

## Cancer Advances: Exercise and Yoga Can Improve Quality of Life and Physical Fitness in Women with Early-Stage Breast Cancer

Posted online September 4, 2007, on [www.jco.org](http://www.jco.org) [1].

Two studies report that exercise and yoga can help maintain and in some cases improve quality of life in women with early-stage breast cancer. Both studies were published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* (JCO).

### Aerobic and Resistance Exercise

In the first study, investigators explored the effects of exercise on quality of life, physical fitness and body composition in women receiving chemotherapy for early-stage breast cancer. Researchers divided women into three groups: supervised resistance exercise three times weekly (82 women), supervised aerobic exercise three times weekly (78) and no aerobic or resistance exercise, also known as the "usual care" group (82).

Resistance exercise was better than usual care for improving muscle strength, lean body mass and self-esteem. Aerobic exercise was better than usual care for improving aerobic fitness, self-esteem and body fat percentage.

Unexpectedly, the study found that women in the resistance exercise group were most likely to finish their chemotherapy. The percentage of women who received 85 percent or more of their recommended chemotherapy dose was 78 percent in the resistance exercise group, 74.4 percent in the aerobic exercise group and 65.9 percent in the usual care group.

### Benefits of Yoga

In the second study, researchers compared various quality of life measures between 84 women with early-stage breast cancer who took a weekly yoga class for 12 weeks and 44 women who did not take yoga. About half of the women received chemotherapy or radiation therapy during the study period. The remainder had already completed treatment or not required it. The group, as a whole, had lower than average levels of quality of life at the beginning of the study.

Among all women in the study, those who did not take yoga reported a drop in social well-being scores (a measure of perceived support from and closeness with others) compared with those who took yoga. Other changes (such as physical, functional, emotional and spiritual well-being; fatigue; anxiety/sadness; irritability; and confusion) were not evident in either group.

However, among women not undergoing chemotherapy, those taking yoga reported improved overall quality of life as well as better emotional well-being and mood compared with those not taking yoga, who experienced declines in quality of life, mood, and social and spiritual well-being.

### What Does This Mean for Patients?

The first study suggests that resistance exercise may help women with early-stage breast cancer complete their treatment. Women considering an exercise program should consult their healthcare providers about the optimal exercise regimen for them. This study suggests that benefits of exercise may range from increasing physical fitness to improving self-esteem.

The second study suggests that yoga can be beneficial for preserving and in some cases improving quality of life in women with early-stage breast cancer. Once-weekly yoga classes appear to be most helpful for women who are not currently undergoing chemotherapy. Women receiving chemotherapy may need to take yoga more frequently to achieve these benefits, and should consider using structured classes, breathing exercises and/or cancer-specific yoga videotapes at home. Women considering yoga should consult their doctors, and then look for a class tailored to the needs of people with illnesses or other medical issues.

### More Information

[Cancer.Net Guide to Breast Cancer](#) [2]

[Physical Activity and Cancer Risk](#) [3]

[Cancer.Net Feature: Physical Activity and Cancer](#) [4]

#### Links:

[1] <http://www.jco.org/>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Breast+Cancer>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Risk+Factors+and+Prevention/Physical+Activity/Physical+Activity+and+Cancer+Risk>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/vgn-ext-templating/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=e80241eca8daa010VgnVCM100000ed730ad1RCRD>