

# What happens after conventional treatment? Investigating the feasibility of a yoga therapy program for breast cancer survivors.



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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) in their cancer trajectory.
- Yoga is regarded as an effective CAM therapy across many cultures.



# Background (Cont'd)

- 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.



# Objective

The study aims to:

- Examine the feasibility of a yoga therapy intervention for breast cancer survivors within British Columbia Cancer Agency (BCCA).
- Capture preliminary feasibility data to inform a future controlled trial.
- Identify factors that promote or 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 the Research Support Team.
- 10 Semi-structured interviews and 4 focus groups with health care professionals (HCPs) and breast cancer patients will be conducted.



# Methods (Cont'd)

- 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), and
  - 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), and culture.
- 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), and
  - 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).



# Yoga Therapy

## 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., assessment, diagnosis, treatment, follow-up)



# Yoga Therapy

*Holistic*

Koshas: Sheaths of the body

Gross body:

- Annamaya kosha: ‘food body’, anatomical & 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



# Foundations of Yoga Practice

- ☞ Riding the waves ~ living skillfully: finding your balance and keeping your poise amidst the tumult of life's ever-changing waves
- ☞ Simple being ~ our immediate sense of simply being present, at any given moment; a reliable point you can come back to, to get centered and find your bearings
- ☞ Awareness ~ watching yourself in your daily life with alert interest - noticing sensations, thoughts, feelings, actions - with the intention to understand rather than to judge
- ☞ Love ~ within all of us there is a deep-down goodness which is the basis for qualities such as kindness and carefulness
- ☞ Acceptance ~ being willing to have the experience you are already having, versus resisting and struggling to escape your own experience



# 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)



# 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



# Yoga and Cancer



- Yoga is self reliant and practical.
- Yoga therapy can be modified to the individual.
- Asymptomatic people and those who are immune compromised need different kinds of support.



# Iyengar Yoga

## Restorative Yoga Practice



- Supportive environment for total relaxation
- Minimal physical exertion
- Some poses effect whole body, while others effect specific target areas.
- Alternately stimulates and soothes the internal organs
- Relaxation response is a chemical process which breaks down the effect of sympathetic arousal. Postures are held longer to encourage this.

# Savasana

## "corpse pose"

*Not-doing in doing. Practice this, and know the unknowable.*

- Lao Tzu



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