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Oakland University study explores effects of yoga, exercise on lung cancer patients

An Oakland University study comparing the effects of yoga and exercise could help patients with lung cancer breathe a little easier.

“It’s a bit complicated because we’re looking at yoga and comparing it to exercise,” said **Dr. Judi Fouladbakhsh**, Ph.D., an associate professor of nursing at Oakland University. “While there are similarities – stretching, movement, etc. – yoga also deals with meditation and structured breathing. We really want to see how the breathing impacts this population because it’s a population that often suffers from shortness of breath.”

Fouladbakhsh has been with the university’s **School of Nursing** since the fall of 2014, where she has been specializing in the exploration of yoga as an alternative therapy for patients undergoing cancer chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

“My interest in yoga had always been there because I had been doing yoga and knew the philosophy,” she said.

Developed approximately 5,000 years ago by the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in Northern India, yoga is now widely practiced for health and relaxation. It often uses a system of physical postures, breathing techniques and meditation to promote bodily or mental control and well-being.

“There are literally thousands of different types of breaths you can take, and you correlate that with the movements,” Fouladbakhsh said. “Yoga enhances the meditation, but it also enhances the movement and the flow of energy through the body.”

Now in its third year, the study will help to determine the effects of yoga and exercise on breathing, stress, sleep and quality of life for patients over age 21, who have been diagnosed with stage I-IIIa non-small cell lung cancer and have had surgery for treatment.

“It’s a challenging study because we have to reach out far and wide to get a few patients,” Fouladbakhsh said. “Because this is early stage lung cancer, there aren’t as many people because it’s often diagnosed later.”

Participants in the study are required to complete a questionnaire, wear a special watch that monitors their sleep patterns, and attend one 40-minute yoga or exercise class per week for 12 weeks.

“Yoga has many different schools, traditions and practices,” Fouladbakhsh said. “We went with Viniyoga because you have the ability to standardize classes, which means we can make a series of classes that are the same, and also individualize them.”

The classes are free and can be taken at various locations in Ann Arbor, Wyandotte and Rochester Hills, as well as the Karmanos Cancer Institute in midtown and Farmington Hills, and Gilda’s Club in Royal Oak.

“I’m also a public health nurse, so I know all about population demographics and patient demographics, so I know when we’re covering a huge metro area, it’s important to offer the classes at multiple sites,” Fouladbakhsh said. “It’s worked out well.”

Class sizes typically range from one to six participants.

“We’re still trying to recruit more patients,” Fouladbakhsh said.

Participants will receive a free yoga or exercise mat, instruction from a certified yoga teacher or nurse research assistant, and a \$100 gift card.



A study being conducted by Dr. Judi Fouladbakhsh, Ph.D., an associate professor of nursing at Oakland University, will help to determine the effects of yoga and exercise on breathing, stress, sleep and quality of life for lung cancer patients.



“For my next study, I will be collaborating with Beaumont Health System’s Department of Integrative Medicine,” Fouladbakhsh said. “That study will focus on yoga for pain and quality of life of breast cancer patients. We will look at the pain breast cancer patients experience, and what they use to treat it. Hopefully we will be able to get that study started soon.”

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