

Hematology-Oncology Associates of CNY

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Researchers Study Yoga to Improve Sleep for Cancer Survivors

Cancer survivors often expect to have more energy and feel better once they've completed treatment. Sadly about half of them discover they're wrong. Persistent sleep disturbances add to the fatigue that they had hoped to overcome and despite the use of sleep aids and antidepressants, survivors continue to report fatigue and depression. Doctors don't know why as many as 66 percent of cancer survivors experience sleep problems in the year following cancer treatment.

Researchers from Hematology- Oncology Associates of CNY are collaborating with researchers across the United States on a three-year, National Cancer Institute-funded study to determine if yoga relaxation techniques improve cancer survivors' sleep patterns.

"We don't know why cancer survivors experience difficulty sleeping, but we know this is an important time for them to get restful, restorative sleep," says Dr. Jeffrey Kirshner, Principle Investigator and Partner in Hematology-Oncology Associates of CNY.

Yoga is a common complementary therapy that people with cancer and other serious illnesses use during treatments. However, there is limited scientific data to prove that it has an effect on patients, says Karen Mustian, Ph.D., principal investigator of this national study. Mustian is a researcher at the University of Rochester Medical Center's James P. Wilmot Cancer Center.

"There are just a handful of studies published, involving only small groups, that indicate the potential of yoga to improve sleep," says Mustian "None of those studies were large, randomized controlled trials"

Mustian and colleagues launched YOCAS (Yoga for Cancer Survivors) a 300-person, multi-center randomized controlled trial to provide an evidenced-base standard for clinical care.

YOCAS is a six-week randomized, double-arm study that includes gentle Hatha yoga sessions twice each week for four weeks for participants. The sessions are designed to teach participants release and relaxation techniques to reduce mental activity, and provide a physiologic basis for deep relaxation and transition to sleep.

Anyone who is at least 21 years old and has completed treatment for any form of cancer within the past year and suffers from sleep disturbances can participate. Researchers at 24 sites across the country will study 300 people over three years.

Hematology-Oncology Associates, in collaboration with the National Cancer Institute, is pleased to provide this opportunity through its 21-year affiliation as a Community Clinical Oncology Program (CCOP). Hematology-Oncology Associates is the only CCOP in Central New York and the only CCOP in the United States that operates as a private medical group practice that is not affiliated with a hospital or university.

The study is now open and the practice is actively recruiting cancer survivors. For more information regarding eligibility criteria or to participate in YOCAS, please contact the Clinical Research Department at Hematology-Oncology Associates of CNY, 315.472.7504.

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