



What Happens after Conventional Treatment? Yoga Therapy for Breast Cancer Survivors



BC Cancer Agency
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Priority of the Provincial Health Services Authority

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Background

- There are over 10.5 million cancer survivors in North America. Over 40% of the female survivors are breast cancer survivors.
- Approximately 75% of cancer patients and survivors experience some kind of debilitating effects from diagnosis and treatments.
- Approximately 80% of breast cancer survivors are using some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) within in their cancer trajectory.
- Yoga is regarded as an effective CAM therapy across many cultures.
- A growing body of randomized controlled research on yoga implies that yoga has physical and psychosocial benefits for the chronically ill.
- Effects of yoga among cancer patients and survivors have been examined by scientists and clinicians in recent years. Several of these studies provided support for the feasibility and efficacy of yoga for cancer patients and survivors, although controlled trials are considerably lacking.

Effects of Cancer

Conditions Experienced from Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment:

- Chronic Pain
- Considerable fatigue
- Psychological distress
- Impaired quality of life
- Cognitive dysfunction
- Loss of appetite
- Poor mental health
- Loss of libido
- Nausea, acid reflux
- Muscle cramps
- Night sweats
- Digestive imbalances
- Reduced physical and sexual functioning

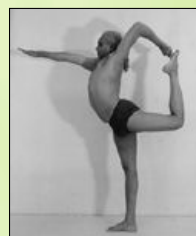


Theoretical Foundation

Yoga is one of the oldest holistic health-care systems in existence, focusing on both the mind and body. The roots of yoga date back almost 5,000 years. About 2,000 years ago the Indian sage Patanjali developed the basis of yoga philosophy as practiced today.

The Yoga Sutras outline Patanjali's 8 limb path of yoga:

1. yamas (cultivate healthy attitudes in relationship to others)
2. niyamas (cultivate positive rapport with self)
3. asana (physical postures)
4. pranayama (breath work)
5. pratyahara (sense withdrawal, turning inward)
6. dharana (internal focus, concentration)
7. dhyana (meditation)
8. samadhi (liberation, freedom from suffering)



Yoga Therapy

Conventional Components:

- Structural Imbalances (e.g., anatomical)
- Neuromuscular Patterning (i.e., pain and pain management)
- Physiological
 1. Digestive
 2. Cardiovascular
 3. Immune system
 4. Endocrine system
 5. Respiratory
 6. Reproductive
 7. Nervous
- Psycho-emotional
- Spiritual / Mindful awareness
- Clinical and therapeutic (i.e., diagnosis, treatment, follow-up)

Holistic Components:

Koshas: Sheaths of the body

Gross body:

- Annamaya kosha: 'food body', anatomical and physiological systems subject to the biological processes of aging.

Subtle body:

- Pranamaya kosha: vital energy, subtle life force, chakras
- Manomaya kosha: psycho-emotional, personality types
- Vijnamaya kosha: wisdom body, discrimination

Causal body:

- Anandamaya kosha: bliss body, meditation, identification of the True Self

Objective

The study aims to:

- Examine the feasibility of a yoga therapy intervention for breast cancer survivors within British Columbia Cancer Agency (BCCA), Vancouver.
- Capture preliminary feasibility data to inform a future controlled trial.
- Identify factors that promote and impede acceptability, sustainability, recruitment and attrition of a yoga therapy program within British Columbia's culturally diverse population.

Methods

- Eligible participants are breast cancer patients who have completed their primary treatments (i.e., chemotherapy, radiation) no less than 4 weeks prior.
- 12 health care professionals (HCPs) and 12 breast cancer survivors and patients will be recruited via BCCA
- 10 Semi-structured interviews and 4 focus groups with health care professionals (HCPs) and breast cancer patients will be conducted.
- Feasibility factors will be identified. These include possible factors that could impact:
 - Acceptability (e.g., perceptions of yoga),
 - Sustainability (e.g., patient flow),
 - Recruitment (e.g., health status of survivors),
 - Attrition (e.g., child care).
- Participants will be asked which factors they have experienced within a care-giving or patient role.
- Focus group/interview questions will also assess acculturation, beliefs about CAM (including yoga), culture and appropriateness of outcome measures.
- The therapeutic context of a yoga therapy intervention will be examined, including perceptions of:
 - the design of a yoga therapy program (e.g., number of sessions)
 - the environmental context of the yoga therapy program (e.g., location of sessions, therapist-patient relationships).

Significance and Outcomes

- Before yoga therapy can be broadly applied into healthcare systems for palliative care, carefully designed and executed research that convincingly validates the physical, psychological and spiritual benefits of yoga therapy will be required.
- The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) of the National Institute of Health (NIH) confirmed that the primary obstacle to incorporating CAM into mainstream healthcare was lack of research on efficacy and cost-effectiveness.
- It is anticipated that this proposed study will generate a solid foundation of data in order to carefully design a pilot study to test efficacy and cost-effectiveness of a CAM modality (e.g., yoga therapy).

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