

Study: Yoga Improves Sleep, Quality of Life for Cancer Survivors

May 21 2010



(PhysOrg.com) -- Cancer survivors who perform gentle yoga report they sleep better, feel less fatigued and enjoy better quality of life, according to the University of Rochester Medical Center, which is presenting the largest study of this kind at the upcoming American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting in June.

“This is great news for cancer survivors who deal with persistent and debilitating side effects from their cancer and its treatments long after their primary therapy ends. There are few treatments for the sleep problems and fatigue survivors experience that work for very long, if at all,” said Karen Mustian, Ph.D., M.P.H., the study’s lead investigator and assistant professor of [Radiation Oncology](#) and Community and

Preventive Medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center's James P. Wilmot Cancer Center. “Yoga is a safe and simple technique that can have multiple benefits for survivors who are looking for solutions.”

People being treated for cancer often report sleep problems and fatigue. Yet, they, along with many doctors and nurses, expect the problems to end when surgery, chemotherapy or radiation therapy is complete. However, studies show that as many as two-thirds of survivors experience them for months after, sometimes years, and they also report sleep aids aren't effective, said Mustian, one of a handful of scientifically trained exercise psychologists and physiologists specializing in cancer in the United States.

The randomized controlled phase II/III study enrolled 410 early-stage cancer survivors, primarily women who had [breast cancer](#), between 2006 and 2009. Half of them attended a twice-a-week specialized yoga program that was developed by Mustian.

Participants in the yoga group reported improved sleep quality and less fatigue, and a better quality of life while reducing the use of sleeping medications following the four-week program. The control group showed increased use of the sleep medications and reported reduced sleep quality, greater fatigue and a poorer quality of life.

The specialized yoga program, designed by the Mustian and colleagues at the University of Rochester, is called YOCAS® (Yoga for [Cancer Survivors](#).) It includes breathing exercises, gentle Hatha and restorative yoga postures and mindfulness exercises. Yoga Alliance-certified instructors who were trained to deliver the YOCAS® program at cancer centers in nine cities across the country.

Over the years, the benefits of yoga have been debated in the scientific

community. Until recently, there were few studies of yoga and an even smaller number of the studies were with cancer patients or survivors. These studies were small and lacked consistency in yoga techniques, making it difficult for researchers to determine clear benefits of its use.

While Mustian is pleased with the success of the program, she's suspects it's the breathing, postures and mindfulness components of gentle [yoga](#), individually or in combination, that improve sleep, fatigue and quality of life. "It is also possible that the YOCAS® program works through many different biological, psychological and social pathways simultaneously," she said, adding that stress and anxiety reduction help initiate relaxation.

Provided by University of Rochester Medical Center

Citation: Study: Yoga Improves Sleep, Quality of Life for Cancer Survivors (2010, May 21)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-05-yoga-quality-life-cancer-survivors.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--