

The Benefits of Medical Qigong in Patients With Cancer: A Descriptive Pilot Study

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Medical Qigong (MQ) is a mind-body exercise that includes movement and meditation and is beneficial in reducing high blood pressure, high cholesterol, anxiety, stress, pain, and incidence of falls. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether patients with cancer and survivors who participated in an MQ class experienced a change in fatigue, depression, and sleep from a preintervention evaluation to a postintervention evaluation. Participants were patients diagnosed with cancer who participated in MQ classes. Some were actively undergoing cancer treatment (e.g., surgery, hormone therapy, radiation therapy, chemotherapy) and some were receiving no treatment. Patients diagnosed with cancer and enrolled in an MQ class were invited to participate. A packet of surveys was completed before the first class and before the final class.

Scores showed a reduced depression score after completing the five-week MQ course. Those findings indicate that MQ is helpful in reducing some of the problems associated with cancer and cancer treatment.

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Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/13.CJON.654-658

A cancer diagnosis can have a great impact on overall quality of life (QOL) (Sun et al., 2012). Symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, and anxiety commonly are reported as inter-related issues for patients with cancer (Jim et al., 2011). About 83% of Americans have used complementary or alternative medicine (CAM) to alleviate symptoms from cancer and its treatment (Cassileth & Deng, 2004). Medical Qigong (MQ), a type of CAM that includes movement and meditation, reduces anxiety, stress, and pain, as well as high blood pressure, cholesterol, and incidence of falls (Jahnke, Larkey, Rogers, Etnier, & Lin, 2010; Ng & Tsang, 2009; Rogers, Larkey, & Keller, 2009; Skoglund & Jansson, 2007; Skoglund, Josephson, Wahlstedt, Lampa, & Norbäck, 2011). The authors sought to identify options for symptom relief for patients with cancer and survivors. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to determine if scores on sleep quality, depression, and fatigue improved after the completion of a five-week MQ class. The type of Qigong used for this project was Zhineng Qigong.

Background Qigong

Qigong was developed 5,000 years ago as a fundamental traditional Chinese medicine, and it uses physical activity and meditation to harmonize the body and spirit (Peiwen, 2003). Qigong theorizes that illness results from a blockage of energy flow in the human body. A free flow of Qi (i.e., energy) improves health and prevents disease (Chen & Yeung, 2002). Western medicine has compared Qigong to the relaxation response theory (Benson & Klipper, 1975) and the theory of psychoneuroimmunology (Ader, Cohen, & Felten, 1995).

Qigong is a generic term that encompasses thousands of forms of exercise, such as martial arts, meditation, and MQ. What differentiates Zhineng Qigong from other forms of MQ is the integration of the Qi. Through the practice of Zhineng Qigong, an exchange occurs between nature's Qi and human Qi that results in a cleansing of the physical body and enhanced mental clarity (National Qigong Association, 2013).