

Sound, Body and Mind: Complements to Cancer Care

Creative and healing artist Sandy Duarte shares how sound bowls, yoga, journaling and meditation complement her medical treatment for Stage IV non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

March 9, 2026 By [Trent Straube](#)

It started with a bad cold and a cough that wouldn't go away. At first, Sandy Duarte, an actress, author and yoga instructor in Los Angeles, didn't think much of it. After all, the Canadian transplant had been traveling back and forth between home bases and figured the change in climate was partially to blame. But the usual balms and antibiotics didn't help. By February 2024, she was so weak she couldn't practice yoga. "I thought, Something's wrong with my lungs, something really bad." She decided to pay out of pocket for MRI scans. "When I got the call, I knew it wasn't good. She said, 'You have to go to the hospital right now. We're seeing a big mass.'" Naive, or in denial about the prognosis, she decided to first teach a scheduled yoga class. "I was being very ignorant," she reflects. "In hindsight, I've learned to be a better friend to my body. We must listen to what our bodies tell us!" She then asked a bestie to meet her at Olive View-UCLA Medical Center. "I thought I was going in and out," Duarte recalls. Instead, a series of tests revealed Stage IV non-Hodgkin lymphoma; she had a tumor so large it had collapsed her left lung. That was in March. "They said, 'You need aggressive chemo: five days and five nights in the hospital, then home two days to recover, then back for five days.' It was like that till August." Since completing her treatment, Duarte undergoes regular scans and remains in remission.

A self-described "creative and healing artist," Duarte was already informed about complementary therapies before her diagnosis. During treatment, she leaned on those modalities and learned new ones. "Cancer is like the ultimate vacation and school—if you choose to look at it that way. You get a lot of time off. You get to face some of the darkest, scariest stuff. But out of cancer, I was birthed two things: my book and my sound."

To learn more, we spoke with Duarte for the latest installment of our Can Heal column—that empowering phrase is right there in our title, Cancer Health. These interviews offer a chance to learn about the nonmedical practices that folks with cancer sometimes lean on. Our discussion has been edited for length and clarity.

Do you get scanxiety?

No. I know it's a real thing, because you do wonder [about the results], but I go in with excitement because the scan shows everything. It's an opportunity to find anything.

Did your previous experience in the health space—yoga and meditation, for example—help prepare you for cancer?

I always cared for my body. I was teaching yoga, and I had been going to one of my favorite places to meditate for years. I'm very grateful I had that because this cancer journey tested every inch of me. There was the physical challenge, but the mental part was the scariest.

When they gave me the diagnosis, I allowed myself about a day or two to live in and truly wonder about the whys. My mom and the nurses would say, "But you teach yoga!" As if yoga teachers don't get sick. Finally, I told everybody, "Don't ever ask my why again. I'm not even going to ask why anymore." There's no progress in "why." You get stuck. Instead, ask yourself, "How?" How am I going to jump forward? How do I become a champion in this? How do I support my body through this with my mind and heart and faith? That mindset was key. That, for me, was a turning point.

You journaled during your treatment and published the bite-size entries as Cancer Ramblings. Did you always write?

I love journaling but never practiced it professionally. Writing is a great support system and way to get out of the mental fog and noise and get closer to the light. It started with a title, [Cancer Ramblings](#). It was the divine saying, "Here's your permission to be a mess." The writing helped me, but I knew it could help others. I thought, If I'm a pretty strong and positive person, and I'm getting kicked in the ass, then what about the others? I wanted them to have a raft.

My oncology team would see me writing in the middle of the night. I'd say to them, "If I can't make

sense of the nonsense that is cancer, then why this experience?" We have to find some way to make beautiful things in this world. That way, the ugly stuff that appears is not really ugly. There is beauty trying to meet you that is greater than you know. I say this not as toxic positivity.

Tell us about sound bowls and aural therapy.

With cancer, you get a lot of time off. In my hospital room, I was online learning more about yoga and detachment. The divine told me to order crystal singing bowls. I start arguing but then say, "Fine. I'll buy the bowls as a gift for myself for those times I'm home between treatment." And oh my gosh, what the bowls do!

Sound vibration is ancient, but it's making its way into the modern landscape. Vibration and sound keep the health of your body in an optimal state for receiving chemotherapy and healing. It helps people with PTSD. When you allow yourself to be bathed in sound, it's like sitting by the beach. The sound of the waves feels good. Same thing with the bowls. They're at various frequencies and put your body's parasympathetic nervous system in a calming zone. If you're stressed, how are you going to receive anything—knowledge, words, healing, medication? You can't.

Sound is now a part of my creative and healing arts. I got certified while doing chemo. I bring sound to studios across LA. I just got back from Miami, where we did two 12-hour days and curated all sorts of sound artists with different tools, including gongs and flutes. It's for patients, students, faculty, everybody. I bring sound to hospitals at UCLA, to Long Beach City College and, recently, to RPA, an advertising firm. This is making its way to corporate environments. Staff join me in a room; they sit or lie down and receive sound and then walk away with more clarity: "Oh, I'm ready for my work projects now!" Not because I'm some magical person but because of the medium. The sound allowed them to creatively flow and surrender the locked-up tension. I create a world where people step in, and they feel held and loved. I call my sessions love wrapped in sound.

Sandy Duarte

Courtesy of Sandy Duarte

Finally, what top-line advice would you offer for someone going through cancer?

- Don't underestimate the power of movement. Move your body no matter the state you're in. When I was in the hospital those five-day periods with that machine—"my friend on wheels," I called her—we'd go for walks. I got 10,000-plus steps some days. Even if I was feeling really crappy or was slow or looked like a zombie. I didn't care. Yes, your body needs healing and repairing, but it's imperative you don't just stay in bed. And it took me a while to get back into yoga. I had neuropathy and couldn't do certain things. I trusted the process, and I didn't judge, so if I was in a class as a student and I could only do half of it, then that was OK.
- Feed your mind. My go-to is Paramahansa Yogananda. I love his little book *Metaphysical Meditations*—it contains so much wisdom about living fearlessly and having faith and courage. I go to his temple, the Self-Realization Fellowship, in Mount Washington in Los Angeles.
- Have an open dialogue with your oncology team. Assert yourself as if you're the CEO of your health and life. I'd communicate what I take between treatments, like lion's mane and turkey tail (two fungi). The doctors said, "OK, but don't do it during treatment." There were no secrets and fears.
- Use visualization. Pick one thing, a macro vision, that you can envision like a flash card, that in a moment of fear you can go to and will take you to a better reality. For me, anytime I had a moment of dark stuff, one of my flash cards was of me running and laughing on the beach: a close-up shot. Later, that came to life. It's not about overthinking. Just see it. "Ahhh, here it is." Your body is guided by your mind. They're not separate.
- Keep leaning on love—love that's beyond a face or a religion or places or things. What helped me was that I repeated "love" as a chant. It's so simple. "Love, love, love."

For more about Sandy Duarte, visit [CancerRamblings.com](https://cancerramblings.com).

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