

Yoga Study Shows Benefits for Breast Cancer Patients



05 June, 2006 12:31 GMT

Participants said they were in better general health, were less fatigued and had fewer problems with daytime sleepiness. Women going through treatment for breast cancer felt better when they tried yoga, according to one of the first scientific studies of its kind.

"Our belief is something as simple and brief as a short (yoga) program would be very useful" at combating side effects from cancer treatment, said Lorenzo Cohen, a psychologist who led the pilot study.

Yoga incorporates meditation, relaxation, imagery, controlled breathing, stretching and physical movements. Although the study was small and preliminary, it's one of the few to try to rigorously measure the benefits of this form of exercise, Cohen said.

Most Pronounced in Physical Function

Researchers at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center focused on 61 women who had surgery for breast cancer and now were getting six weeks of radiation treatment. Thirty women were assigned to a test group that took twice-a-week yoga classes. The others did not.

At the end of six weeks, study participants filled out detailed questionnaires grading their ability to lift groceries, walk a mile (1.6 kilometers) and perform other physical activities. They also were asked about feelings of fatigue, their sense of well-being and other aspects of their quality of life.

Their scores were converted to a scale that ranged from 0 to 100. The researchers found the yoga group consistently had higher scores in almost every area. It was most pronounced in physical function -- the yoga group had a mean score of about 82, compared with 69 for the other group.

Participants said they were in better general health, were less fatigued and had fewer problems with daytime sleepiness. But the researchers found no differences between the groups in measurements of depression or anxiety.

The researchers drew blood and took saliva samples in an effort to measure the participants' immune system function and stress levels, but those results are not finished yet, said Cohen, who presented the results at a medical conference in Atlanta held by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

A future study will have one group do stretching and another yoga, to see if there is a difference in the result, Cohen said.

Middle-Aged Yoga Practitioners Lose Weight

Traditionally, such scientific approaches have been lacking in the assessment of yoga's medical benefits, said Alan Kristal, an epidemiology professor at the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

Due in part to increased federal funding for research into alternative therapies, more rigorous studies have emerged in the last three or four years that attempt to provide harder proof, Kristal said.

Recent studies have demonstrated the benefits of yoga for cancer patients and people with carpal tunnel syndrome. Kristal co-authored a study last year that found middle-aged people who regularly did yoga lost weight over 10 years while a non-yoga group gained, on average, more than 13 pounds (5.9 kilograms).

The National Cancer Institute recently awarded Cohen and his team \$2.4 million (Pounds 1.87 million) to study the effects of Tibetan yoga on women with breast cancer undergoing chemotherapy. It was the largest ever federal grant for the study of Tibetan yoga in cancer patients.

Teresita Ladrillo, 52, a Houston breast cancer patient currently taking yoga classes at MD Anderson, said the stretching helped her regain flexibility in her right arm, which was limited by scarring from surgeries and other treatments.

Learning to control her breathing through yoga has helped her to calm and sleep, she said.

"Whenever you do yoga, the first thing they tell you is forget everything else and just focus on your breathing," she said. "There's something to be said for being still."

(c) Deseret News

(c) Daily News Central. All Rights Reserved.

Deep Breathing

The total capacity of our lungs is about 6000 c.c., but during normal breathing we only breath about 600 c.c. air per breath in to our lungs. In deep breathing the practitioner can inhale up to the total capacity of the lungs, which increases breathing efficiency per breath. The normal breath rate is 15 to 18 breaths per minute but in deep breathing this rate is reduced to about 4 to 8 breaths per minute.

The air is inhaled mostly using diaphragm or muscle of respiration and expanding the chest. The movement of abdomen helps the movement of diaphragm. The intercostal muscles help the movement of chest. In this the diaphragm movement requires less efforts than the rib movement and more air can be inhaled as the diaphragm can be vertically moved up and down to about 6 inches. So Deep breathing involves efficient movement of abdomen.

Following are the benefits of Deep breathing -

- Due to slowing of respiration rate (15 breaths/min to 4 breaths/min), the heart rate / pulse rate is reduced. The blood pressure is also reduced. So deep breathing is very good for stress and related ailments.
- More oxygen is made available per breath, making the breathing most efficient.
- Conscious deep breathing greatly affects the cortical activities, relaxing the nervous system, which calms the mind by removing thoughts and emotions.
- Enhanced movement of the diaphragm gives good massage to the internal organs as liver, pancreas, stomach, heart, lungs are attached to the diaphragm which is moved up and down during the breathing.
- It is observed that the animals who breath slowly have more life span, so reducing the breath rate with deep breathing may help increase the life span of human beings.

Practice - Beginners can start with deep breathing practice in sitting position or lying down position.

- Initially the ratio of 1:1, that is inhalation and exhalation counts are same. for example - 4 seconds inhale and 4 seconds exhale or 5 sec inhale and 5 sec exhale. You may practice it for 5 minutes initially, and gradually increase the time duration.
- After practicing it for 10 minutes everyday, one can increase the ratio to 1:2, that is exhalation is twice of inhalation. for example - 4 seconds inhalation and 8 seconds exhalation or 5 sec inhale and 10 sec exhale.

Note- If one feels short of breath then he / she can reduce the counts of deep breathing.