



Inset: Amy Balog leads a chair yoga class for cancer patients at Scully-Welsh Cancer Center.

HEALTH

A Gentle Side of Cancer Care

YOGA AND OTHER INTEGRATIVE THERAPIES HELP PATIENTS MANAGE CANCER-RELATED SYMPTOMS



BY RENÉE TESAURO

It's a Thursday morning at the Scully-Welsh Cancer Center at Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital, and the dozen or so patients gathered in a light-filled multipurpose room are not here for chemotherapy, radiation, or a follow-up visit with their oncologist. They are here for yoga.

For the next hour, Amy Balog, a palliative medicine

nurse practitioner certified in yoga instruction for oncology patients, will guide the group through gentle breathing, movement, and mindfulness techniques designed to ease the physical and emotional toll that all too often accompanies the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The classes, offered several times a week in both mat and chair yoga formats, are

free to cancer patients regardless of age, physical ability, or experience level.

"Whether they are newly diagnosed or have been in remission for 10 years, cancer patients can benefit from yoga in many ways," points out Balog, who has been practicing yoga for more than 20 years. "It can help decrease stress, depression, fatigue, pain, and nausea."

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RJ Ward assists cancer patients with free, individualized physical therapy and exercise.

Many people come during and after treatment, she says, while others continue to benefit many years after their treatment. Everyone is welcome, and the program can be tailored to accommodate individuals and their particular symptoms.

“I love it. I had never done it before,” comments 78-year-old Wayne, a stage 4 esophageal cancer survivor who began yoga classes eight weeks ago. “It makes me more at ease, relieves stress and pain, and helps me sleep better. It’s also made me more flexible. I can touch my toes now!”

Participants also cite the benefits of connecting with others who have been through the biggest fight of their lives.

“When you have cancer and you’re undergoing treatment, you feel like you’re the only one,” observes Renee, who accompanies her daughter, Rachel, to yoga classes while Rachel receives treatment for large B-cell lymphoma. She says yoga has not only given Rachel a sense of peace, but it has also made her realize that she is not alone; there are others going through the same thing. The experience, Renee says, has been a godsend for both her and her daughter.

This year, more than two million new cancer cases will be diagnosed in the United States alone. Although survival rates for many types of cancer have increased dramatically over the past

LIVING WELL



Mary Horne offers foot massages during infusions, and Wendy Reynolds assists patients with wig selection at Scully-Welsh Cancer Center.

decade, many patients will undergo treatment regimens that have a prolonged impact on their physical and psychosocial well-being.

Common physical issues include loss of strength and flexibility, weight gain, and reduced physical function. While studies have shown that aerobic and resistance training can improve these issues, many cancer patients resist such activities because of chronic pain, nausea, fatigue, or self-consciousness related to their appearance. That's why

approximately one in three cancer patients turn to integrative therapies such as yoga to help manage their symptoms.

Although research in the United States and China has largely focused on breast cancer patients, yoga has gained widespread recognition as an integrative therapy for managing physiological and psychological challenges among all types of cancer patients. Studies of women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer suggest that yoga therapy

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HOW YOGA BENEFITS CANCER PATIENTS

- ◆ *Lowers stress and anxiety*
- ◆ *Reduces chronic pain*
- ◆ *Eases cancer-related fatigue and nausea*
- ◆ *Improves sleep*
- ◆ *Enhances immune response*
- ◆ *Lowers blood pressure*
- ◆ *Improves balance, flexibility, and physical function*
- ◆ *Provides a sense of joy and well-being*

reduces fatigue, depression, and anxiety and improves sleep, quality of life, and weight management. In a study of more than 400 cancer survivors with cancer-related fatigue (CRF) two to 24 months after treatment, yoga helped reduce CRF and improve their walking, engagement in physical activity, and quality of life.

According to Sarah Taylor, who coordinates the integrative oncology program, yoga is one of many complementary programs offered without charge to patients at the Scully-Welsh Cancer Center. “We have a dedicated wig boutique, art therapy classes, massage therapy, nutrition counseling, and smoking cessation



Sarah Taylor is the accreditation and integrative oncology program coordinator at Scully-Welsh.

programs. There is an exercise therapy studio with treadmills, dumbbells, and a TRX system where patients work one-on-one with a trainer for 12-week sessions to build strength and improve their immune system. The center also offers music therapy in partnership with the Visiting Nurse Association for both inpatients and those receiving infusions as well as acupuncture in partnership with Indian River Acupuncture.”

Patients receiving infusions in the 13-bay glass-enclosed infusion area with views of the center’s beautiful garden are offered foot massages to help with neuropathy; essential oils; and warm oshibori towels.



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LIVING WELL



Practicing yoga can help reduce stress and anxiety.

Taylor worked with a dietician to stock a food cart with healthful snacks to foster healing during infusion sessions. Patients (including her own dad), she says, really appreciate the tasty protein shakes, kombucha, and menu items such as hummus and crackers.

“The goal of integrative medicine,” Taylor explains, “is to go beyond the basic clinical care. We educate each provider about the programs we offer, and every patient gets a nurse navigator, who regularly meets with them, when they are diagnosed.” Scully-Welsh integrative medicine programs are tailored to meet individual needs and free to all oncology and palliative care patients thanks to

philanthropic support. Answer to Cancer, a nonprofit organization created by Grand Harbor members, is one of many generous donors.

“We define survivorship as day one after diagnosis,” says Taylor. “We target any patient who can benefit, regardless of the type of cancer they have or how far out they are from treatment.”

“When I see these patients thriving, and when I hear Amy saying, ‘Today we all shouted mantras and we all left feeling so empowered,’ I know that the program is truly making an impact.”

For these yogis, namaste (an expression of gratitude) truly has added meaning! 🙏

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