

Managing Malignancy: Practices of Meditation and Yoga

Anirudh Kumar Satsangi*

Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Dayalbagh, Agra, India

***Corresponding Author:** Anirudh Kumar Satsangi, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Dayalbagh, Agra, India.

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Malignancy or cancer has been known to exist more than five thousand years. Cancer is the uncontrolled growth of cells as a result of mutation. The cause of mutation is unknown and probably many factors such as bacteria, viruses, air pollution, and a variety of chemicals play a role. Many researches suggest that psychological, regional, religious, and social factors are also important.

Each year, there are 11 million cases of cancer world-wide, and 6 million of those occur in low-or middle- income nations. Some 4 million people die from cancer in these countries each year. Due to increase industrialization, incidence of certain types of cancer has increased substantially. The rise in cancer is somehow related to economic development. It is sad to mention here that my wife, Mrs. Mala Satsangi, also died this year, on 11th September, due to suspected malignancy of liver. Her memories led me the idea to write on this topic, basically a work of compilation.

Cancer is a wonderful equal opportunity provider. There may be no more powerful facts of life teacher. The choices how to respond to it physically are usually between surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. Medical Science has produced a large body of work that proves it is most advantageous to cease doing those things that promote the optimum functioning of the immune and healthy systems. Changing to a healthy diet, exercising, and other alternate healing methods are gaining respectability in the orthodox medical community, but none more than meditation and yoga.

Researchers have found links between psychological factors such as feelings of helplessness, depression, loss of social support, and stress and the development of cancer. Immune system plays a role susceptibility to cancer. Whose immune system are weakened are more likely to develop tumours (Petrova, 1955; Antoni 1987; Greenbug 1987).

The immune system is also affected by stress, studies reveal relationship between various stressors and the development of cancer.

Russian work has shown that tumours are more likely to develop in animals whose nervous system weakened by chronic stress. Petrova, for example, reported that malignant tumours developed more frequently in dogs with experimental neurosis than in control animals.

The practices of meditation and yoga are extremely cost-effective tools to control such life style diseases. Practice of Asans in general induces neurohumoral and endocrinal vitality [1]. The practice of different yogic procedures has a definite place in the prevention and treatment of different types of mental and physical disorders [1].

A study conducted by Nagendra and Nagendra (1993) on eight patients with Ca-breast revealed that yoga practices, deep relaxation techniques (DRT) and pranic energisation techniques (PET) gave the patients a sense of well-being, improved their sleep and reduced swelling and arm stiffness in most cases.

O Carl Simonton [2], Oncologist, created a psychotherapy programme and asked his patients to visualize their cancers as healing using a version of meditation, several times a day. He talked with patients and their families and helped them find positive reasons to continue living. After several years he found that a large number of their patients lived significantly longer than statistical expectations for their type and stage of cancer.

Dr. N Anantha [3], Director, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology, Bangalore writes: "In my experience, I have seen some patients who were suffering from very advanced stage cancer, we have thought would die, but, they survived for a long time, and in some there was no evidence of disease when seen after many years. When asked, how this has happened? They said, they developed a strong will to live to look after their dependents, through prayer and things like that".

To understand meditation and yoga one must understand the somato-psychic perspective of health. Integrative medicine or holistic healing is all about understanding the mind-body compatibility. Mind and emotions play a critical role in our health and well-being. In fact, the endocrine system is largely influenced by mental dispositions and secretions like catecholamines having significant bearing on physiological health. Meditation and Yoga help in arriving at a balance between mind and body through influencing the secretions of ductless glands (Pramod Pathak).

For practices of meditation and yoga we should be acquainted with chakra system. The chakras are often associated with the endocrine gland system. They are the centres of life energy. Any blocks or restrictions to either reception or expression of this life energy will result in a malfunction of the organism as a whole, and will be expressed as disease, discomfort, lack of energy, fear, or an emotional imbalance. By acquainting yourself with the chakra system through the practices of meditation and yoga, how it works and how it should operate optimally, you can perceive your own blocks and restrictions and develop guidelines for relieving entanglements (David Pond).

O Carl Simonton and others have demonstrated that the psychological and spiritual aspects of the health team, patient and the environment, when integrated with medical care and treatment, result in the miracles of healing and vibrant health [4-10].

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