


**BATTLING CANCER**

## FDA approves new breast cancer drug treatment

Studies show Herceptin  
can cut relapse for  
some patients

By **JIM WARREN**  
McClatchy News Service

**LEXINGTON, KY.** — Progress in fighting breast cancer usually comes in small steps, but developments last week concerning the drug Herceptin represent a huge leap forward, a University of Kentucky cancer specialist says.

"We need to see how this holds up in the long run, but so far it's a bigger leap forward in breast cancer treatment than we've had with anything else in the last 25 years," said Dr. Edward Romond. He participated in studies last year showing that Herceptin can reduce by half the risk of relapse in women with a particularly dangerous form of breast cancer.

Based on those findings, the FDA on Thursday approved Herceptin for use in women who have been diagnosed with early-stage "HER-2 positive" breast cancer and have undergone surgery. Under the FDA ac-

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**DR. EDWARD ROMOND,**  
University of Kentucky  
cancer specialist

tion, these patients now can be given Herceptin for up to a year to guard against their cancer from coming back.

Herceptin received approval about eight years ago for women with advanced breast cancer that had already spread. Last week's development means the drug now can be given in the earlier stages of the disease, when treatment is easier.

"When you use the drug early, in combination with chemotherapy, it basically cuts the likelihood of recurrence in half," Romond said. "That's a huge improvement, because this really is one of the more aggressive, fast-spreading kinds of breast cancer."

The results, he said, essentially mean a much better prognosis for many women.

The HER-2 form of breast cancer accounts for 20 percent to 25 percent of all cases of the disease, which kills about 40,000 women each year in the United States.

Herceptin is not a chemotherapy agent, but it acts like a natural antibody, specifically targeting cancer cells without damaging healthy cells. As a result, it doesn't produce the typical side effects of chemotherapy, Romond said.

Herceptin can cause cardiac problems in some patients, but doctors contend that the drug's potential benefits outweigh the risk. The key, Romond says, is to carefully monitor patients for cardiac problems while they're taking the drug and then treat any such problems accordingly.

"It has to be given carefully, like any cancer drug," he said. "You can't give it blindly without paying attention to what's happening with the patient."

The real drawback to widespread use of the drug might be cost.

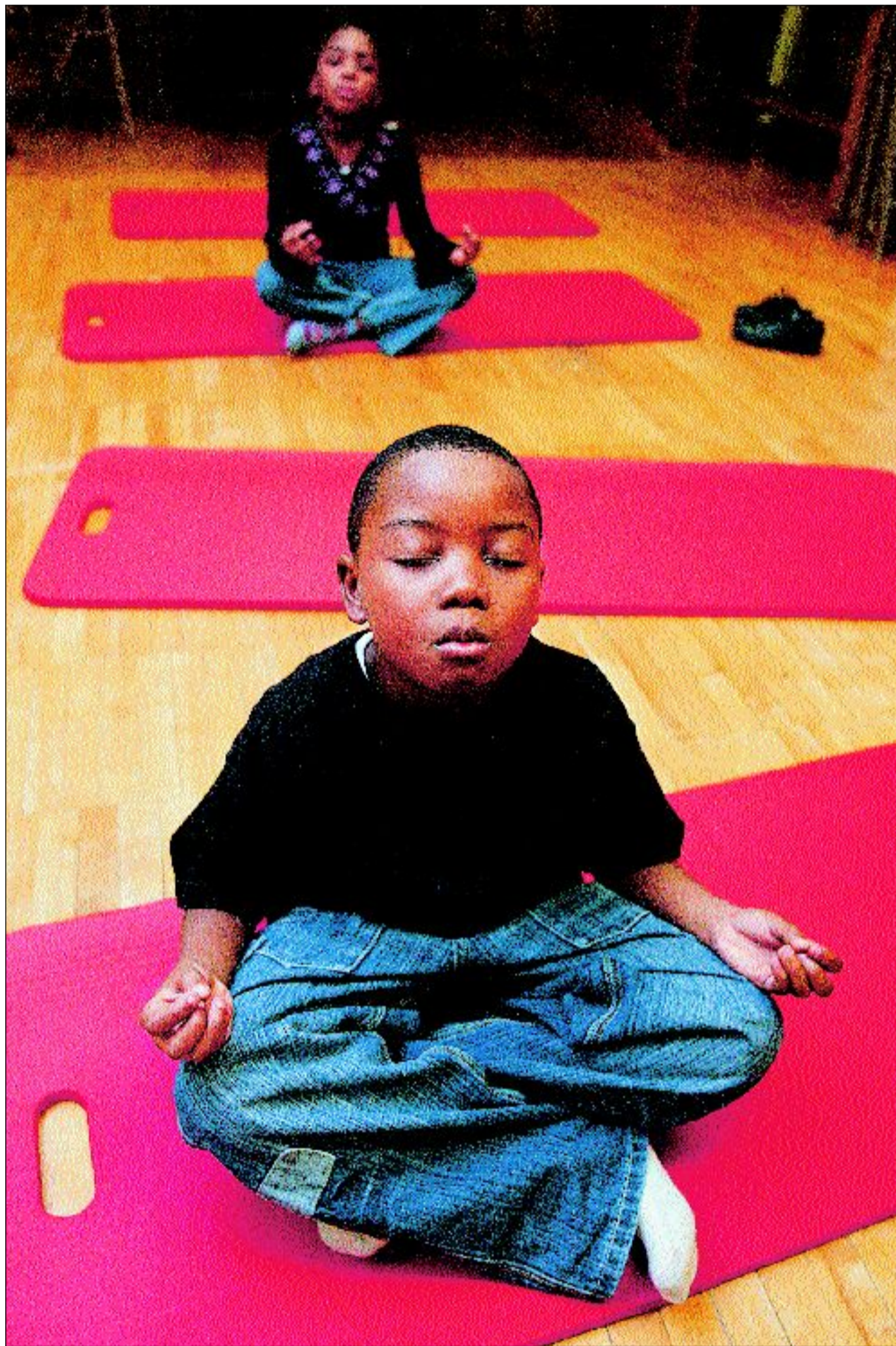
Romond said a single dose of Herceptin costs almost \$1,000, and a year of treatment — the regimen that was used in studies — would cost about \$50,000. But he said that some insurance programs are covering the treatment, and more might do so now that the FDA has issued its approval.

In addition, Romond said, it may turn out that a shorter treatment program, say six months, will produce the same protection. A study now going in France could help provide answers, he said.

"We've been making incremental steps with breast cancer pretty steadily for the past 25 years," he said. "But every once in a great while we actually make a pretty substantial leap forward, and this is one of those uncommon times that has happened."

# YOGA

## FOR THE YOUNG



ELIZABETH LARA/Herald News

Nasir Davis, 7, sits in a relaxed position as yoga class comes to a close at School 28 in Paterson. The after-school class is run by the Paterson YMCA in collaboration with the nonprofit organization New Jersey After 3.

By **BETSY QUERNA**  
Herald News

**Omm...**

Visit the sights and sounds of Keisha Woodford's Yoga for Kids class at Paterson School 28 on [northjersey.com/hn](http://northjersey.com/hn).

Class began with eyes closed, a few inhales and exhales to relax, and a series of "Omm"s. The low, soothing chant familiar in many yoga classes was higher pitched this afternoon. One yogi, Damon McFadden, 7, opened his mouth wide, making his "omm" more of an "ahhh."

The chanting was not the only thing unconventional about this yoga class. Mats covered the floor of a classroom in Paterson's School 28, and the yogis, second-graders at the school, didn't know a cat pose from downward-facing dog.

Throughout this area and the nation, yoga classes are going

junior. Once a haven just for mommy or daddy, more studios are opening their doors to get kids into the popular practice.

"It's becoming mainstream," said Shakti Kaur Khalsa, a teacher in Virginia who trains yoga instructors to teach children and has written a book, "Fly Like a Butterfly," about children's yoga. "There's more programs and more people in my program."

Teachers and coordinators for the after-school care program

Please see **YOGA, C2**