

Effects of Yoga-Nidra on Psychophysiological Parameters among Breast Cancer Patients: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

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Yoga-Nidra is a deep relaxation technique that facilitates profound physical, mental and emotional rest. It is a guided meditative practice that induces a state of conscious awareness while promoting relaxation at deeper levels of the mind-body system. The purpose of this study is to review research conducted in recent years on the application of Yoga-Nidra among cancer patients. The primary objective is to identify its therapeutic effects on physical, psychological and emotional health, with a specific focus on its relevance for individuals with cancer, particularly breast cancer. Evidence indicates that breast cancer patients experience not only physical symptoms during treatment such as pain, hot flashes and nausea but also psychological and emotional challenges, including death anxiety, insomnia, depression and stress. These psychological difficulties can negatively influence treatment outcomes and diminish overall quality of life. Previous studies demonstrate that the practice of Yoga-Nidra provides beneficial effects for both psychological (stress, anxiety and insomnia) and physical (pain, hypertension and cardiovascular) conditions. This review presents a concise summary of the findings from earlier studies on Yoga-Nidra, along with an overview of their limitations and recommendations for future research.

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1. Introduction

Breast cancer remains a major global health challenge and continues to affect a large proportion of women worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 2.3 million new cases

(11.5%) of breast cancer were reported globally in 2022, resulting in 670,000 deaths. In India alone, an estimated 190,000 new cases (13.6%) and 98,000 deaths occurred in the same year, posing a substantial burden not only on women but also on families and national healthcare systems. Modern lifestyle factors—marked by increased comfort, reduced physical activity and elevated stress—have further contributed to the rising incidence of breast cancer (Zheng et al., 2023).

Evidence indicates that breast cancer patients experience numerous physical symptoms during treatment, including sleep disturbances, pain, fatigue, nausea, paraesthesia, lymphedema, brachial plexopathy, chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN) and sexual dysfunction (Binkley et al., 2012; Stubblefield et al., 2012; Tofthagen, 2010; Vandendorpe et al., 2021). In addition to these physiological symptoms, patients frequently suffer from psychological and emotional difficulties such as death anxiety, insomnia, depression and stress (Dinapoli et al., 2021; Vehmanen et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025). These psychological disturbances significantly impair Quality of Life (QoL) (Fann et al., 2008). Several studies also highlight that psychological stress adversely affects multiple dimensions of QoL, including body image, future outlook, functional capacity, treatment-related complications and chemotherapy-induced alopecia. Importantly, some of these psychosomatic complications persist long after treatment completion.

Current research suggests that mind-body practices, including yoga, offer beneficial effects in managing the psychophysiological side effects of breast cancer treatment. As the limitations of conventional medical care become increasingly evident—particularly in addressing psychosomatic and quality of life related concerns—there is growing recognition of complementary therapeutic modalities. Yoga has emerged as an important adjunctive approach; however, many breast cancer patients experience fatigue and reduced physical strength during treatment, limiting their ability to engage in physically demanding yogic practices.

Scientific evidence indicates that regular practice of yogic relaxation techniques improves physiological parameters, reduces stress, enhances emotional regulation and contributes to better overall quality of life (Kulkarni & Bera, 2009). Yoga-Nidra, a deeply relaxing practice performed in Shavasana, is particularly suitable for patients with limited physical capacity. The term “Yoga-Nidra” is derived from two Sanskrit words: *yoga*, meaning “*union or heightened awareness*,” and *nidra*, meaning “*sleep*.” Yoga-Nidra is therefore conceptualized as “*conscious sleep*,” a state in which awareness operates at a deeper level while the body enters profound relaxation (Saraswati, 2013). When consciousness is withdrawn from external sensory input and separated from ordinary sleep, it becomes more focused and potent.

This narrative review aims to examine the psychophysiological effects of Yoga-Nidra in breast cancer patients by synthesizing evidence from existing clinical and experimental studies. It evaluates research on stress reduction, anxiety, pain relief, sleep quality, autonomic regulation and overall well-being. By

integrating current findings, this review highlights the therapeutic potential of Yoga-Nidra as a complementary intervention that supports recovery, enhances quality of life and promotes overall well-being in breast cancer care.

1.1 Yoga-Nidra and Breast Cancer:

Breast cancer patients not only contend with the disease itself but also experience a range of treatment-related and post-treatment psychophysiological symptoms, including pain, fatigue, emotional distress, anxiety and sleep disturbances. These symptom burdens significantly impair overall quality of life (Prakash et al., 2020). As conventional medical approaches primarily focus on disease management, psychosomatic and quality of life related dimensions often receive less attention. Consequently, there is increasing interest in integrating mind-body complementary approaches into oncology care. Among these, Yoga Nidra - a structured form of guided yogic relaxation has shown promise in reducing sympathetic arousal (“stress response”) and enhancing parasympathetic activation (“relaxation response”) through deep psychological and physiological relaxation (Ragavee et al., 2024). This shift in autonomic balance contributes to improved emotional regulation, autonomic stability and physical comfort in breast cancer patients.

1.2 Yoga-Nidra and Pain Reduction:

Breast cancer patients frequently experience pain due to surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and neuropathic complications, which can negatively impact functional capacity and quality of life. Yoga-Nidra activates the relaxation response, enhancing parasympathetic nervous system activity, particularly vagal tone (Kılıçlı, 2024). This leads to reductions in heart rate and respiratory rate (Telles et al., 2000) and decreases muscle tension, promoting a restorative physiological state (Markil et al., 2012), thereby contributing to pain relief. Additionally, Yoga-Nidra mitigates sympathetic over activation commonly observed in breast cancer patients, resulting in decreased cortisol levels and reduced pain-promoting inflammatory mediators such as IL-6 and TNF- α . Collectively, these neurophysiological effects reduce pain intensity and sensitivity while improving psychophysiological functioning in breast cancer patients (Aruchunan et al., 2023; Bower et al., 2014; Bratborska & Piotrowski, 2024).

1.3 Yoga-Nidra and Sleep Quality:

Individuals diagnosed with cancer often experience persistent survival-related anxiety, beginning at the time of diagnosis and continuing throughout the disease trajectory. Such anxiety adversely affects overall quality of life, including sleep quality. Evidence indicates that among breast cancer patients, poor sleep was reported in 36% prior to chemotherapy and increased to 58% during treatment (Fakih et al., 2018). Yoga-Nidra has been shown to reduce stress-related hormones -particularly cortisol (Lanjiklu G et al., 2025), which facilitates both mental and physiological relaxation, thereby contributing to a reduction in sleep. Melatonin, commonly referred to as the “sleep hormone,” is secreted by the pineal gland in response to darkness and plays a critical role in regulating the sleep-wake cycle by synchronizing circadian rhythms

and promoting sleep onset. Yoga-Nidra and deep meditative relaxation practices are reported to enhance melatonin secretion by calming pineal activity (Govindasamy et al., 2025; Harinath et al., 2004). Furthermore, Yoga-Nidra and deep relaxation reduce sympathetic nervous system activation and down regulate inflammatory pathways, thereby improving psychophysiological relaxation and enhancing overall sleep quality (Divya N et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2024).

1.4 Yoga-Nidra and Stress / Death Anxiety:

Yoga-Nidra is a simple, low-effort and highly accessible relaxation-based practice, making it a suitable complementary therapy for patients undergoing cancer treatment. Breast cancer patients frequently experience significant psychological burden-including elevated stress, anxiety, fear of recurrence and prolonged hormonal fluctuations-arising from diagnosis, treatment procedures and survivorship challenges. As a structured form of guided relaxation, Yoga-Nidra modulates both neuroendocrine and autonomic pathways, thereby contributing to the reduction of these psychological symptoms.

Physiologically, conditions such as disease-related uncertainty, treatment burden, and death anxiety elevate stress hormones, particularly cortisol. Evidence indicates that Yoga-Nidra practice leads to reductions in cortisol levels, reflecting a dampening of the physiological stress response. Additionally, Yoga-Nidra enhances parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) activity while attenuating sympathetic nervous system (SNS) activation, thereby promoting a relaxation response and improved autonomic balance (Divya N et al., 2015; Rao et al., 2017; Sahu & Pradhan, 2025; Su et al., 2022).

Yoga-Nidra induces deep relaxation, which is associated with increased alpha and theta brainwave activity, thereby facilitating improved emotional regulation (Datta et al., 2022; Shashikiran et al., 2022). This neurophysiological state contributes to hormonal balance and stabilizes both neuroendocrine and autonomic functions, leading to reductions in psychological stress and anxiety. Furthermore, Yoga-Nidra enhances interceptive awareness and mindfulness, enabling patients to more effectively regulate fear, death anxiety, intrusive thoughts and treatment-related emotional distress. Breast cancer patients, who engage in regular Yoga-Nidra practice exhibit improved mood, reduced stress levels, strengthened coping mechanisms and overall enhanced emotional well-being.

2. Psychophysiological Responses (HRV, BP, RR, Cortisol):

Yoga-Nidra has demonstrated beneficial effects on psychophysiological functioning in breast cancer patients. The practice enhances parasympathetic activity, improves heart rate variability (HRV), reduces blood pressure (BP) and lowers respiratory rate (RR), thereby promoting relaxation and autonomic balance (Telles et al., 2000). Additionally, Yoga-Nidra contributes to down regulation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in decreased cortisol levels and improved stress regulation. Evidence from yoga-based oncology research further indicates that such relaxation-based interventions

effectively reduce cortisol and improve autonomic markers in breast cancer populations (Giridharan, 2024; Palesh et al., 2008).

3. Methods:

3.1 Literature search:

This narrative review investigates the psychophysiological effects of Yoga-Nidra in breast cancer patients. Studies published between 2000 and 2025 are identified through systematic searches of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, and Google Scholar, supplemented by manual screening of reference lists and grey literature. Search terms include “Yoga-Nidra”, “breast cancer”, “psychophysiological”, “heart rate variability”, “cortisol”, and “quality of life”.

3.2 Study selection:

This review study included research studies that evaluated the impact of Yoga Nidra or Yoga Nidra like practices within the context of yoga on breast cancer and other cancer patients. Eligible studies examine Yoga-Nidra in breast cancer or cancer populations and employ quantitative or qualitative designs, including randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies and observational research approaches. Studies that did not include Yoga-Nidra practice, interventions involving only yoga, editorials, theoretical papers, and those involving non-cancer populations were excluded.

3.3 Data abstraction:

Data extraction focuses on participant characteristics, intervention protocols, outcome measures, and key findings. Due to methodological heterogeneity, results are synthesized thematically to highlight how Yoga-Nidra influences stress regulation, autonomic balance, endocrine responses, emotional well-being, and overall physiological health in breast cancer patients.

Literature related to the study:

Table 01: Summary of the previous studies:

Title	Author and year	Study design and sample	Assessments	Intervention	Findings and Conclusion
<i>“Effectiveness of Yoga Nidra in Mitigating Stress in Women Undergoing Curative Radiotherapy</i>	(D’cunha et al., 2015)	Prospective blinded RCT, n = 48	Stress	Yoga-Nidra	The study shows that Yoga-Nidra effectively reduces stress in cervical cancer patients undergoing curative

for Cervical Cancer”					radiation therapy.
“Effects of an 18-Week Integrated Yoga Program on Cardiac Autonomic Function in Breast Cancer Patients Undergoing Adjuvant Chemotherapy”	(Inbaraj et al., 2023)	RCT n = 68	Heart rate variability, Autonomic dysfunction and Resting heart rate	Yogic intervention	Yoga therapy significantly mitigates chemotherapy-induced cardiac autonomic dysfunction by preserving lower resting heart rate and higher HRV in breast cancer patients.
“Effectiveness of Yoganidra on quality of sleep among cancer patients”	(Divya N et al., 2015)	Survey n = 25 (in two phase)	Sleep quality and Insomnia	Yoga-Nidra	The study found that yoga nidra is an effective therapeutic intervention for improving sleep quality among cancer patients.
“A Randomized Controlled Trial on Pranayama and Yoga Nidra for Anxiety and Depression in Patients with Cervical Cancer Undergoing	(Nuzhath et al., 2024)	RCT n = 70	Anxiety and Depression	Yoga nidra and Pranayama	This study indicates that Yoga-Nidra and pranayama help reduce depression and anxiety in cervical cancer patients.

Standard of Care”					
“A study to assess effectiveness of Yoga Nidra on Level of anxiety among cancer patients of selected hospital”	(Patel et al., 2024)	Quasi experimental study n = 40	Anxiety	Yoga-Nidra	The findings indicate that Yoga-Nidra is effective in reducing anxiety among cancer patients and may contribute to improved overall well-being.
“Complementary Therapies in Medicine Yoga-Nidra as a complementary therapy for reducing psychological distress and enhancing quality of life in cancer patients”	(Baruah et al., 2025)	RCT n = 40	Psychological distress, Pain, Fatigue and Quality of life	Yoga-Nidra	Yoga-Nidra reduces pain, fatigue, psychological distress and enhances quality of life in cancer patients, supporting emotional well-being and symptom management during treatment.
“Therapeutic potential of yoga nidra for chemo brain: A complementary	(Sahu & Pradhan, 2025)	Review	Neuro-cognitive function and Stress-	Yoga-Nidra	Yoga-Nidra shows promise in improving neurocognitive function,

<i>and integrative perspective”</i>			related neuroplasticity		modulating stress-related neuroplasticity, and enhancing overall well-being in cancer survivors.
“Yoga Nidra: A Promising Complementary Therapy for Enhancing Cancer Care”	(Giridharan, 2024)	Review	Psychological distress, Fatigue, Pain and Improving sleep quality	Yoga-Nidra	Yoga-Nidra may serve as a feasible and beneficial complementary therapy for reducing psychological distress, fatigue, pain and improving sleep in cancer patients.
“Effect of Yoga on Sleep Quality and Neuroendocrine Immune Response in Metastatic Breast Cancer Patients”	(Rao et al., 2017)	RCT n = 91	Cortisol, Sleep quality and natural killer cells	Yogic Intervention	The intervention improved sleep, reduced distress, lowered morning cortisol, and increased natural killer cell levels in advanced breast cancer patients.

<i>“Long-Term Yogic Intervention Improves Symptomatic Scale and Quality of Life by Reducing Inflammatory Cytokines and Oxidative Stress in Breast Cancer Patients Undergoing Chemotherapy and/or Radiotherapy”</i>	(Jain et al., 2023)	RCT n = 96	Inflammatory cytokines, Quality of life and Symptomatic scale	Yogic intervention	Yoga may reduce inflammatory cytokines, improve quality of life and mitigate treatment-related side effects such as fatigue, depression and immune dysfunction in breast cancer patients receiving chemotherapy/radiotherapy.
<i>“The Impact of Yoga on the Immune System of Cancer Patients: A Scoping Review of Current Evidence”</i>	(Giridharan & Bhana, 2024)	Review	Immune function, Quality of life and Inflammation	Yogic intervention	Yoga appears to enhance immune function and quality of life in cancer patients by reducing inflammation and improving key immunological markers.

4. Psychophysiological Effects of Yoga Nidra on Breast Cancer Patients:

The research papers included in this review demonstrate that Yoga-Nidra and integrated yogic practices hold substantial therapeutic potential for cancer patients, particularly those with breast cancer. Evidence

from multiple randomized controlled trials (D'Cunha et al., 2015; Inbaraj et al., 2023; Barua et al., 2026; Rao et al., 2017; Jain et al., 2023) consistently shows significant improvements in stress, psychological distress, sleep quality, pain, fatigue, inflammatory markers and autonomic function following yogic interventions. Yoga-Nidra specifically has been shown to reduce stress, enhance sleep quality and alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression among patients undergoing radiotherapy (Divya et al., 2015; Nuzhat et al., 2024; Patel et al., 2024). Integrated yoga programs incorporating Yoga-Nidra effectively preserve cardiac autonomic balance in breast cancer patients receiving chemotherapy, reflected through lower resting heart rate and higher HRV indices (Inbaraj et al., 2023). Additionally, Yoga-Nidra contributes to reductions in pain, emotional distress and overall symptom burden, thereby improving quality of life (Barua et al., 2026). Review articles (Sahu & Pradhan, 2025; Giridharan, 2024; Giridharan & Bhana, 2024) further corroborate these findings, noting enhancements in neurocognitive function, immune activity and stress-related neuroplasticity. Overall, the evidence supports Yoga-Nidra as a low-cost, accessible complementary therapy capable of eliciting meaningful psychological, physiological and immunological improvements, underscoring its potential integration into holistic and integrative oncology care.

5. Discussion:

This study demonstrates that Yoga-Nidra is an effective complementary intervention for enhancing psychophysiological and emotional outcomes in breast cancer patients. Breast cancer treatment commonly leads to pain, fatigue, sleep disturbances, anxiety and autonomic dysregulation, all of which negatively affect quality of life (Binkley et al., 2012; Di Nardo et al., 2022). Consistent with previous evidence, the findings of this study indicate that Yoga-Nidra may alleviate these symptoms by modulating neuroendocrine and autonomic pathways, thereby supporting emotional well-being and physiological stability (Sahu & Pradhan, 2025).

A key observation from this study is the beneficial impact of Yoga-Nidra on pain reduction (Baruah et al., 2025). Yoga-Nidra activates the parasympathetic nervous system, enhances vagal tone, and reduces sympathetic arousal, leading to lowered heart rate, respiratory rate, and muscle tension (Ghai et al., 2025; Lanjiklu G et al., 2025). Yoga-Nidra reduces cortisol levels and increases melatonin secretion, which helps regulate circadian rhythms and promote psychophysiological relaxation, crucial for improving sleep quality (Divya N et al., 2015). Furthermore, significant reductions in stress and death anxiety reflect Yoga-Nidra's influence on HPA-axis regulation, autonomic balance, and increased alpha-theta brainwave activity (Datta et al., 2021; Saraswati, 2013).

In addition to psychological outcomes, Yoga-Nidra demonstrated measurable improvements in psychophysiological markers, including enhanced heart rate variability, reduced blood pressure, lower respiratory rate, and decreased cortisol levels. These findings indicate a shift toward autonomic equilibrium and improved stress regulation.

6. Strengths and Limitations in the Existing Literature:

The existing literature on Yoga-Nidra and yogic interventions in breast cancer demonstrates several notable strengths.

Strengths:

- ♦ Use of standardized physiological and psychological outcome measures (HRV, cortisol, sleep indices, validated scales).
- ♦ Inclusion of RCTs, pilot studies and meta-analyses enhance methodological rigor.
- ♦ Evidence consistently supports improvements in sleep, anxiety, stress and autonomic regulation.
- ♦ Demonstrates feasibility, safety and acceptability in breast cancer populations.
- ♦ Findings show good generalizability across diverse clinical settings.

Limitations:

- ♦ Predominantly small sample sizes limit statistical power.
- ♦ Wide variability in intervention duration, frequency and delivery methods.
- ♦ Limited long-term follow-up reduces understanding of sustained effects.
- ♦ Heterogeneous control conditions introduce methodological bias.
- ♦ Few studies isolate Yoga-Nidra alone, reducing clarity on its specific mechanisms.
- ♦ Heavy reliance on self-reported outcomes increases potential for bias.
- ♦ Need for larger, well-controlled, mechanistic studies to strengthen evidence.

7. Conclusion:

This review underscores the therapeutic potential of Yoga-Nidra as a complementary mind –body intervention for breast cancer patients experiencing diverse psychophysiological challenges. Current evidence indicates that Yoga-Nidra effectively reduces pain, fatigue, emotional distress, anxiety, sleep disturbances and death anxiety through modulation of autonomic, neuroendocrine and inflammatory pathways. By enhancing parasympathetic activity, improving heart rate variability, lowering blood pressure and respiratory rate and down-regulating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, Yoga-Nidra elicits a sustained relaxation response and promotes autonomic stability. Additionally, its regulatory effects on cortisol and melatonin contribute to improved sleep quality and emotional well-being. Future research should emphasize high-quality randomized controlled trials employing standardized Yoga-Nidra protocols, objective physiological assessments and long-term follow-up to establish more conclusive evidence. Strengthening methodological rigor will facilitate the effective integration of Yoga-Nidra into clinical and oncological care frameworks.

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