



# yoga and breast cancer latest research

by Jimmy Kwok, PhD

## Yoga's role in supporting breast cancer patients and survivor recovery

A review of the benefits that Yoga might bring to breast cancer patients and survivors were conducted by CRUK in March 2010, where the scientific rigour of 10 clinical trials performed to date was examined in greater detail. A majority of the clinical trials participants were breast cancer patients. Reported clinical benefits included reduced levels of anxiety, depression, fatigue and stress, improving quality of sleep, mood and spiritual well-being. The assessment was that on balance, Yoga may improve the psychological well-being cancer recovery for some breast cancer patients based on these studies but weak study designs, low number of participants in some studies prevented a firmer conclusion from being drawn.

Within the field of breast cancer research, a substantial amount of research funding is provided for the development of anti-cancer drugs. In comparison, funding for research into 'alternative methodologies' that can improve the psychological well being of breast cancer patients and their recovery is not as commonplace.

Encouragingly, results from a very recent study conducted by

Professor Lorenzo Cohen, Director of the Integrative Medicine Programme at The University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Centre suggested that Yoga can benefit breast cancer patients undergoing radiotherapy. The study recruited 163 women with stage 0 – 3 breast cancer lasting over a 6 month period. They underwent 6 weeks of radiotherapy and were randomly assigned into 3 groups which received different add-on instructions apart from their standard course of radiotherapy. Group 1 received 3 hourly Yoga sessions per week; Group 2 received 3 hourly simple stretching exercise regimes per week; Group 3 acted as a control group who received neither Yoga nor stretching regimes. The most significant finding here is that women who practised Yoga registered the sharpest fall in a stress hormone - Cortisol (hydrocortisone). Cortisol is normally produced by the adrenal gland in response to stress. This is of particular importance because 'blunted circadian cortisol rhythm' – a high level of blood cortisol levels in the body have been linked to worse outcomes in breast cancer. Unsurprisingly women who practised Yoga also reported qualitatively that they have better general health, physical functioning and psychological well being.

Professor Cohen cited that "Teaching patients a mind-body technique like Yoga as a coping skill can make the transition less difficult." What is more important is that the National Cancer Institute in USA has awarded the largest grant to date to the study of Yoga in Cancer to Professor Cohen's team to conduct a proper Phase III clinical trial for breast cancer patients to determine the scientific mechanism of how Yoga can effect a better biological outcomes post radiotherapy treatments. They are also going to assess the cost efficiencies of implementing Yoga programmes in hospitals. To date, this is the known clinical trial going to be performed to address how Yoga can benefit breast cancer patients.

In the UK, the breast cancer charity group, The Haven, has been advocating the use of Yoga as part of a range of complementary programmes to help breast cancer patient survivor and recovery for a number of years now. Thriving Yoga, founded by Kate Lubensky based in New York, has passionately worked with Yoga instructor Denise Hopkins to produce a one of its kind DVD for breast cancer patients and those in recovery. The DVD is dedicated to Kate's mother Priscilla Kinney who battled with breast cancer for 23 years have inspired her to produce this DVD based on personal experiences that is believed to help breast cancer survivors. The DVD has already benefited many women in America. Working with Kate, I plan to make the DVD available in the UK, helping to raise the awareness Yoga might bring to breast cancer patients and survivors and subsequently encouraging more research funding to be channelled into Yoga and breast cancer research. For every DVD sold, £10 will be donated to the cancer charity group Maggie's which supports people through the impact of a diagnosis and empowering them with hope and determination through treatment and beyond. The centres create calm and uplifting spaces for those affected by all kinds of cancer where a warm welcome is assured for all those on the cancer journey, including at the end of life and in bereavement.



*Jimmy Kwok has worked in the field of clinical oncology for a number of years and is a Yoga enthusiast. Further details from: [www.Yogaseeker.co.uk](http://www.Yogaseeker.co.uk) [www.maggiescentres.org/donate/gifts.html](http://www.maggiescentres.org/donate/gifts.html).*