

# Complementary Approaches: Yoga, Tai Chi

Printed from <https://www.cancerquest.org/patients/integrative-oncology/yoga-tai-chi> on 04/20/2026

## Intro and Background

Yoga has been practiced in Asian countries for thousands of years, sometimes to treat a variety of diseases. [1](#) Generally, yoga can be characterized by breathing, meditation, and posture techniques, though it encompasses different styles and schools of thought. In the United States, Hatha yoga is most common. [2](#) Tai Chi is a similar form of body manipulation in which slow, graceful movements are combined with breathing techniques. [3](#)

Recently, in Western culture yoga has been suggested to treat ailments such as arthritis [4](#), asthma [5](#), coronary artery disease, [6](#) and epilepsy. [7](#) Both yoga and Tai Chi can be viewed as aerobic exercises that can decrease the nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and depression associated with many cancer treatments. [8](#), [9](#) They have also been shown to improve quality of life following treatment. [10](#), [11](#)

## Scientific Research

Most of the research pertaining to yoga and cancer study how yoga can help ease side effects of the disease and treatments. Yoga has been shown to improve side effects that trouble cancer patients, like depression, loss of sleep, and physical weakness. [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#) Yoga can also improve quality of life. [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#), [10](#)

Exactly how these therapies combat stress is unknown, though research suggests that the mechanism is intricate and complex. According to one theory, changes in breathing, posture, and muscle tension alter sub-cortical, or unconscious or semi-conscious, patterns. [17](#)

Currently, many studies are investigating the benefits of yoga and tai chi on cancer patients and survivors at various institutions.

[Visit the National Cancer Institute to learn more about ongoing clinical trials involving yoga.](#)  
[Visit the National Cancer Institute to learn more about ongoing clinical trials involving tai chi.](#)

To learn more about clinical trials, visit our section on [Finding Clinical Trials](#).

## Recommendations

The Society for Integrative Oncology recommends yoga for reducing anxiety and improving mood in breast cancer patients both during and after treatment. [18](#) Gentle yoga may also improve sleep quality. [18](#)

---

*Please be sure to see our [notice on complementary therapies](#). To better understand and evaluate the research described above, read our [Introduction to Scientific Research](#).*

- 
- 1 Bower JE, Woolery A, Sternlieb B, Garet D. Yoga for cancer patients and survivors. *Cancer Control*. (2005) 12 (3):165-71 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 2 Cohen L, Warneke C, Fouladi RT, Rodriguez MA, Chaoul-Reich A. Psychological adjustment and sleep quality in a randomized trial of the effects of a Tibetan yoga intervention in patients with lymphoma. *Cancer*. 2004 May 15;100(10):2253-60 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 3 Lee MS, Pittler MH, Ernst E. Is tai chi an effective adjunct in cancer care? A systematic review of controlled clinical trials. *Support Care Cancer*. (2007) Feb 21 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 4 Garfinkel M, Schumacher HR Jr. Yoga. *Rheum Dis Clin North Am*. (2000) 26: 125-132 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 5 Vedanthan PK, Kesavalu LN, Murthy KC, et al. Clinical study of yoga techniques in university students with asthma: a controlled study. *Allergy Asthma Proc*. (1998) 19: 39 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 6 Mahajan AS, Reddy KS, Sachdeva U. Lipid profile of coronary risk subjects following yogic lifestyle intervention. *Indian Heart J*. (1999) 51: 3740 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 7 Yardi N. Yoga for control of epilepsy. *Seizure*. (2001) 10(1): 7-12 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 8 McNeely ML, Campbell KL, Rowe BH, Klassen TP, Mackey JR, Courneya KS. Effects of exercise on breast cancer patients and survivors: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *CMAJ*. (2006) 175(1): 34-41 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 9 Visovsky C, Dvorak C. Exercise and cancer recovery. *Online J Issues Nurs*. (2005) 10:7. [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 10 <sup>ab</sup> Kiecolt-Glaser JK, Bennett JM, Andridge R, Peng J, Shapiro CL, Malarkey WB, Emery CF, Layman R, Mrozek EE, Glaser R. Yoga's impact on inflammation, mood, and fatigue in breast cancer survivors: a randomized controlled trial. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014 Apr 1;32(10):1040-9. [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 11 Irwin MR, Olmstead R, Breen EC, Witaranta T, Carrillo C, Sadeghi N, Arevalo JM, Ma J, Nicassio P, Ganz PA, Bower JE, Cole S. Tai Chi, Cellular Inflammation, and Transcriptome Dynamics in Breast Cancer Survivors With Insomnia: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *J Natl Cancer Inst Monogr*. 2014 Nov;2014(50):295-301. [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 12 Chandwani KD, Perkins G, Nagendra HR, Raghuram NV, Spelman A, Nagarathna R, Johnson K, Fortier A, Arun B, Wei Q, Kirschbaum C, Haddad R, Morris GS, Scheetz J, Chaoul A, Cohen L. Randomized, controlled trial of yoga in women with breast cancer undergoing radiotherapy. *J Clin Oncol*. 2014 Apr 1;32(10):1058-65. [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 13 <sup>ab</sup> Culos-Reed SN, Carlson LE, Daroux LM, Hately-Aldous S. A pilot study of yoga for breast cancer survivors: physical and psychological benefits. *Psychooncology*. (2006) 15(10): 891-7 [[PUBMED](#)]
  - 14 <sup>ab</sup> Rosenbaum E, Gautier H, Fobair P, et al. Cancer supportive care, improving the quality of life for cancer patients. A program evaluation report. *Support Care Cancer*. (2004) 12(5): 293-301 [[PUBMED](#)]

- 15 <sup>ab</sup> Carson JW, Carson KM, Porter LS, Keefe FJ, Shaw H, Miller JM. Yoga for women with metastatic breast cancer: results from a pilot study. *J Pain Symptom Manage.* (2007) 33(3): 331-41. [\[PUBMED\]](#)
- 16 <sup>ab</sup> Bower JE, Garet D, Sternlieb B, Ganz PA, Irwin MR, Olmstead R, Greendale G. Yoga for persistent fatigue in breast cancer survivors: A randomized controlled trial. *Cancer.* 2011 Dec 16. [\[PUBMED\]](#)
- 17 Payne P, Crane-Godreau MA. The preparatory set: a novel approach to understanding stress, trauma, and the bodymind therapies. *Front Hum Neurosci.* 2015 Apr 1;9:178. [\[PUBMED\]](#)
- 18 <sup>ab</sup> Greenlee H, Balneaves LG, Carlson LE, Cohen M, Deng G, Hershman D, Mumber M, Perlmutter J, Seely D, Sen A, Zick SM, Tripathy D; Society for Integrative Oncology. Clinical practice guidelines on the use of integrative therapies as supportive care in patients treated for breast cancer. 2014 Nov;2014(50):346-58. [\[PUBMED\]](#)