



Yoga Therapy and the Complementary Treatment of Cancer



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Introduction

The life of a cancer patient is complicated by a litany of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual factors leading to stress, fatigue, depression, and several other unpleasant emotional issues. (Caraceni et al, 1999) Insomnia and pain also contribute greatly to the overall discomfort. (Daut et al, 1982; Strang, 1983; Grossman, 1993; Ripamonti et al, 2001) These symptoms result in a significant reduction in the quality of life. (Allard et al, 2001) A host of non-pharmacological therapeutic interventions have been tried to alleviate this cancer and its treatment related disease. (Menefee et al, 2005; Goldstein et al, 2005; Smith et al, 2009; Anderson et al, 2012; Chandwani et al, 2012) Yoga therapy has shown increasing promise in improving these cancer-related emotional issues, greatly improving the quality of life of these patients. (ACS; Singh et al, 2015; McCall et al, 2015)

Methods

A comprehensive search of PubMed under 'yoga and cancer' revealed 339 citations dating back to 1975. PMC revealed 2736 full length articles. Other medicine databases were also queried and relevant publications were consulted.

Results

Most of the published literature on yoga and complimentary cancer care was in patients with breast cancer. (Sharma et al, 2016) Several studies have shown that women with breast cancer realize a marked improvement in quality of life scores and emotional well-being with yoga therapy. (Buffart et al, 2012; Harder et al, 2012; Cleeland et al, 2013) Prostate cancer patients, in an isolated study, have demonstrated similar benefits. (Carlson et al, 2003) Although published data in other kinds of cancer is scarce, two studies have reported benefit in advanced lung cancer, (Fouladbakhsh et al, 2014; Milbury et al, 2015) and one in the pediatric oncology population. (Danhauer et al, 2017) Overall, most cancer patients experience a decrease in anxiety, depression, fatigue and pain with yoga therapy, with an improvement in their psychological, physical and social wellbeing. (McCall et al, 2015) Emotional benefits have also been reported in cancer caregivers. (Milbury et al, 2015)

Conclusions

Evidence based data overwhelmingly demonstrates that yoga therapy is a safe and acceptable adjunctive intervention aimed at improving the quality of life in patients with breast cancer. It should therefore be offered as a complementary therapeutic modality to these patients. More studies are needed for its benefits in patients with other kinds of cancer.

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