

# St. Elizabeth Cancer Center Presents: **YOGA MYTH BUSTERS**

Yoga at St. Elizabeth Cancer Center is not:

- The pretzel yoga you see in the media
- Physically challenging and intimidating
- A religion

**Q: What is Yoga Therapy for Cancer?**

*A: Yoga Therapy for Cancer is a safe, gentle yoga structured to honor each individual patient exactly where they are in treatment. An important goal of yoga therapy is to teach self-regulating techniques that can relieve the distressing side effects of cancer and improve sleep, mood, and coping.*

**Q: Who can come to class and how much does it cost?**

*A: Classes are free to all cancer patients, their families and caregivers.*

**Q: What Makes the Yoga Therapy for Cancer classes different than other yoga classes and can it really help me?**

*A: While most yoga classes in the community are physically-based movement classes only, Yoga Therapy for Cancer classes encourage slow and gentle movements that activate the muscle's stretch receptors which improves blood flow and increases range of motion and flexibility in the joints and muscles. Our yoga therapist teaches the similarities and distinctions between yoga and exercise and never suggests or respects going for the burn or "pushing it" with either. Classes include the non-physical aspects of yoga such as relaxation, breathing, guided imagery and other ways to use the mind consciously for healing.*

*In recent studies, specific improvements have been documented with pain, anxiety, physical function and sleep quality.*

**Q: Is the class difficult like most yoga? I am not flexible. How is Yoga Therapy for Cancer different from other types of yoga?**

*A: Classes are gentle and mostly done in a chair. They are personally designed to meet the needs of every student at all levels of functioning and capability. The Yoga Therapist, certified in Oncology Yoga, addresses specific issues such as fatigue, neuropathy and lymphedema.*

**Q: Isn't practicing yoga something spiritual and a religion?**

*A: Yoga is not a religion. It is a science and an art that was developed as a natural healing modality.*

## **THREE-PART BREATH (also known as belly breathing)**

The three-part breathing practice helps strengthen the nervous system and calm anxiety. Begin by sitting comfortably and erect. Completely soften the belly and the rib cage.

- (1) Expand the abdominal muscles while inhaling, letting the belly fill with breath first. This actually contracts the diaphragm muscle and expands the capacity of the lungs to take in air. Expanding the abdominal muscles with the incoming breath helps one gain control of the diaphragm. On the exhalation, contract belly down and in as the air is released. (Pulling in the abdominal muscles is like contracting a bellows and helps exhale more residual air, which in turn increases available lung capacity for the next inhalation)

As the belly fills, the higher parts of the lungs fill. (This should not cause any strain or discomfort)

Try this a few times with ease, smoothing out the inhale and the exhale, like you are pouring a glass of water from bottom to top.

- (2) The second part breath is done by allowing the breath to move up into the rib cage. The ribs expand out sideways and front ways as the lungs fill with air.
- (3) The third part is done by allowing the inhalation to fill the chest completely to the top, up into the apex of the lungs.

## **HEAD & NECK SERIES**

This 5-part series of movements is designed to isolate each particular muscle group that is involved in moving the head and neck. Because tension is often stored in the shoulders, this movement can reduce tightness often associated with stress. Purpose is to re-educate muscles of their correct function, and help to increase range of motion and flexibility in the neck and shoulders.

Repeat each 3 times, very slowly:

- (1) As you exhale allow the chin to drop down toward chest. As you inhale extend the chin up toward ceiling opening through the throat.  
(Do not lift the shoulders)
- (2) As you exhale turn the head to side, bringing chin toward and above the shoulder for the full length of an exhalation. As you inhale return the head back to center.
- (3) As you exhale let the ear lower down to one side toward shoulder. As you inhale return the head back to center. Maintain gaze directly forward.
- (4) As you inhale shrug shoulders up toward the ears and as you exhale press the shoulders down toward the hips.
- (5) As you inhale, make larger circles with shoulders by bringing them forward and lifting, and exhale shoulders back behind you and continue exhaling as you lower shoulders down into neutral position.