



Yoga for Cancer

Julie Williamson

Certified Personal Trainer



One of the many ways that cancer affects a person is by causing stress. There is stress caused by receiving the diagnosis, stress from doctor visits, from treatments, from possible pain and discomfort, the list goes on and on. One way to alleviate stress is through exercise. Yoga is an excellent way to relieve stress. It uses a variety of poses and breathing techniques to create peacefulness and relaxation of the mind and body. Studies have shown that after one yoga session a person's cortisol (hormones released in response to stress) levels are lowered.

According to Bari Ruck, a yoga teacher at Moffitt Cancer Center, "Yoga that helps with cancer is not the 'go for the burn' yoga, it is to help loosen the joints, relax the muscles and most importantly to help control and focus your breathing." Yoga teaches you to control your breath and in so doing you control your body and quiet your mind.

There are a few misconceptions about yoga. Yoga is not a religion, when one practices yoga there is no worship involved. According to Ruck, "it is about stilling the mind and relaxing the body and learning how to connect body and mind."

Here are a few of the benefits of yoga:

- Increased sense of hope and increased energy
- Increased confidence and elevation of mood
- Increased ability to perform the activities of daily living
- Decreased pain, fatigue, anxiety, depression and nausea
- Decreased sleep disturbances and sense of isolation

Following is a short yoga session, from Ruck, that can be done in 10 minutes:

1. **The pause:** Take a moment to notice how you feel right now.

- a. How do I feel physically, emotionally?
- b. Am I breathing fully?

2. **Breathing:** Take five slow, deep breaths. Count them.

Inhale 1, Exhale 1... Inhale 2, Exhale 2 and so on.

Try to complete all five breaths and the pause again.

3. **Movement:**

- a. Exhale and let the chin drop down towards the chest.
- b. Inhale and lift the chin – this movement does not have to be too deep.
Move slowly and repeat 10 times with full breath
- c. Exhale and bring your right ear to your right shoulder
- d. Inhale and bring your head back to center
- e. Exhale and bring your left ear to your left shoulder
Moving slowly repeat 10 times
- f. Exhale and turn your chin to your right shoulder, complete the exhale
- g. Inhale and bring your chin back to neutral
- h. Exhale and turn your chin to your left shoulder, complete the exhale
Move slowly and repeat 10 times
- i. As you inhale shrug your shoulders up towards your ears
- j. As exhale, bring your shoulders down

Repeat this movement slowly 10 times

Once you are done let your shoulders relax down towards your waist

Please be sure to honor your body. If you find something does not feel right, feel free to skip the movement or change it so it is suitable to you.