Yoga can strengthen your body and mind, but what role does it play in a cancer setting?

Research shows yoga can lessen the severity of symptoms, improve quality of life at a physical, psychological, and spiritual level, and improve biological parameters.

Yoga is a quintessential mind-body practice combining movement, controlled breathing and breathing exercises, and meditation. The focus on the breath in all aspects of yoga helps to reduce stress, leading to a healthy balance between mind and body.

Yoga can help reduce our ‘flight-or-fight’ response that is common in the face of stressful situations and instead activate a state of relaxation and calm that can help relieve feelings of anxiety and distress. This can lead to improvements in overall health, as chronic stress is harmful to all aspects of our lives, including biological functioning, and has been found to be associated with shorter cancer survival and to speed the aging process. Other health benefits of yoga include increased flexibility, increased balance, improved mood, and reductions in fatigue, sleep disturbances, and inflammation.

In 2021, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network listed yoga as a way to help manage cancer related fatigue and nausea. Research also shows that yoga can help improve multiple aspects of cancer patient physical and mental health, overall quality of life, and biological outcomes such as immune function. A study conducted by the Integrative Medicine Program at MD Anderson found yoga helped improve aspects of quality of life and lead to better regulation of cortisol (a stress hormone linked to poor survival among breast cancer patients) in women with breast cancer undergoing radiotherapy through six months later.

Our own research at MD Anderson also suggests the following benefits of yoga:

- Improved sleep
- Decreased treatment side effects such as fatigue
- Improved quality of life, physical function
- Improve stress hormone regulation
- Increase in finding meaning from having cancer

There are many different types of yoga and there is no evidence that one style is more beneficial than another. Taking into consideration safety and your level of physical conditioning, it is important to find an instructor, class and type of yoga that best matches your individual needs. It is also important to consult with your primary medical care team before participating in exercise if you have any physical limitations.

Yoga Services Available for You at MD Anderson and Virtually

Currently, all yoga and meditation services are offered virtually either through MyChart/Epic Zoom video-conferencing platforms. All programs are taught by a certified yoga therapist who specializes in cancer care.

You can participate in a weekly group yoga class entitled Yoga for Health. This moderately active program features a gentle form of yoga including stretching, breathing, relaxation, and meditation. The classes are available for patients and caregivers.

Participation in Yoga for Health does not require a referral and is offered multiple times a week as listed in this newsletter.

One-on-one Yoga/Meditation consultation sessions are also available for inpatient and outpatients. Yoga therapy sessions will explore techniques to help you relax and feel calm such as gentle stretching, breathing, yoga postures, meditation, and relaxation. All aspects are tailored to meet your unique needs.

Ask one of your Integrative Medicine Center team members for your consultation today.
Pumpkin Corn Muffins

Total Time: 40 minutes

Serving: 12 muffins
Calories: 476 kcal
Author: Cynthia Lair
Website: www.cookusinterruptus.com

Ingredients:
- 1 cup corn meal
- 1 cup whole wheat pastry flour
- 1 cup baked and pumpkin or sweet potato
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk (cow, almond, soy, hemp, etc)
- 1/2 cup melted butter, coconut oil or grape seed oil
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 2 eggs

Instructions:
1. Preheat oven to 350° F. Oil muffin tin or line with cupcake papers.
2. Combine cornmeal, flour, baking powder and salt together in a large bowl, and set aside.
3. Place pumpkin, milk, melted butter, and maple syrup into food processor or blender. Blend until smooth. Add eggs and pulse briefly.
4. Pour wet ingredients into bowl with dry ingredients. Mix together using fewest strokes possible, taking care not to over-mix. Batter should be thick but not dry. Stir in a little extra milk if needed.
5. Spoon batter into twelve muffin cups, dividing evenly.
6. Bake about 25-30 minutes until center of bread is firm.