

Support for Caregivers of Patients With Cancer: An Experiential Mind–Body Approach to Self-Care

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Friends and family members of patients with cancer are increasingly relied on to perform critical multifaceted roles in home-based care, such as appointment scheduling and transportation. The demands associated with this ongoing care provision can be taxing and negatively affect the emotional health of caregivers. As a result, brief and accessible resources are needed to address these psychological needs. This article describes a supportive mind–body approach to self-care that may offset the negative psychological impacts of stressors related to ongoing informal caregiving while augmenting well-being and quality of life.

AT A GLANCE

- Informal caregivers have limited access to supportive care resources because of time constraints and the need to be available to the patient.
- Interventions that heighten the capacity to be present with self and promote mind–body integration may improve caregivers' mental health and perceived quality of life.
- Informal caregivers may benefit from guided, short, movement-based meditations scientifically grounded in psychophysiological processing.

KEYWORDS

movement-based meditation; oncology nursing; family caregivers; interoception

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Patients with cancer are primarily cared for by informal caregivers, often family or friends, who provide basic and complex unpaid services, including assistance with bathing and meal preparation, medication administration, symptom management, and emotional support (Frambes et al., 2018). Because of these ongoing demands, caregivers can experience psychological, physical, and financial burdens that contribute to perceptions of poorer quality of life and well-being (Applebaum & Breitbart, 2013; Zaleta et al., 2023). Therefore, informal caregivers are recognized as a vulnerable population in need of psychological support and restorative self-care information. Despite this significant need, caregivers are underserved and have limited access to supportive care resources (Applebaum & Breitbart, 2013). Accordingly, previous research has evaluated how meditation, gentle yoga, and related mind–body practices can help caregivers meet their psychological needs (Wyatt et al., 2019). The purpose of this article is to describe the mechanisms underpinning positive benefits from movement-based meditation programs, as well as resources that nurses can recommend to informal caregivers of patients with cancer.

Mind–Body Health Modalities

Integrative mind–body health modalities emphasize the mind's capacity to heal and promote wellness through modifying perceptions of symptoms (Heeter et al., 2021). For example, one method of mind–body practice—yoga-based meditation—adapts principles of yoga (e.g., guided imagery, progressive relaxation, physical movement) to promote mind–body integration by directing attention to noticing, appraising, and responding to sensations and feelings originating within the body (Heeter, 2023). For some individuals, directing attention can be challenging because of external distractions and/or racing thoughts driven by fear, particularly while under stressful conditions, such as those that can occur during caregiving (Heeter et al., 2021). Caregivers who feel stressed can learn to synchronize the vital energy of the breath with body movements and focus on meditation objects and qualities (e.g., natural environments). Then, the mind has an anchor with which to connect, and the gentle movements coordinated with the breath provide a space for restoration (Heeter et al., 2021).