



Patient Power

Yoga for Cancer-Related Anxiety: A Calming 15-Minute Practice

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Raquel Jex Forsgren:

Hi everyone. My name is Raquel Forsgren. Welcome to living yoga therapy. Today's practice will be focused on managing and processing the emotion of anxiety, the anxiety you may feel when you wake up in the middle of the night worrying about scans, worrying about what you might hear from your oncologist when you go back to the next day, worrying about side effects you might feel when you're inside the infusion suite and you're in your chemo chair—any one of those things.

It could be even just anxiety about what's to come in the future or fear of recurrence. All of those are emotions that each person processes and has uniquely and differently along the journey if you're someone living through cancer or even if you're the care partner or caregiver and having anxiety in general about your loved one.

So today's practice will be about grounding. We'll start with some postures, then we'll move into a seated position on the chair. So if you have chair handy, that would be really great to have next to you. And then we'll work through a breathing technique that is one of the best for managing anxiety—and then just a short guided meditation.

So begin standing with your feet close together, engaging your inner thighs, squeezing your legs together and beginning to feel all 10 toes, feel the heels, feel everything engage. Elongate the neck, begin to pull the shoulder blades back, almost feel like there's something pulling the top of your head making you feel as long as possible. Spreading the fingers wide, then making a fist with your hands, spreading your fingers wide and making a fist with your hands. Doing it one more time, spreading the fingers wide and making a fist with your hands.

Now take your feet hip-width distance apart. Again, come back to the root, feel all 10 toes, feel the heels ground through the mat. As you inhale raise the arms up looking up towards your hands. Turn the palms down as you exhale, move the breath through the center of your line of your body. Inhaling, raising the arms up again, palms toward each other, exhale, palms face down lowering through the center of your body.

Last time, inhaling all the way up, exhaling and turn the palms forward and down and lower all the way down, letting your head, your neck relax, fingertips dangling, letting your head relax, nice and long neck. Keep a nice bend in the knees, inhale your fingertips to your shins, keep a nice flat back pulling the bellybutton in. Your neck is long, shoulder blades together, then through the knees take the arms forward, press into your heels and slowly stand all the way up. Lower your arms by your side.

If this is starting to feel like too much for you, if you're in the middle of treatment, I encourage you to just sit in your chair, and you'll be able to do all of the arm movements right along with the standing postures from the chair.

So from here take the right foot forward and the left foot back, widen your stance by moving your right foot over toward the opposite side, press through the back left pinky toe, ground all five toes and the heel down of the right foot and just open the arms into a cactus posture. You're lifting your heart, you're lifting your chin, you're pressing into both feet inhaling and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling.

From here just moving yourself into what's called warrior two. All you're doing is opening up your arms into a T, heel-toeing the left foot apart so that the toes of the left foot are directly forward and the heel of the front foot if you drew a straight line would be right in the middle of your back foot. From here looking over your right shoulder, holding this posture, squeezing your inner thighs toward each other, inhaling and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling.

Flip your right palm up and just reach straight up with your right arm, let the left arm be by the side, reaching up. And if this bothers your shoulders or your chest at all, just lowering the arm so the elbow is just softly bent. Coming back into straight arm, straighten both legs and turn the right toes forward and then just turn the left toes the opposite direction. All you're going to do here is wiggle the left toes over toward the left side and bring the right toes at an angle, and you're back into warrior one.

Opening the arms into cactus arms. Feel all five toes the heel of the left foot grounded into the mat, the back right pinky toe grounded in as well. Inhaling and exhaling three times on your own, at your own pace. And just like the other side opening up into warrior two. Wiggle that left foot back over in the center of your mat again, taking care and looking at the left knee making sure that it's over your ankle, drawing a straight line between the heel and the arch of the back foot, looking over the left shoulder, holding the posture for another couple of breaths on your own. Flipping the left palm up, reaching all the way up toward the sky let the right arm relax.

And regular warrior two. Straighten both legs, toes toward the front of the room, heel-toe the feet back together. Ending in this posture, bring your hand to heart center, and we'll come into our chair.

Now that you're in your chair come into the most comfortable seated position that you can, taking your back against the chair. If you need a block under your feet if your feet don't go all the way to the floor, please use that, or even just a pillow you can put underneath your feet. The point is to be completely comfortable and begin to close your eyes. Coming back into your breathing, feeling all ten toes, your heels, the back of the chair supporting you, the chair underneath your thighs.

Feel your thighs underneath the palms of your hands. Tune into your breathing and notice, notice if anything has shifted since when you first started the practice today, if your breathing is long and smooth or short and sticky or clunky. Relaxing, inhaling and expanding the ribs, the muscles and the ribs, and exhaling, releasing and exhaling longer than the inhale. Taking two more of those at your own pace. Feel completely present in this moment, nowhere to be, nowhere to go, just here with your chair, your practice, feeling your breath and your body.

Softly blink open your eyes, and we'll move into a technique that's called alternate nostril breathing, and this is one of the best technique I have ever used to manage anxiety. So what you'll do is you'll take two fingers. That's taught a little differently technically, but I find it's the easiest, especially if you have arthritis in the hands, to use the two fingers. So if you're right-handed or left-handed it doesn't matter. Use which hand is most comfortable.

If your arm is tired you can easily just rest your elbow right in the palm of your hand, and basically you'll be using these two fingers to close off one side of the nostril at a time. So we'll begin by closing off the right side of the nostril and exhaling out the left. Then inhaling through the left, and closing off the left exhaling out the right. Inhaling through the right, exhaling out the left. Inhaling through the left, exhaling out the right. Inhaling through the right, and exhaling out the left. Continuing this four more times on your own, at your own pace, and I'll do it with you.

Just a couple more. And ending, releasing the exhale out the left nostril, taking your hands down by your sides or on your thighs resting comfortably, sitting up again nice and tall, closing your eyes and bringing your awareness right into the belly, right above your bellybutton. Notice the rise of the belly with the inhale and the lowering of the belly with the exhale. Nothing forced, just noticing if your breathing has changed in any way and not judging it or analyzing it, just noticing if it's any different.

And with your awareness on the space above your bellybutton bring to mind a beautiful yellow light or yellow color, warm and glowing, bright. With each inhale visualizing that yellow color expanding as bright and warm as it can be, and exhaling, releasing, still visualizing the yellow color but letting it be a little dimmer, taking a few rounds of breath visualizing the yellow getting brighter and warmer and glowier and exhaling, letting the brightness fade. One more round.

Bringing to mind the words I am. And you can say these out loud, you can say them silently, but these will be words that you can repeat to yourself in any of these moments where anxiety feels like it may be overtaking your mind or your emotions or your body, feelings of the shakiness or the thoughts are racing. Saying the words I am grounded. I am strong. I am here in this moment. I can handle anything that comes my way. I am. I am.

Bring your hands to your heart center, palms together, softly bow your head honoring yourself, maybe even setting an intention for yourself if you didn't at the beginning of your practice. How you want to feel could be an option. Softly blink open your eyes. Namaste.

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