- The practice of pranayama is intimately connected with the autonomic nervous system and aims to bring its functions under conscious control
- We can calm the nervous system and our minds through breath practices
- Various pranayama practices focus on changing depth, duration, and frequency of respiration and eliminating the pause between inhalation and exhalation, or by expanding the pause through retention creating a wide range of effects including calming and invigorating

# WHAT IS MEDITATION?

- Meditation is a practice where an individual uses a technique – such as mindfulness, or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity – to train attention and awareness, and achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state.
- Meditation is a mental exercise that involves relaxation, focus, and awareness. Meditation is to the mind what physical exercise is to the body.
- "When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a certain internal or external location, there comes to it the power of flowing in an unbroken current, as it were, towards that point. This state is called *dhyana* (meditation)." ~ Swami Vivekananda
- Meditation isn't about becoming a different person, a new person, or even a better person. It's about training in awareness and getting a healthy sense of perspective. You're not trying to turn off your thoughts or feelings. You're learning to observe them without judgment. And eventually, you may start to better understand them as well.
- There are many types of meditation practices including: mindfulness, mantra, guided visualization like yoga nidra, metta (lovingkindness), body scan, chakra, and so many more.

# DIVING DEEPER INTO THE SCIENCE OF YOGA, PRANAYAMA, AND MEDITATION

What does medical research say?

## PHYSICAL BENEFITS

### Yoga, Meditation, and Pranayama

for Cancer Patients & Survivors

Medical research supports these  
benefits of a regular yoga practice.

- Builds fitness, muscle strength, and muscle mass
- Improves cardiovascular function & lowers high blood pressure
- Improves immune system capacity
- Increases hemoglobin
- Decreases overall inflammation
- Reduces generalized pain, joint pain, and muscle pain
- Improves balance, flexibility, range of motion, and motor skills
- Improves sleep disturbances & insomnia
- Increases bone health & density
- Increases lung capacity & function
- Helps decrease lymphedema
- Decreases frequency & intensity of hot flashes
- Decreases glucose, insulin, and insulin resistance
- Decreases estrogen & androgens
- Decreases risk of other health problems like obesity, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, osteoporosis, and osteoarthritis

## PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

### Yoga, Meditation, and Pranayama

for Cancer Patients & Survivors

Medical research supports these  
benefits of a regular yoga practice.

- Eases stress-related symptoms, anxiety, and depression
- Reduces anger & hostility
- Improves quality of life and mood
- Increases ability to cope
- Increases functional well-being
- Enhances self-esteem
- Reduces fatigue
- Improves body awareness & acceptance
- Increases happy and calming neurotransmitters like GABA and serotonin
- Decreases stress hormones like cortisol, adrenalin, and catecholamines
- Supports psychological & spiritual insight
- Supports adherence to lifestyle and behavior changes
- Opportunity to just feel normal for an hour
- Improves emotional management & self-regulation

# SCHWARTZ SCALE OF SELF-REGULATION

Dis-Attention



Dis-Connection



Dis-Regulation



Dis-Order



Dis-Ease

Attention



Connection



Regulation



Order



Ease/Health

Humans tend to dis-regard negative or unpleasant experiences and try to ignore them. Yoga and meditation practices help us to face these unpleasant experiences with gentleness, openness, acceptance, and non-judgment. This allows us to respond consciously and creatively, creating order and ease - instead of reacting unconsciously and creating more dis-order and dis-ease.



# WHO CAN PRACTICE YOGA, MEDITATION, AND PRANAYAMA?

- Experience not required
- Flexibility not required
- Athletic ability not required
- Physical fitness not required
- A new wardrobe is not required
- Yoga, meditation, and pranayama are non-denominational, and no particular belief system is required
- There are yoga, meditation, and pranayama practices accessible to everyone
- If you breathe you can practice
- If you are sentient you can practice

## TIPS FOR STARTING A YOGA, MEDITATION, AND PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

- Start where you are
- Do what you can as often as you are able
- Don't do more than 70% of your capacity
- Approach your practice with gentleness, ease, patience, non-judgement, and non-striving
- Pain and strain don't belong in your yoga practice
- In general yoga studios have more highly trained teachers than gyms
- Not all yoga classes are appropriate for all students
- In pranayama and all practices don't try too hard
- Avoid setting goals other than being present for what is; let go of results
- Accept that some days you can do more than others
- Seek out an experienced and qualified teacher
- Listen to the wisdom of your body
- There is no "wrong" way to meditate
- Try different meditation techniques
- Focus on practices that make you feel good
- If you are spiritually-inclined, try connecting your practice to that which you deem sacred

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING TO SELF ON THE CANCER JOURNEY

- Improve awareness of body, mind, energy, and abilities and the mindful utilization of these so that they are directed to what matters most
- Tap into inner strength and wisdom
- Improve your ability to relate to others and to the world in a healthy and balanced way
- Make interacting with others more pleasant, healing, and growth-promoting
- Make life flow more smoothly
- Feelings of contentment, harmony, and joy become easier to access and maintain
- Reduce grasping, attachment, and fear
- Activate an inner power of healing and a sense of ok-ness
- Create an internal independent support system to draw on in crisis
- Enhance willpower and strength to fight
- Enhance willpower and strength to accept when the journey is over

# Paradox of Noise

By Gunilla Norris

It is a paradox that we encounter so much internal noise when we first try to sit in silence.

It is a paradox that experiencing pain releases pain.

It is a paradox that keeping still can lead us so fully into life and being.

Our minds do not like paradoxes. We want things to be clear so we can maintain our illusion of safety. Certainty breeds tremendous smugness.

We each possess a deeper level of being, however, which loves paradox. It knows that summer is already growing like a seed in the depth of winter. It knows that all of life shimmers, in shades of becoming – that shadow and light are always together, the visible mingled with the invisible.

When we sit in stillness we are profoundly active. Keeping silent, we hear the roar of existence. Through our willingness to be the one we are, we become everything.

# ACUPUNCTURE & CHINESE MEDICINE

## Benefits for Cancer Patients and Survivors

- Reduces side effects of cancer therapies
  - Post-operative pain control
  - Post-operative swelling & bruising
  - Nausea & vomiting
  - Muscle and joint pain
  - Hot flashes from breast cancer hormone therapies
  - Anxiety related to chemotherapy
  - Sleep disturbances related to chemotherapy
  - Fatigue
  - Dry mouth
  - Lymphedema
  - Neuropathy
  - Increases immune function
  - Depression
  - Helps to minimize medication for pain and side effects

# YOGA & ANCIENT PRACTICES IN INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

There are many definitions of integrative health care but all involve bringing conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way with a focus on health and wellness of the whole person and their quality of life.

Avoid the East versus West perspective; rather open to the idea of East and West working together.

Yoga, meditation, pranayama, acupuncture, and Chinese medicine are powerful tools that can help you on your journey with cancer.

- <https://academic.oup.com/bja/article/101/2/151/260251>
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- [https://www.gastrojournal.org/article/S0016-5085\(12\)01609-5/pdf](https://www.gastrojournal.org/article/S0016-5085(12)01609-5/pdf)
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- <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/treatment/complementary-alternative-therapies/individual-therapies/reiki>
- Dr. K. Simon Yeung, Herb Drug Interactions in Cancer Care Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center <http://www.exercisemedicine.org.au/research-activity/publications>
- Dr. Ting Bao, Oncologist, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation/overview.htm#hed3> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3415184/>
- Buffart L, BMC Cancer 12(1) 2012; Foley et al, J Consult Clin Psychol 2010; Cohen et al, Cancer 2004; Carson et al, Support Cancer Care 2009; Freeman et al, J Soc Integr Oncol 2008

## **Reading options for insight and information:**

*Warrior Pose: How Yoga (Literally) Saved My Life* by Bhava Ram

*Yogic Management of Cancer* by Dr. Swami Nirmalanada

*Lymphedema: A Breast Cancer Patient's Guide to Prevention and Healing* by Jeannie Burt and Gwen White

*Radical Remission: Surviving Cancer Against All Odds* by Kelly A. Turner, Ph.D.