

YTF - E-Magazine

From The Editor

This month's issue we will learn more about Tree Sisters - one of our charity partners. Tree Sisters aligns beautifully with YTF because their breath in and breath out connects to the idea of nurturing ourselves in order to have the strength to give. When I think of our yoga practice - for me it is very much something that gives me the nurturing I need to be active in the world. I found Angharad's story wonderful to read and I am delighted that we have been able to donate over £1k to this amazing charity in 2021.

Do let me know what you think of this month's issue!

Julia Davis, Editor, YTF Magazine

Title: The In Breath and Out Breath of TreeSisters Groves.

I am Angharad, and I am one of the Groves managers at TreeSisters. Groves are Nature-based women's circles that come together to create a nourishing space for women to lean into support, take action on Nature's behalf, and fund tropical reforestation through donations to TreeSisters.

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circle is more important than ever. I personally found my way into the TreeSisters community by a happy accident,

In a Grove, we work to balance the inner and outer, spiritual and practical. In these challenging and ever-changing times, gathering in

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signing up for what I thought was a news feed for TreeSisters and then finding myself on a course called “The Inner Journey” I was utterly drawn into what became an amazing group of women sharing a journey of self-discovery, grief, truthfulness and genuine sisterhood. I became a volunteer supporting the women’s work and then later joined the TreeSisters Team.

As Groves Manager, I spend my time supporting women around the globe to find their own leadership, start and run their own circles and events, and navigate ways in

which we can come together. Together we discuss topics such as how we create safety in a circle, why this is so important and different ways of sharing, practices, rituals and activities that can support us.

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We also run engagement events for global events such as International Women’s Day and explore how local action can become global action.



Photo credit: Angharad Barlow

With the joy of technology today, myself and the other Groves team members are able to sit in circle with women from around the globe sharing our journeys and experiences as we create a network of support for all the women stepping up. It is an

incredible honour to be able to hold space for this diverse range of courageous women. This is what we call, an 'In Breath' activity. Time to nurture and support and nourish

ourselves in order to enable us to do what we at TreeSisters call 'Out Breath' activities.

Birmingham's Wildheart Grove inspired 52 women, men and children from different ethnic backgrounds to come together to plant trees on behalf of their local community, TreeSisters and the planet

I would love to share with you a story from one of our UK based Groves participating in 'Out Breath' activity and action on behalf of our planet.

In February 2020, Birmingham's Wildheart Grove inspired 52

women, men and children from different ethnic backgrounds to come together to plant trees on behalf of their local community, TreeSisters and the planet. The Wildheart Grove has previously held events to raise funds for global reforestation, but this time they turned their attention closer to home and their community.

The dream was to create the 'Ogham Wood', a physical grove of native and locally sourced trees that have historic and cultural significance in the UK. The Ogham is an ancient alphabet, tree catalogue and means of divination used throughout the ancient British Isles from as early as the 5th Century. One hundred saplings of birch, willow,



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rowan, elder, alder, holly, oak, ash, hawthorn, hazel, apple, blackthorn etc. were to be planted alongside one transplanted yew tree.

The Grove worked with local wildlife trusts and parks to secure land for planting and the trees. All attendees were invited to help care for the trees and visit them with their families, as well as providing some basic tree care guidelines and maintenance agreements to promote healthy growth.

They share regular updates of their grove circle and community gathering there.



Photo credit: Hanna Clara Borrowman

It is such a pleasure to work with the In Breath and Out Breath in balance with Nature, being a part of a community that is putting their love in action is inspiring everyday.

If you would like to know more about TreeSisters, please visit www.TreeSisters.org YTF events have helped to raise over £1K for Tree Sisters this year - they are currently running a campaign to double donations through the BIG GIVE.

Space for Me, You and Us: Yoga for Women of Colour, Supported by The Brighton Yoga Foundation

By Indie Foolheea @indie.wellness

Having spaces that feel affirming, empowering to you as an individual and relating to your lived experience, can be transformative but unfortunately quite rare, especially when it comes to wellbeing. I certainly felt that, as I explored a personal yoga practice some of which was spent in Yoga studios.

There are many layers that contribute to a whole experience when developing a yoga practice; the physical spaces you practice in, the students, the teachers, guidance, the information being shared during practice, what kind of community the studio attracts to name a few. Maybe these are things you've already thought about, maybe not.



We're at a time of unrest and the air is thick with information, education and change. With this shaking up of much of what we've known, I welcome this opportunity to do something different and for the benefit of the most marginalised in society today. Whilst this can be a vast topic to talk about, let's look at it through yoga.

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Still vast and nuanced, but a little more zoned in. From my personal experiences at yoga studios over the years, I increasingly started to feel disconnected from what was being presented to me. Being Indian, this is a practice that comes from my homelands

with ancestral ties, so I knew there was so much more to this practice, but no one around me could tell me. Nor were they talking about it beyond an asana perspective. Plus, I see so many communities missing from these spaces, why?

So as I delved deeper, the more I saw what was happening and made connections to it all. Through my trainings and deeper learning of different societal constructs and understanding history from those affected, it became clear that not many spaces feel safe for historically minoritised or racialised communities.

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The Brighton Yoga Foundation is a charity whose mission it is to bring Yoga to communities that may not normally be able to access it and all it can offer. They have run several projects bringing free or subsidised classes to Brighton & Hove and surrounding areas. One of these is a class for Women of Colour that I have been guiding since late 2020. This class was born out of the diversity goals the foundation created, realising they could do better in including racialised and other minoritised people and addressing inequalities.

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Why a space for women of colour? In recent years, accessing wellness and wellbeing services have become increasingly difficult. Be it financial

considerations or cultural understanding or disconnect. In understanding how race and gender play a part in Western society, we can see that the voices of women have historically been excluded from many industries and the shaping of culture. The same is true for minoritised women, through exclusion, discrimination and socio-economic inequalities. Women of colour sit at this intersection of both and affects Black women the most acutely.

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ensuring space to share and talk about what we're feeling

Guiding this class is a careful curation - ensuring space to share and talk about what we're feeling - a check in of sorts, followed by gentle asana practice and time spent in rest. Additional considerations to create a safe container includes, a pen and paper at each mat to ask questions or share privately and always offering as much autonomy to move in a way that works for our bodies. So accessibility through physical variations and use of language is a key part in making this class a safe container.

All of this is on top of sharing an ancient practice with honesty and respect of its roots that intertwine with my own. Making sure to guide in ways that encourage a deeper understanding of the philosophy of Yoga and what that could mean for us as **individuals**. Spaces for women of colour are important - they provide a sense of community between others that understand unique lived experiences. There's a sense of grounding and connection that comes with being understood and seen that may not be the same in a mixed space.

I love guiding these classes and being part of the great work the Brighton Yoga Foundation is doing for many different

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marginalised communities. A class created for us, by us.

Testimonial from a participant in the BYF Yoga for Women of Colour Class

“Indie is an extremely mindful and creative guide. This class has been a breath of fresh air



encourage a deeper understanding of the philosophy of Yoga and what that could mean for us as individuals.

compared to my experiences of yoga over the years.” Scarlett

You can join Indie for an exploration of Surya Namaskar:

Surya Namaskar: Understanding the Stories & Traditions of The Sun Salutation

14 March 1230-1430 GMT (recorded for you if you book and cannot attend live)

<https://yogateachersforum.org/surya-namaskar>

Our charity partner for this event will be The Brighton Yoga Foundation.

Where Attention goes, Energy flows: Birthing the Pregnancy Chakras

with Nadia Raafat @

The dimension of energetics can seem mysterious and intangible to many.

Modern Yoga is often concerned with bones and muscles, structure and form; the domain of the subtle is not accessible or available to most yoga practitioners. But there comes a time in every yoga

teacher’s evolution when they recognise the truth of the statement: yoga is an energetic practice.

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I remember when one of my teachers Tara Fraser said this to me many years ago. I had been practising yoga for seven years; it was my second teacher training and posture perfection was losing its allure. It was the first time my body recognised the truth of that statement. Fast forward another five years and, after touching into a

delicious new interior aspect to my practice, I decided to explore this subtle dimension of yoga through the allied practice of Qi Gong. Now training my eye towards the subtle, rather than the sensation of skin and stretch, I refined my inner flow awareness.

Mid-40s with four kids behind me, a separation and two years of therapy , I was still harbouring residual blockages, and resistances in the shadows of my

chakras by a range of classical and modern authors, I began to focus on the chakras in my practice on the mat and my self-inquiry off the mat. Mid-40s with four kids behind me, a separation and two years of therapy , I was still harbouring residual blockages, and resistances in the shadows of my psyche.

Years earlier I had completed an online chakra questionnaire and discovered I was deficient in muladhara. I knew that. Childhood traumas, personal safety issues, had been life-long struggles for me. Through the knowledge base of muladhara I came to really understand the deep relationship between my personal history, lack of trust, hyper vigilant nervous system, tight psoas and hip flexors and negligence in certain fundamental areas of my life. This was the first time I had been able to weave these strands together in such a way that made profound and embodied sense. Through dedicated muladhara practice both on and off the mat I was able to bring about profound healing in this area.

At the same time I began reading books and attending courses on the



I realised how my muladhara deficit had contributed to the experience of my first pregnancy and birth. I recognised that there was no language for this knowledge base in pregnancy.

Muladhara governs physically the lower pelvis including the vaginas or birth canal; the domain in which the birth happens. With such enormous cultural, institutional and personal lack of trust in childbirth, so little genuine embodiment and so much nervous system dis-regulation is it any wonder that the childbirth event is so thwarted in modern day clinical birthing?

As I read on I discovered how the muladhara knowledge base integrates so many profoundly important teachings for the postpartum period. Embodied connection is everything in this period as the newborn in their elemental state lives, breathes and feeds off its mother; its very brain structures forming in response to the degree of its mothers loving gaze, presence and attunement.

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Being embodied is the gift of yoga; understanding the significance of your embodiment in the postnatal period; the sensory, tactile, physical, felt, skin-sense significance of gazing, holding, touching, being, looking, meeting and seeing into the soul of your newborn as the muladhara chakra establishes - the deepest foundation aspects of their being. This IS postnatal Yoga wisdom.

Becoming a mother, often disconnects you from your original maiden self; becoming mother is a profound holistic transformation - and often far from smooth. We can feel desexualised, lose our playfulness, forget we are more than mothers. This is what happened to me. I got lost in the mother archetype. I lived mother; I worked with mother; she encompassed and swallowed me whole.

At some point, after the birth of my two sons, I sought out an energetic healer who identified deficit at three chakras;



first, second and crown. 'I was closed to the father,' she said. She didn't know how right she was. Longstanding father issues had sent me strongly to the mother-side. But now I was tired, disconnected from my sexuality and my feminine power. I had unconsciously moved into my warrior third chakra (a familiar and comfortable place for me) and my mind (6th chakra).

I started to explore the relationship between sexuality, and female power through bodywork, asana, meditation, inquiry and experiential discovery.

Whilst on an Art of Being retreat with Alan Lowen, I experienced a kundalini awakening in my second and third chakras. During an intense physical movement and chakra meditation session, I felt a powerful surge of

electricity animating my pelvis and shooting up towards my solar plexus; it was enlivening, exciting and deeply empowering. It was as if the two centres were discovering each other for the first time. A fundamental shift happened for me that weekend; a blockage was released; a psychosomatic wall was broken down. It was a peak life experience I shall never forget. My heart and mind opened; Practices, mantas, affirmations, inquiries spilled across my pages. The maternity Chakra course was born.

For me, this model has borne more fruits than any other practice or therapy I have encountered. Contrary to the trivialised understanding of the chakras, demonstrated by the many colour charts and chakra tests that flood the web, there is a deep wisdom and body of knowledge available to us here, a pathway to awakening. Having spent 15 years working with pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period as a yoga teacher, birth educator and doula alongside my own four pregnancies, everything I have encountered as a yogi, I have looked at through the lens of maternity.

The Maternity Chakras have grown alongside my own explorations; through

yoga practice, meditation, study with diverse teachers including Christopher Wallis, Anodea Judith, Kristine Webber and Caroline Myss I have deepened and developed this course merging my knowledge base with theirs. I have been

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teaching the Maternity Chakras to the perinatal community for the past two years. The response has been wonderful. This is a maternity yoga that is inherently spiritual, deep and primordial as the chakras are. But more than that it enables us to weave seemingly disparate strands of knowledge and practice together into a meaningful whole.

Yoga practice is ultimately an energy practice. When we approach yoga like this it is deeply revealing. Emotions are energy in motions, thoughts are units of mental energy and sensations are energy manifest in the physical body. Blockages become multidimensional and healing occurs on many different levels.

Chakra Yoga is the yoga of transformation and pregnancy is the state of transformation. The Maternity Chakras are the ultimate expression of Pregnancy Yoga.

To find out more about Nadia's Maternity Chakras Pregnancy CPD Training for Pregnancy Yoga Teachers (Feb 22), then join her Maternity Chakra Taster Workshop (Level 1 of the Chakras Course) this December with the Yoga Teachers Forum.

<https://yogateachersforum.org/maternity-chakras> - Sun 12 Dec 0900-1100

(This event will be recorded for all participants)

Welcoming Mothers into a Tween/Teen Yoga and Mindfulness Circle

With Elena Riu

The excitement is palpable as the girls prepare to welcome their mothers/female carers into the room. There are mats and blankets to set down and chopping and serving to be done for snack time. We have waited a whole term for this!

The time comes for each girl to welcome her Mum and lead her into the space. In the centre is the nature-inspired seasonal Mandala, which the girls have co-created, bringing seasonal objects from nature and home. The Moon is always included in this, and we chart colouring in the phase to see how we feel and to see if it is affecting us in a particular way. The mandala, a focus of beauty, reminds us of nature's powerful cyclicity through the reassuring recurrence of the seasons.

The girls and their mothers hold opposite ends of the menstrual thread and are on their way to enter the momentous portals of Menarche and Menopause.

After the years of tender symbiosis their individual needs are undergoing a revolution. The sacred rite of separation looms, creating a conflict of interests. Expectations run high and there are cracks in the relationship, stirring doubt and resentment.

Consciously or unconsciously, Mother and daughter are questioning their role within the patriarchal narrative, both gasping for air and in the throes of hormonal



insurrection. Navigating private rollercoasters, the waves of change rock the relationship's boat. Fearful of how these changes will affect them and emotionally overwhelmed and overstretched they are both in need of heaps of reassurance and huge amounts of space.

In the same way as when she was a toddler, the 9-11-year-old might have difficulties expressing her feelings. Undergoing individuation and trying to find her role within the family's constellation creates inner tensions. She is not clingy: she is suffering from separation anxiety and needs compassionate holding. The mother, thrown out of balance by perimenopause is trying to hold it together, watching the remnants of who she has been up till now fray at the ends.

Daughter listens critically, her questioning tactics a match for a litigator. This level of intensity makes mother feel hemmed- in leading her to pull away- experienced as rejection by the resentful daughter (and as guilt by the mother) Unfortunately, this dance between met and



unmet needs
lacks an instruction manual with specific steps for achieving the best choreography. A break, a truce, a new perspective is needed and this is where these sessions can act as a bridge.

Meanwhile, in the yoga space, some of the girls are embarrassed and some mothers' apprehensive. Most of them have never sat in circle with other females. All are profoundly tired, self-care the last carriage in their priorities train. But there is also elation as they sit together, and LOVE fills the room. This sacred time offers an opportunity for deep and joyful presence for both. Zen master Tich Nath Hanh states that 'there is no greater gift to a loved one than the gift of space'.

In the whirlwind of life, welcoming the mothers offers a safe landing-pad to experience relaxation and reconnection with themselves and their daughters. I have witnessed a renaissance of intimacy, bubbling springs of laughter and conflict resolution delivered through the healing medicines of Yoga & Breath.

Here are some ideas of what to include in a session:

1: Invest in a mindfulness bell. It has proven to be an invaluable ally and the girls love it. The bell invites us to look deep inside, to stop and go back to our 'true home'. This can also be used in the home to call time for stillness, or, if necessary, a truce.

2: Ritual. Opening circle, mothers' seat behind daughters taking turns to name the women that came before them: 'I am Elena. Mother of Ananda. Daughter of Elena. Granddaughter of Giuseppina'. Some of the girls might have never heard their ancestors' names before. The matrilineal line spreads like a protecting veil around the room. Passing a red thread around the circle, each mother ties a piece onto her wrist before tying it onto her daughters, a symbolic remainder of the sacred blood that brought us all into this world.

3. Deploy some ice breakers whilst we move around the room. At the sound of the bell, when the girl meets her Mum's gaze they stop, take turns to say their names, give a high five and answer a question: 'what would be your superpower'. Or: 'would you rather be a lake, a river or the sea and why'. Then move again until you meet another person. Excited and surprised to discover new things about each other. What questions would you ask?

4. 'shaking the tree': start shaking fingertips and hands then, add the legs, hips, feet, shoulders, letting all our worries fall away like Autumn leaves. Continue for one minute, getting rid of negative energy and stress, wiping the slate clean for partner yoga. Can you smile and shake simultaneously? Try to say, 'I am stressed' while you shake and smile. Tricky! Close your eyes: how do you feel now?

5. Partner yoga-The roles switch. The daughter teaches Mum now. She knows the ropes. She leads mother, correcting her, even criticizing her-maybe helping her. For most mums and daughters this will be a novelty. Watch the dynamic between them. It is also there when the mums are not present.

6. Before any movement practice take the opportunity to always mention.... **the big elephant in the room: menstruation.** More than likely, one of the women will be on her bleed. In my yoga book this means no inversions; better safe than sorry! A great chance to mention Apana's function and our ayurvedic understanding of the cycle!

My aims are to ground, de-stress, rest. With so much uncertainty around remember Tich Nath Hanh's tree in the storm: focus on the trunk, where the stability, the grounding reside. Take attention away from the top of the tree (our head)-more liable to be swayed around by the changing winds... Tree pose it is. In pairs or mums and daughters facing each other. Who can balance the longest? **A bonus:** unbeknown to the mums, this is a top notch asana for bone density and maintaining blood health. Rolling around, balancing, falling over, laughing, stretching, breathing together, daring one another, faces flushed, stress peeling away layer by layer. Choose asanas with the most eye contact, encouraging them to gently guide each other through consent-seeking feedback, stretching the limits of trust and building sovereignty.

90-minutes will allow for an essential Yoga Nidra snuggle, providing the space for the rest they crave and for tuning into their heartfelt desires and inner most

intuition. If you only have 10 minutes and you have props, show them how to prop themselves into Supported Supta Badhakonasana. A panacea for PSNS activation- especially during transitional times- and winner of a top of the pop's menstrual asana safety badge. I call it 'First Class Asana' 😊. Blankets add to the magic.

Warning: with this age group, mind the clock or they will fidget.

Prepare a topic or use a visualization but always be mindful about possible triggers. A lovely one uses the inner seasons of the menstrual cycle, drawing parallels

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between the day's cycle, the wheel of seasons and the breath. Summer beaming at the top of the inhale and winter's darkest, quietest time at the end of the exhale. Sometimes I describe a beautiful place in nature for the visualization and introduce either a friendly spirit animal guide or a wise woman bringing a special message/gift for them. Place blank paper besides the mats and lots of colouring materials and as they come round from the Nidra instruct them to quietly draw or write. If

they fancy sharing their drawings it can be a lovely mystical moment of communion for Mother & Daughter.

Snack time. Hurrah! Share a song or a blessing and lead by example by eating mindfully. Difficult for the girls usually ravenous by this point! One of my favourite's treats are dates filled with almond butter. YUM! (check for food allergies beforehand!) If you planned a craft activity, do it now. For a self-care topic they LOVE 'Magic Cauldron', using nature's wisdom: healing herbs, their properties, and the importance of self-care; one herbal DIY bath at a time.... Hypnotic- and the room will smell like heaven.

A great tool I discovered thanks to Jane Bennett (Celebration Day for Girls), are the Strength Cards. Encouraging positivity and confidence their brilliant illustrations describe different emotional qualities: being confident, capable, resourceful, considerate, creative etc. There are MANY cards so prepare in advance to avoid flustering! Ask the daughters and mothers in turn to pick:

a-A card that describes something they love in their daughter/mother

b-A card that describes a quality they like in themselves

Holding up the chosen cards, take turns to say what they chose and why. A very affirming practice and great fun. It encourages group sharing and helps everyone know each other better.

Otherwise, try Tich Nath Hanh's wonderful 'Watering the flower'.

This profoundly moving practice encourages us to appreciate the other person by watering their good qualities as if they were a flower.

-Recipe

Epsom Salts, fragrant herbs like chamomile flowers, lavender, dried roses, rosemary, calendula, and essential oils (asthma alert!).

Keep these simple: lavender and rose. Sit in a circle and display the herbs either in little bowls (they look gorgeous) or paper bags.

Place a big mixing bowl in the middle of the mandala.

Have a large mixing spoon handy. Ask pairs to make a positive wish for themselves - or a relative or friend, the earth, an animal, or plant- as they sprinkle some herbs into the communal bowl stirring three times, holding the spoon together.

Everyone has a turn. Spoon into jars.

Result: a love potion full of good vibes to beat any blues!

I also designed a special selfcare questionnaire to give to participants before, during & afterwards

Light a candle. Mother and daughter seat facing each other. Inviting the bell, set up an even rhythm of breath working up to 5/6 BPM for three rounds. Instruct them to take turns to name something they love about the other. Sound the bell after each person has spoken and breath together. Listening deeply and compassionately, no interrupting until the bell is sounded. For privacy, each pair seats in separate spaces in the room. Easier than Plum Village, where families do the full practice (including saying sorry, saying what hurt you and asking for help) with all the other families listening in!!! Use any flowers in the Mandala as presents that each person can give to the other at the end. Or ask them beforehand to make something or gather a beautiful object from nature which reminds them of the other person and bring it to the session to offer as a present. Followed by hugging meditation -either in pairs or with the whole group, this is an extremely validating and emotionally healing practice for both Mothers and daughter's, which will have a transformative effect in their relationship. And for you as well!

A magical way to bring the session to an end and some of the most rewarding work that I have had the good fortune to do in my life.

@Elena Riu 2021

Elena runs the Creating Yoga Mindfulness & Coming of Age Circles Training for YTF.

Are You Ready for The Time When One Of Your Regular Students Tells You They Have a Diagnosis of Cancer?

Jenni Stone gives tips what you can do...

Ok let's get the scary fact out of the way first: nearly half of us at some point in our lives will have a diagnosis of cancer. Chances are that you already know someone who has had cancer or perhaps had a diagnosis yourself. I too have personal experience of cancer through friends and family having their own diagnoses and from the many years I have worked with cancer patients, both as a yoga teacher and as a reflexologist.



The good news is that early detection and improved treatments mean that in the vast majority of cases the cancer is treatable, often curable and many people live full active and long lives afterwards. The other good news is that yoga is now recognised and recommended as an effective support during an NHS patient's treatment and recovery.

What this means for yoga teachers is that the likelihood of us encountering cancer in a professional capacity is increasingly likely. But are we ready for it?! Have you thought about how you might handle a situation when one of your regular students tells you they have a cancer diagnosis, or someone new approaches you and asks to join your class because their oncology team recommended it?

Perhaps first it would be useful to give an outline of what cancer is. Despite it being very common, and in the public's awareness, there is often a lack of

understanding of what cancer actually is. This can fuel fear and well-meaning mistakes in communication.

Very simply, cancer can develop when there is an error in our normal cell division, meaning the new cells are faulty or 'abnormal'. Usually abnormal cells are cleaned up and disposed of by our immune system but when cancer develops our immune system seems to not recognise them.

Very simply, cancer can develop when there is an error in our normal cell division, meaning the new cells are faulty or 'abnormal'. Usually abnormal cells are cleaned up

and disposed of by our immune system but when cancer develops our immune system seems to not recognise them. These abnormal cells ignore instructions from surrounding cells and continue to divide and proliferate. In addition, these abnormal cells fail to self-destruct at their appointed time as healthy cells do. This results in uncontrolled growth that creates a tumour. In time, a tumour can create its own blood supply and then send out abnormal cells to colonise other areas. Please note, not all tumours are cancerous.

Although suspected cancers may be spotted in scans, screening tests or by self-examination, a diagnosis ultimately (usually) comes from a biopsy. This is when a small piece of tissue is taken from the suspected site and the cells are examined to see if they are cancerous. When someone receives a diagnosis there are typically 3 parts: the type (location), the stage (how advanced it is) and the grade (how aggressive it is). The diagnosis then forms the basis of the treatment plan. The most common forms of treatment are surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormone therapy. Not everyone will have all of these and of course there are new treatments being developed all the time.

When teaching people with cancer it is not only the physical impact of their treatment that we need to be mindful of it is also the mental and emotional effects a diagnosis can bring. A diagnosis can come from “out of the blue”, people don’t usually feel ill and there is often little warning or preparation for the fact that they have cancer. The process from initial tests to diagnosis to full on treatment is usually very quick. Literally you may find a lump, decided to check it out just in case, and within a couple of weeks be in surgery with the next months of your life planned out by a medical team.

Thankfully these days, most often a diagnosis is not a death sentence; but it can be life changing. Diagnosis and treatment can be a frightening, bewildering and challenging process. The treatment itself can last many months and brings many physical challenges. Recovery from surgery can involve dealing with pain, limited range of movement and loss of strength. Chemotherapy can cause nausea, fatigue, dizziness, peripheral neuropathy and hair loss. Radiotherapy is much like getting sunburn and can also cause fatigue, and hormone therapy can cause joint pain and bring on premature menopause. All of these factors need to be considered when teaching a safe, appropriate class.

People often use the term “it’s like being on a rollercoaster”. Very commonly people experience shock, fear, anxiety, stress and anger. Also common is for someone to get into practical mode, to focus on the treatment and be almost emotionally numb.

Almost everyone has difficulty processing their feelings at the end of treatment, which can often be the first time they have had to stop and acknowledge everything that has just happened. It is also the time when the medical support network is withdrawn and that can raise anxiety.

This is where I feel yoga is so valuable as a holistic approach to wellbeing. We don't just focus on physical recovery but mental and emotional wellbeing too. We can help them recover their strength and mobility through asana practise; give them tools to cope with stress and anxiety through pranayama and relaxation techniques, improve their energy through restorative practises. People report that they tend to sleep better, have more energy and feel more positive due to their yoga practise. Classes themselves can act as a support group which can continue after medical treatment has stopped.

A cancer diagnosis is like dropping a stone into a pond - it ripples out into all areas of a person's life and affects the people around them. We need to be aware that they may also have concerns about their job security and finances, their relationships, the impact on their family members, their body image, long term quality of life and so on. So when we teach and hold space for people with cancer, we need to be mindful of all the things we can't see as well as the physical impact that we can.

Numerous studies have found that cancer survivors who have strong emotional support tend to adjust to the changes cancer brings to their lives more easily. Specifically with yoga, research suggests that people with cancer who practise regularly not only cope with their treatment better but also have better overall long-term outcomes.

Some of the feedback I've had from the classes I teach at Maggie's Royal Free has been very affirming, one woman told me she could now dress herself without help, another that she felt confident enough to drive again. Others have said they loved having a space where they didn't have to try to be 'normal' or explain anything. Last summer there was one lady who on entering the room immediately pulled off her wig with a smile. "It's nice to let my head breathe!". Often, people find it empowering - something positive they can do for themselves rather than being passive recipients of treatment.

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MAGGIE'S

Everyone's home of cancer care

This kind of work isn't for everyone, it can be emotionally challenging, you get to hear some difficult stories. Some of these may be triggering for you. Occasionally, people do die. But, if you can hold good boundaries, work with sensitivity both with your students and yourself and build a strong support network, then it can be some of the most meaningful and rewarding work you'll ever do.

Jenni runs regular workshops for teachers - YTF Yoga For Cancer Charity Partner is Maggie's and we donate to this charity.

- **Breast Cancer Workshop**, live on Zoom - 10th December, 09:30-11:30 GMT (£35)
- **Free Talk: Cancer and Trauma, a New Perspective** with Aneta Idczak - 19th Jan, 13:00 GMT (FREE)
- **Online Self-Study Module: Introduction to Teaching Yoga for Cancer** (£19.95)
- **Yoga For Cancer - Essentials Workshop**, live on Zoom - 5th March 2022, 10:30 - 14:00 GMT (£55/£65)
- **7 Week In-Depth Training Course**, live on Zoom - starts 7th May 2022, 10:30-13:30 BST (£245/£345)

Jenni teaches yoga for cancer at Maggie's Royal Free, Hampstead, London. All Maggie's centres offer free drop-in yoga classes to people with cancer and their families or carers. No referral is needed. They also offer many other support services. <https://www.maggiescentres.org/>

Information and support is also offered by Macmillan <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

You can find out more about Jenni's work at [Yoga for Cancer Training – Jennitherapy](#)

(This article first appeared in Spectrum Magazine copy right belongs to Jenni Stone)

Coming Up....

We would love to hear from you... Do email us at info@yogateachersforum.org with your questions and let us know if you would like to contribute to next month's issue.

In the next issue of YTF - E-Magazine we would love to hear about your reflections on 2021 and what yoga and mindfulness practices you are using to manifest your longings for 2022. And we will have more inspiring stories from teachers who are making a difference one class at a time....

COURSES & TRAININGS IN DECEMBER & JANUARY WITH YOGA TEACHERS FORUM

Teaching Yoga for Breast Cancer - Friday 10 Dec 0930-1130 GMT

<https://yogateachersforum.org/breast-cancer-december>

Maternity Chakras: A Pathway for Pregnant Awakening Sun 12 Dec 0900-1100 GMT

<https://yogateachersforum.org/maternity-chakras>

Winter Solstice: Meditation & Celebration Mon 13 Dec 1200-1315

<https://yogateachersforum.org/winter-solstice>

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