

# Chairside yoga during infusion therapy reduces pain, fatigue, anxiety and distress

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Tina Walter

Chairside yoga can reduce pain, fatigue, anxiety and distress among individuals with cancer who undergo infusion therapy, according to study results presented at Association of Community Cancer Centers National Oncology Conference.

Tina Walter, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, a yoga therapist at The Christ Hospital in Ohio, and principal investigator Gigi Robison, MSN, APRN-CNS, AOCN, assessed the effects of a yoga intervention during infusion therapy among patients in an outpatient oncology clinic at an academic health care facility in the Midwest.

Certified oncology yoga therapists conducted the 20- to 40-minute intervention sessions, guiding 96 patients through awareness and breathing practices, gentle movements, guided imagery and relaxation techniques.

Researchers used a Likert scale (0 to 10) to measure the effects of the intervention on five predetermined variables. They reported statistically significant improvements in pain, fatigue, anxiety and distress; however, they observed no statistically significant improvement in nausea.

“Helping people connect breath with movement physiologically can really benefit anyone,” Walter told HemOnc Today. “To teach these things and empower people when they are at their most vulnerable state is so important. They often feel they have no control over anything, and this helps them realize they can control what they feel and what they are thinking about.”

HemOnc Today spoke with Walter about the study and the potential benefits of this intervention.

Question: Can you explain the concept of chairside yoga?

Answer: In yoga therapy, the breath and the mind are used to help the practitioner. In the case of individuals with cancer, it is less about the movements and poses. It is more about meditative practices and breathing practices, and providing a personalized intervention to the patient to aid in their healing. It is very adaptable to the chairside in outpatient oncology settings.

Q: What benefits of chairside yoga did you observe?

A: We saw a statistically significant improvement in measures of anxiety, fatigue, pain and distress. We showed big drops in anxiety after participants did chairside yoga practices. We did not see significant improvements in nausea, largely because the medications the patients were taking worked so well.

Q: Did the results surprise you?

A: No. People really respond to a lot of the practices. Many patients said things like, "This makes me feel so much better" or "This is something I can practice at home." That is really important that they can use these practices whenever they are having anxiety, when they can't sleep, or any time they are trying to get through a rough time during their treatment.

Q: Did any specific subset of patients derive particular benefit ?

A: The people who were suffering from anxiety showed the most marked improvement. These practices have a profound effect on anxiety. They also seemed especially effective for people who were recently diagnosed. This intervention also can have a benefit prior to treatment, because the worry that these patients feel is so intense.

Q: Do oncologists understand the benefits of this practice ?

A: Most do not. They think I am going to go into an infusion suite and make patients stand up and do pretzel poses. That is not what this is about. Advanced yoga is about breath and mind control, and the ability to sit upright and have integrity of the spine.

Q: Did patients express any reluctance or apprehension about this intervention?

A: Every now and then. When some people hear the word yoga, they think pretzel poses or religion. It's not religion. It is a science and an art. It is more a philosophy.

Q: What resources would a treatment center need to offer chairside yoga?

A: I would highly recommend a yoga therapist who is trained in oncology care. It also is important to have a team. I work with an oncology clinical nurse specialist, an oncology social worker, the clinical director of oncology service line, the staff nurses and the director of nursing research. You need a team approach. Yoga is part of integrative medicine, so make it integrative. This is not covered by insurance, so oftentimes foundations are used to fund integrative practices such as this within hospitals. – by Scott Buzby

Reference:

Walter T. Utilizing bedside yoga as a nonpharmacological intervention for cancer patients. Presented at: Association of Community Cancer Centers National Oncology Conference; Oct. 17-19, 2018; Phoenix.

For more information:

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