



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## CANCER AND YOGA

Taking time to relax between doctor's appointments and treatment is an important part of your care. Relaxation techniques provide an outlet to calm and rejuvenate the mind and body. Many people living with cancer find a sense of peace participating in yoga, an ancient practice combining breathing, relaxation and meditation exercises. Those that practice yoga may find their quality of life improve and gain a renewed sense of belonging.

### COPING WITH CANCER THROUGH YOGA

Yoga connects the mind and the body through moving meditations. People living with cancer that consistently practiced yoga can experience:

**Improved quality of life.** A racing mind of endless thoughts makes people restless, especially during the night, and promotes sleep difficulties. Yoga has a relaxing effect on the mind and body that can help relieve feelings of anxiety, and in turn, help patients achieve better sleep. For some people living with cancer, yoga has helped reduce fatigue, and even improve quality of life.

Yoga classes specifically created for people with cancer allow them to connect with others in a different capacity than in a traditional support group. This creates a sense of community, reduces feelings of isolation, and improves social skills.



**Reconnecting emotionally and spiritually.** On an emotional level, yoga helps people with cancer reconnect with their body after undergoing chemotherapy, radiation, and/or surgery. Yoga provides a sense of improved well-being by focusing attention on moving from one pose to the next, allowing the person to connect to the present moment. The breathing and movements ease stress and allow participants to connect to their inner selves on and off the mat. This inner peace can translate to increased emotional coping skills during and after treatment.

People can also experience an improvement in their own spiritual connection, ability to think outside the box, and social skills. Practicing yoga helps improve a person's quality of life, in turn, improving the person's relationship with themselves. This relationship is the building block for emotional stability and endurance during cancer treatment and ultimately, a person's ability to cope.

**Enjoying life in the moment.** Yoga aims to bring attention to the present moment by focusing on the breath. There are many different styles of yogic breathing, but the main element is to focus on inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the nose. This type of breathing promotes relaxation by slowing the heart rate.

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## TALKING TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT YOGA

Before starting yoga, it's important to talk with your doctor and consider the following:

- Is yoga right for you? There are other relaxation techniques if yoga is not the right fit. Where should you practice yoga? It is important to practice proper techniques with a licensed yoga instructor starting out. More hospitals and treatment centers offer yoga classes. There are also many helpful videos about yoga practices that can be done from the comfort of your home.
- What type of yoga is best for you? Some types of yoga, like 'hot yoga,' can be physically demanding in a humid environment. It is important to keep in mind your physical comfort level.
- Are there similar options to yoga if I have physical limitations? Talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine during treatment.

### OTHER RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

There are many alternatives to strengthen the mind and body that are similar to yoga:

**Guided Imagery.** This is a simple way to improve an emotional state while incorporating deep breathing and meditation. As you practice deep breathing, imagine a peaceful scene or setting, perhaps from a memory.

**Reiki.** Reiki is a gentle healing method to increase energy.

**Tai Chi.** Tai Chi involves slow, fluid motions that focus on relaxing the mind.

**Meditation.** This self-directed practice can relax the body and calm the mind.



### CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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