Exploring Different Types of Hatha Yoga for Patients With Cancer

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Yoga has been practiced for more than 5,000 years and is based on the collective experiences of yoga practitioners over time. Western countries and sophisticated medical facilities use this practice as a complementary therapy with standard medical treatments. Yoga has been shown to improve quality of life. Several types of yoga potentially can benefit people with cancer, including Hatha yoga. The type of recommended Hatha yoga is dependent on the physical conditions and fitness level of patients. This article explores the impact of different types of Hatha yoga on various cancer-related symptoms in patients with cancer. The article also provides guidelines for healthcare personnel—particularly nurses—to help choose the right kind of Hatha yoga that suits their patients’ needs and interests. Additional information is provided on measures and instructions that are essential for healthcare providers to know before recommending any yoga type to their patients. Evidence of the feasibility and potential efficacy of yoga for patients with cancer is provided.

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Yoga is a form of non-aerobic exercise that involves different postures, breathing exercises, and meditation (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine [NCCAM], 2013). Yoga is believed to have originated from ancient Indian philosophy and is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning union—a union of mind, body, and spirit during exercise (D’Stasio, 2008; NCCAM, 2013). Yoga, with its religious roots in Hinduism and Buddhism, is practiced by different cultures around the world and is more than just a physical exercise (Connolly, 2007). This article will help nurses become familiar with different techniques of Hatha yoga, along with their benefits for different patients with cancer.

About 14 million Americans were living with a cancer diagnosis in 2012 (American Cancer Society, 2013). The scar of the disease always is evident—physiologically and psychologically—and this affects the quality of survivors’ lives forever. Yoga is considered a complement to standard medical care treatment, and although no scientific evidence exists of its effectiveness in treating cancer or any other disease, yoga can help to protect and support patients’ physical, mental, and spiritual strength (Culos-Reed et al., 2012).

This article explains Hatha yoga and its impact on different types of cancer. Yoga is the sixth most commonly used complementary health practice among U.S. adults (NCCAM, 2013). Yoga also has gained popularity among patients who are diagnosed with cancer. Yoga may help in managing cancer-related symptoms and symptoms of many other chronic conditions, such as arthritis and pain (Cramer, Lange, Klose, Paul, & Dobos, 2012).

A variety of yoga types focus on different techniques (American Yoga Association, n.d.). Hatha yoga is practiced by concentrating on physical movements, postures, and breathing, whereas Raja yoga involves meditation and study by integrating exercise with breathing. Jnana yoga follows the path of knowledge and wisdom, and Bhakti yoga involves practice of devotion. Karma yoga focuses on doing good to other individuals with service (American Yoga Association, n.d.). This article explains Hatha yoga.

Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is popular in the United States and requires a combination of body postures and breathing techniques (NCCAM, 2013). Hatha yoga is considered to be a foundation of...