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Yoga provides emotional benefits to women with breast cancer

Randomized study confirms effects include improved mood and reduced fatigue

Women undertaking a ten week program of 75 minute Restorative Yoga (RY) classes gained positive differences in aspects of mental health such as depression, positive emotions, and spirituality (feeling calm/peaceful) compared to the control group. The study, published today in a special issue of *Psycho-Oncology* focusing on physical activity, shows the women had a 50% reduction in depression and a 12% increase in feelings of peace and meaning after the yoga sessions.

RY is a gentle type of yoga which is similar to other types of yoga classes, moving the spine in all directions but in a more passive and gentle way. Props such as cushions, bolsters, and blankets provide complete physical support for total relaxation with minimal physical effort, and so people in differing levels of health can practice yoga more easily.

44 women took part in the study, with 22 undertaking the yoga classes and 22 in the waitlist control group. All of the women had breast cancer; 34% were actively undergoing cancer treatment while the majority had already completed treatment. All participants completed a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the ten week program, asking them to evaluate their quality of life through various measures. The results clearly showed that the women who had been given the RY classes experienced a wide range of benefits compared to the control group (who were later all invited to attend identical RY classes).

"Evidence from systematic reviews of randomized trials is quite strong that mind-body therapies improve mood, quality of life, and treatment-related symptoms in people with cancer. Yoga is one mind-body therapy that is widely available and involves relatively reasonable costs," said lead researcher Suzanne Danhauer, Ph.D., based at Wake Forest University School of Medicine. "Given the high levels of stress and distress that many women with breast cancer

experience, the opportunity to experience feeling more peaceful and calm in the midst of breast cancer is a significant benefit."

The study found that women who started with higher negative emotions and lower emotional well-being derived greater benefit from the gentle yoga intervention compared to the control group. Women in the gentle yoga group also demonstrated a significant within-group improvement in fatigue, while no such change was noted for the control group.

"This was a pilot study to identify the worthiness and feasibility of conducting a larger randomized control trial on restorative yoga and women with breast cancer," added Danhauer. "Our results are very promising and will allow us to embark on a much larger scale study."

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