

Yoga Proven Effective in Complementary Cancer Care

By Jack Bleeker

The 21st Century has brought with it tremendous strides in cancer survival and the efficacy of therapies. Among the more important aspects of this progress is the implementation of integrative oncology as an effective model for cancer treatment. Integrative oncology emphasizes not only the use of traditional cancer treatments, such as surgery, chemotherapy, and surgery, but also complementary, non-curative therapies designed to ease the process of cancer treatment for the patient. These therapies can range from acupuncture to meditation, but have proven more often than not to be effective in assisting patients through the discomforts commonly associated with traditional cancer treatment. One therapy being incorporated into cancer care in recent years is Yoga.

The primary goals of integrative oncology are to achieve effective cancer treatment while maintaining patient comfort and relief of stress. Just as Yoga has been used for hundreds of years as an effective stress release mechanism for many people, so too is it now being utilized by cancer patients.

While further research is ongoing, preliminary studies examining the effects of Yoga among cancer patients and survivors support the efficacy of Yoga within cancer treatment regimens, including the combating of symptoms caused by chemotherapy drugs. Yoga has shown to dramatically reduce sleeplessness, cancer-related distress, nausea, and excessive fatigue.

Some aggressive cancers are difficult to treat with curative therapies. Many patients of malignancies such as peritoneal mesothelioma, choose to incorporate alternative therapies such as Yoga, not to supplant traditional therapies, but to improve quality of life and reduce anxiety associated with terminal disease. Therapies which can reduce stress levels and alleviate symptoms associated with aggressive chemotherapy cocktails and radiation treatments can be extremely beneficial not only to patients but also to family members and loved ones of patients.

This is not to say however, that Yoga and other alternative therapies are appropriate for all patients. Patients suffering with mesothelioma, should speak with their oncologist and other doctors to ensure that they are in good enough health to pursue any therapy which could induce mild stress on the body. However, support for Yoga and other well-being-based therapies is growing among the oncology establishment and many cancer centers are introducing sessions designed for patients and family members. If the ultimate goals of complementary cancer care are to introduce therapies which improve comfort levels and reduce stress experienced by patients and loved ones, Yoga will be at the forefront of integrative oncology now and in the future.

Reference

Bower, Julianne E., Woolery, Alison, Sternlieb, Beth, and Garet, Deborah. "Yoga for Cancer Patients and Survivors." *Cancer Control* 12 (2005): 165-71