

RESTORATIVE YOGA

36
step-by-step
poses and
sequences

Easy moves to relax and heal your body and mind

- > BEAT STRESS
- > SLEEP BETTER
- > EASE BACK PAIN
- > BOOST ENERGY



RESTORATIVE YOGA

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Restorative Yoga ISBN 978-1-78106-731-4

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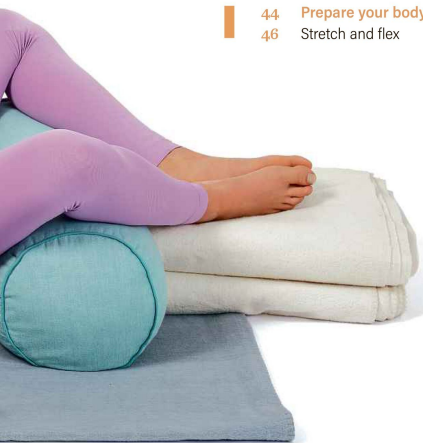
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Discontinue any exercise that causes you pain or severe discomfort and consult a medical expert.

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Contents



- 
- 6 Welcome
 - 8 How to use this book
 - 10 Introduction
 - 14 Reap the benefits

- 26 **Get started**
- 28 Create a yoga space
- 30 Before you start
- 32 How to breathe
- 34 Support act

- 44 **Prepare your body**
- 46 Stretch and flex

52 The poses

- 94 **The sequences**
- 96 Introduction
- 98 Deep rest
- 102 Creating quiet
- 106 Ease stress
- 110 Sleep well
- 112 Revive your energy

- 114 **Mindful moments**
- 116 Breathe yourself better
- 120 Meditation magic
- 124 Massage miracles
- 128 Relax & restore
- 130 Biographies

Welcome

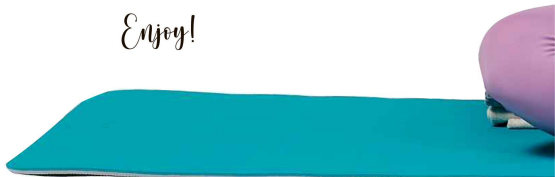
If you already do yoga, you'll know how good it can make you feel. Calm yet focused, relaxed yet energised, strong yet supple. Restorative yoga can deepen these rewards and, incredibly, you barely need to move a muscle!

In Restorative yoga, demanding poses and dynamic sequences are replaced by simple, supported poses that enable deep, profound rest. Not only do the poses feel blissfully relaxing. By slowing down your breath, lowering your heart rate and quieting your mind, Restorative yoga triggers physiological processes that restore, heal and rejuvenate body and mind.

This tried-and-tested therapy is proven to ease stress, beat back pain, improve breathing problems and aid digestion, among many benefits. And, the best thing about Restorative yoga? Anyone can do it whatever their age, fitness level or state of health.

In *Restorative Yoga*, you'll find an expert, step-by-step guide for home practice. Don't worry if you don't have props – we'll show you how to use household items such as pillows and blankets. Just follow the instructions to the poses, sequences, breathing exercises and meditations and you'll soon have your very own self-healing sanctuary.

Enjoy!





Tip

Restorative yoga is suitable for everyone, whatever your age or fitness level.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Ready to enjoy the relaxing powers of Restorative yoga?
Follow these instructions to ensure you
get the most from your guide



Restorative yoga is the perfect way to rest and heal your body. And with this expert guide you can practise it safely and simply in the comfort of your own home. Once you've got the foundations in place, you can do the poses and simple sequences anytime you want to release tension, ease stress and restore your body and mind. Add some simple breathing and meditation techniques, and you have a complete, home-healing practice.

The poses might look complicated but with the expert, step-by-step guides, they'll soon become second nature. To get maximum benefits, work your way through the book, from start to finish. Once you've learnt the basic principles and techniques, you can dip in and out to choose poses and sequences to suit your goals, or tailor your own Restorative sessions. Here's what you need to know to get started.



Reap the benefits

Discover all the scientifically-proven benefits of Restorative yoga – from easing stress and relieving pain to aiding weight loss – and discover the best poses for your symptoms.



Get started

Wondering how to use yoga props or how to do yogic breathing? This section will answer all your questions and help you establish the foundations of your practice.



Prepare your body

To help your body relax in Restorative yoga, it's good to start by warming up. In this section, you'll find a series of mobility moves that will keep you flexible and supple.



The poses

Now you've learnt the foundations, it's time to try some Restorative yoga poses. Each pose comes with a step-by-step guide, plus teaching tips and a list of benefits so you can choose the best poses for you.



The sequences

Once you're familiar with the poses, you can start creating your own Restorative yoga sessions. In this section, you'll find five tailored sequences to help you relax, rest and revitalise your body.



Mindful moments

Relax further by adding a few simple breathing and meditation exercises to your sessions. Just follow the expert instructions. Also discover how to do a soothing DIY face and body massage.

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE YOGA?

Whether you simply want to relax and
de-stress or heal your body and mind here's
why you need to try Restorative yoga

When was the last time you truly relaxed? Perhaps it was during your last holiday, daydreaming in a hammock while soothed by the sound of the waves. Or when you walked through the countryside, immersed in the beauty of nature. Sadly, these experiences are rare these days, thanks to our busy, 24/7 lifestyles. All too often, we simply collapse on the sofa, turn on the TV, scroll through social media or open a bottle of wine – habits that ultimately do little to ease stress and fatigue, instead putting more pressure on our bodies and minds. It's no wonder we rarely feel fully rested.

YOGIC SOLUTIONS

This is where yoga can help. The ancient system of mind and body exercise can help you discover the true meaning of relaxation. If you've ever taken a regular yoga class, you've probably noticed how calm, yet refreshed, you feel afterwards. This is because the combination of stretching, breathwork and popular relaxation poses, such as Corpse and Child's pose, help release tension and mental chatter while rejuvenating your entire being.

Restorative yoga takes this experience further, offering tailored poses designed to encourage deep relaxation on

both a physical and mental level. Unlike regular classes, the focus of Restorative yoga is not on stretching and strengthening but on encouraging your body to release and rest. You won't find familiar poses such as Downward dog or Warrior. Instead, you'll discover a new collection of therapeutic poses, from simple relaxation poses such as Mountain Brook (p56) and Restorative child's pose (p80) to gentle backbends such as Supported bridge (p64) and gentle spinal twists such as Supported Twist (p70), all involving props such as blankets and bolsters to hold and support your body, allowing you to relax effortlessly. You can rest in some poses for up to 20 minutes so an hour's class may include just a handful of poses, plus meditation and breathwork to deepen the effects.

RELAXATION REVOLUTION

Restorative yoga was developed by the founder of Iyengar yoga, BKS Iyengar. Discovering that yoga props helped improve his students' alignment, Iyengar began incorporating props such as bolsters, chairs and stools into his classes. Not only did these props allow him to adjust poses to suit each student's needs, he found they could also help ease their health conditions by increasing relaxation, deepening the breath and improving circulation. Subsequently, Iyengar created



a series of specialised relaxation poses using props tailored to particular health conditions, from stress to heart disease and asthma.

In the 1970s, one of Iyengar's students, Judith Hanson Lasater, popularised Restorative yoga in the US, creating therapeutic sequences for common conditions such as insomnia and headaches as well as pregnancy. In the intervening years, Restorative yoga has evolved further through the work of experts, including Donna Farhi and Aki Omori, who created a softer, more nurturing approach. Now, as life becomes more stressful, the demand for Restorative yoga is growing across the world. And the benefits that these yogis and their students have witnessed are being backed up by science. Research shows that Restorative yoga can offer benefits ranging from reduced levels of stress hormones and back pain to better breathing and improved sleep.

HEALING POWERS

Ultimately, it seems Restorative yoga brings your body and mind back into balance so it can heal itself. Breathing rate calms, heart rate and blood pressure fall, brain waves slow and the immune system is strengthened. And, practising Restorative poses regularly can help you build the mental resilience to deal with any stresses life throws at you. 'Making sure we take some time out to practise Restorative yoga even once a week can help to balance our busy lifestyles and has an enormous capacity to heal stress-related physical and emotional issues,' says yoga teacher Esther Ekhart (ekhartyoga.com). 'There is no muscular effort involved so Restorative yoga can also be helpful to try if you are chronically ill or are recovering from injury.'

“ Sometimes doing nothing can be one of the most powerful, supporting and healing practices of all ”

Corpse pose or Savasana is one of the foundations of all yoga. Often practised at the end of a yoga session or after a challenging pose or sequence, the relaxation pose helps you withdraw from the external world and allow your body and mind to become one. According to the founder of Iyengar yoga, BKS Iyengar, Savasana is the first step towards meditation. In Restorative yoga, props are added to the pose to create Relaxation pose or Savasana with bolster (p54), to deepen the pose, further relaxing your brain, soothing your nervous system and leaving you rested and rejuvenated.

The ultimate pose





‘Relaxation changes everything’

ESTHER EKHART, FOUNDER OF EKHARTYOGA (EKHARTYOGA.COM), TALKS ABOUT THE POWER OF RESTORATIVE YOGA



8 reasons to practise

- > YOU HAVE INSOMNIA
- > YOU CAN'T RELAX
- > YOU HAVE BACKPAIN
- > YOU GET HEADACHES
- > YOU HAVE A STRESSFUL JOB
- > YOU'RE OFTEN UNWELL
- > YOU FEEL DEPRESSED
- > YOUR BODY FEELS STIFF AND UNFLEXIBLE

‘Do you recall feeling so comfortable in your own skin you hardly noticed your physical body? And what about that laid-back feeling of watching everything from a distance with a big smile on your face, knowing beyond a doubt that everything is okay, exactly as it is? In this state, you know that life is just as it is; there is nothing to accept or reject. Do you remember what it’s like to rest in your true nature? To know you are not separate from life, any more than the air in a balloon is different from the air surrounding it, or the wave is separate from the sea?’

The true meaning of yoga is to experience union. To see through the illusion of being a separate being. To see that we’re all made out of the same energy, which is the ground of all being. For me, Restorative yoga is a wonderful way of accessing deep relaxation; of understanding that sometimes doing nothing (resting in the now) can be one of the most powerful, supporting and healing practices of all.

Why you should try it
Restorative yoga often has the appearance of being a very passive practice. We practise it lying down, supported by blankets and props.

There’s little physical movement and it certainly won’t give us the muscular, toned body Hollywood has popularised. But it’s a powerful practice. It’s helpful for accessing and balancing the nervous system – in particular, activating the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest) which combats that feeling of “overdrive” we often find ourselves in. It also slows the heartbeat down and has a way of quieting those endless fluctuations of the chatterbox mind.

It helps you relax
It’s also a deeply relaxing practice for the physical body. Because Restorative yoga doesn’t use any muscular contraction, we may achieve more opening in tight parts of the body than we do by practising a strong, dynamic yoga. Restorative yoga helps dial down the level of activation when we need it – or ramp it back up when we’re tired. When our nervous system is not locked in overdrive, it becomes responsive, supporting us to redress the balance when things move too fast, or slow them down when we’re running on empty.

Relaxation changes everything.
We become more mindful, aware of the moment. We become more understanding and compassionate towards others and ourselves.

REAP THE BENEFITS

Restorative yoga's not just relaxing – it offers many healing benefits for your body and mind. Here are a few of them

PHOTOGRAPHY: YOGAMATTERS (YOGAMATTERS.COM)

Spend several minutes relaxing in a Restorative yoga pose and magic starts to happen. As your brain registers that you're safe and secure, chemical and physical reactions start to occur in your body that initiate rest, recovery and healing. And all you need do is relax and effortlessly enjoy the experience.



Benefits at a glance

- > DEEPLY RELAXES YOUR BODY
- > CALMS YOUR MIND
- > RELEASES MUSCULAR TENSION, IMPROVING FLEXIBILITY
- > STRENGTHENS YOUR BODY'S HEALING ABILITIES
- > BALANCES YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM
- > BOOSTS YOUR IMMUNITY
- > DEVELOPS FEELINGS OF ABUNDANCE AND COMPASSION

FLEXES YOUR JOINTS

STRETCHES YOUR BODY





1

“Restorative yoga is one of the most effective ways to reduce the impact of stress on your body”

IT REDUCES STRESS

We're all familiar with symptoms of stress – a speeding heart, tight breath, nagging anxiety and fitful sleep. When you're feeling under pressure, your brain triggers a stress response in your body, activating the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) which is responsible for your 'fight or flight' mechanism, releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to give you energy. In the short term, this survival mechanism works well. However, if stress hormones are constantly circulating around your body, it can start to take a toll on your health, increasing the risk of conditions such as high blood pressure and heart attack. It can disrupt your weight, affect your skin and cause depression, burn out and accelerated ageing.

Restorative yoga is one of the most effective ways to reduce the impact of stress on your body because it switches on your body's relaxation response. 'During a Restorative yoga sequence, we still stretch, but we're encouraged to relax fully in the stretch with the aid of the props so that we can release tension and focus on the breath,' says Esther Ekhart, founder of Ekhart Yoga. 'This helps us to activate the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), responsible for the rest/digest process [which lowers your heart rate and reduces levels of stress hormones] which helps combat that feeling of "overdrive" that we often find ourselves in.' One study, published in the *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, found that cortisol levels dropped significantly in people with depression after three months of yoga.

Relaxation response

If you do Restorative yoga regularly, your nervous system will gradually learn this relaxation response, allowing you to harness it during everyday situations, not just on the mat. Effectively, you will learn a new way to deal with stress. Researchers at the Sibar Institute of Dental Sciences in India found that people who regularly practised yoga had lower levels of perceived stress. Practise yoga daily or even weekly, and you'll soon feel ready to handle anything! Some poses are specifically designed to help soothe stress. Legs up the wall with chair (p92) soothes your nerves; Reclining bound angle pose (p68) grounds and calms; while Seated wide angle pose (p74) soothes the SNS and rests the mind.

Improve your digestion

Do you suffer from bloating, indigestion or IBS? Digestive problems are often the result of a busy lifestyle. When you're stressed, your body's fight or flight response directs blood supply away from the digestive system to your muscles to prepare you for action. This can compromise your digestion. Eating on the go, hunching over a desk all day and lack of physical exercise can also take a toll. Restorative yoga activates the rest and digest response, meaning your body can re-focus its energies on digestion and detoxification. Try these two poses which are helpful: Supported Bridge (p64) and Seated side twist (p51).





2

IT ENERGISES YOU

Do you feel constantly tired, even when you've been trying to switch off? The true, deep relaxation that comes from doing Restorative yoga helps recharge and restore and your energy. Some poses are particularly known for their energising qualities. Supported back-bending poses, for example, are great for rejuvenating your mind and body because they open up the body and energetic heart space. Try Supported bridge (p64) or Supported backbend (p66). The fact you'll sleep better after doing Restorative yoga also has knock-on benefits for your energy levels.

Didn't sleep well last night?
Try doing Prone release (p58)
as it will take the edge of your
fatigue and perk you up.



3

IT IMPROVES YOUR BREATHING

In day-to-day life, we tend to restrict or hold our breath when things get busy or stressful. This can reduce oxygen flow around the body, leading to muscle tension, fatigue and headaches among other problems. The relaxation and restful breathwork associated with Restorative yoga helps improve your awareness of how you breathe and soon improves your breathing in everyday life, boosting your health and helping you stay calm and centred.

Yogic breathing techniques have even been used successfully as a complementary treatment for people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One study at Stanford University in California found that a group of US ex-servicemen who learned rhythmic, controlled breathing saw their PTSD symptoms, including anxiety, dramatically fall. Try the Breath awareness exercise (p33) plus poses designed to improve your breathing by opening up your chest and ribcage, such as Heart pose with a chair (p88) and Supported side bend (p60).

4

IT HELPS YOU SLEEP

According to research by the National Sleep Foundation, people with insomnia who start doing yoga as part of their daily routine sleep longer, fall asleep faster and tend to wake up less during the night. By relaxing your muscles, deepening your breath and calming your heart rate, Restorative yoga can help prepare your body for sleep.

Some poses are particularly useful. In Legs up the wall pose (p84), having your legs above your head allows your nervous system to calm down. Restorative child's pose (p80) draws your focus inwards, calming your nervous system and quieting the mental chatter that can keep you awake. Reclining bound angle pose (p68) also calms your nervous system and lowers your blood pressure while stretching out tight hips and shoulders for a more restful night's slumber.

5

IT MAKES YOU MINDFUL

If you've tried to meditate in the past but always failed, Restorative yoga could be a good place to start. By drawing your attention inwards and bringing your focus to your breath and the physical sensations that arise, it's a natural form of mindfulness. With your body fully supported by props, it's easier let yourself be in the moment. Safe in the knowledge that you'll be resting for some while in the pose without effort, your mind can disengage from the stresses and distractions of outside world. Gradually, you'll find you become more mindful in daily life, appreciating the now and worrying less about the past or future. Restorative yoga can also make you more compassionate.

'Because our body and mind become softer, this means we can also create the space to get in touch with our natural qualities of compassion and understanding of others and self,' says Esther Ekhart. To explore the benefits further, try the mindfulness and meditation exercises in this book (p120).

6

IT MAKES YOU FLEXIBLE

While Restorative yoga doesn't involve the active stretching and strengthening moves you do in regular yoga, it still stretches and conditions your body. Once you're settled in the pose, the support of the props allows your body to release tension and stretch without effort or exertion. By adjusting the props you can increase or decrease the intensity of the stretch.

'The beauty of Restorative yoga is that we don't have to contract our muscles,' says Ekhart. 'Though we often believe we have to "work" to increase our flexibility, we can, in fact, achieve more opening by softening and relaxing than by forcing our way through a strong, dynamic asana practice.'

This also means there's less chance of strain or injury while you practise. To stretch your lower back and hamstrings, try Supported head-to-knee pose (p72). To open your hips, try Supported pigeon (p78) and to stretch your sides, try Supported gate pose (p62).





7

IT HELPS YOU LOSE WEIGHT

Numerous studies show that yoga can help you lose weight and keep it off. And it's not just the more active types of yoga that can help. Research shows that Restorative yoga and relaxation poses such as Relaxation pose (p54) can aid weight loss. One study at the National Institutes of Health in the US compared two groups of people – one group performed a stretch routine while the other did a Restorative yoga routine. Both groups lost weight, but the group that did Restorative yoga lost almost twice as much weight in the first six months and kept the weight off better.

They also lost significantly more subcutaneous fat (stored underneath the skin) than the group doing stretching. It's thought that this is because Restorative yoga triggers the body's parasympathetic system, reducing levels of the stress hormone cortisol which is known to encourage fat storage, particularly around the abdomen. Restorative yoga may also help you eat more healthily because it makes you more mindful. Research shows that people who practise yoga tend to have better appetite control, fewer cravings and eat more mindfully. Restorative yoga can also improve your digestion by triggering the rest/digest response.

Restorative twist (p70)
massages your inner
organs, aiding digestion.



Lift depression

Restorative yoga not only helps ease physical conditions, it can heal your mind, too. Whether you are facing challenging changes in your life, dealing with grief or a break up or struggling with low mood or depression, Restorative poses can provide soothing support. Physiologically, they lower the stress and anxiety that can be associated with depression. But the poses also provide nurturing and comfort, plus time for inward reflection and mindful awareness, which are both key factors for creating happiness and helping turn negative thought patterns around. Try Relaxation pose (p54) and Bolster hugging pose (p82).

HEAL YOUR BODY

Research shows that Restorative yoga can actively improve and even treat a variety of health conditions while improving your healing capacity. By easing tension, deepening your breath and triggering your PNS. Studies have found it lowers blood pressure and reduces the chance of heart disease, eases asthma, PMS and digestive issues, helps manage back pain, balances hormones, improves mental wellbeing and more. By massaging your vital organs, yoga also boosts your body's repair systems so your entire hormonal system is more balanced.

TRY THESE SOLUTIONS:
COMMON COLD: Supported bridge (p64) - this gentle backbend helps open your chest and increase lung elasticity. By taking your head lower than your chest, it also helps drain your lungs.

ASTHMA: Heart pose with chair (p88) - safely stretching your upper body, this pose helps expand your chest and ribs, so opening your lungs.

PMS: Restorative twist (p70) - this pose helps create space in your abdomen, eases back pain and calms anxiety.

PERIOD PAIN: Wide-angle seated forward bend (p74) - by relieving congestion in the uterus, this pose reduces period cramps.

8

IT EASES BACK PAIN

All forms of yoga can help improve back pain - if they're performed carefully and correctly. But Restorative yoga is particularly therapeutic, even for conditions such as sciatica and scoliosis, and can be tailored to your particular back condition. One year-long study, funded by Arthritis Research UK (now Versus Arthritis) and published in *The Spine Journal*, showed a 12-week yoga programme by the organisation Yoga for Healthy Lower Backs helped participants control pain and take fewer sick days.

Tension and tightness in the muscles, tendons and ligaments that support your spine are among the main causes of back pain. Yogic warm-up poses such as Cat/Cow (p50) can help stretch and mobilise your spine. Hip-opening poses such as Reclining bound angle (p68) help ease tight hips which also contribute to back pain. Poses that stretch your hamstrings can also help by improving mobility in your pelvis, reducing stress in your lower back. Try Supported wide-legged forward fold (p76). To be extra safe, it's worth getting expert help and trying a one-on-one yoga therapy session or a group class for backcare. And it's not just the poses that can help improve back pain. The breathwork and meditation that play a key part in Restorative yoga also help you effectively manage and let go of pain. Try the Body Scan exercise (p120).

Restorative Child's pose (p80) lengthens and stretches out your spine while encouraging your mind and body to relax and recuperate.





All props from a selection
at Yogamatters
(yogamatters.com)



GET *started*

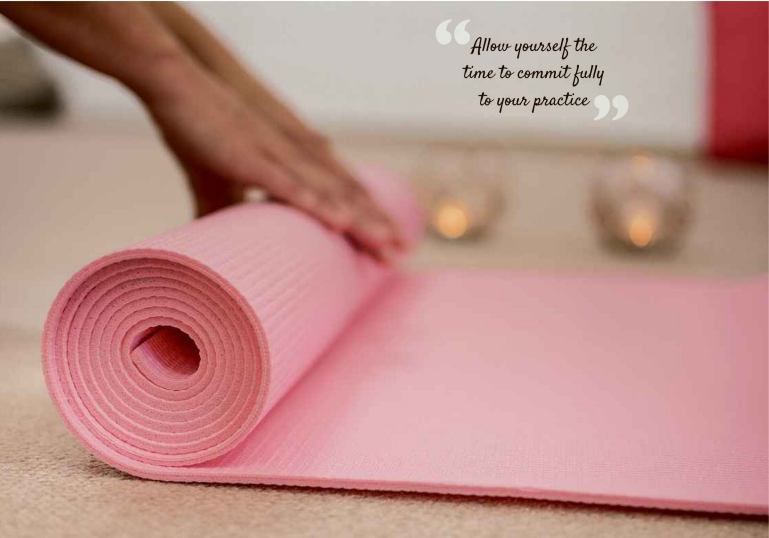
Like all forms of yoga, the beauty of Restorative yoga is that you can fit it into your daily life, practising at home whenever you need and tailoring your sessions to suit your goals. In this section, you'll find all the expert advice you need to set up a safe, effective home yoga practice.

Learn which yoga props you'll need – and how to use them – and pick up top tips from the pros on how to get more from your practice.

Read these pages first before you try the moves, to ensure you enjoy your sessions to the max.

CREATE A YOGA SPACE

Enhance your practice by taking time to set the scene for relaxation. Just follow these tips from the experts at **Yogamatters** (yogamatters.com)



“Allow yourself the
time to commit fully
to your practice”

The joy of yoga is that you can practise it anytime, anywhere. But if you're going to make

Restorative yoga a regular part of your routine, it's worth finding a dedicated space to practise. Here, you can create a calming environment where you can keep your props and other essentials. It could even become a space where you spend time relaxing, reading or writing your journal. Here are some easy ideas to get you started.

SET A TIME AND A PLACE

Often with Restorative yoga, we practise in the evening after a busy day when we need to unwind. Whatever time works for you, make sure you have a dedicated space. It doesn't need to be big at all, just enough room to allow you to lie down comfortably. You can even practise Restorative yoga on a bed or sofa if you have limited floor space.

REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

Allow yourself the time to commit fully to your practice. Let others know you'll be practising so that you're not interrupted. Turn off your phone or keep it in a different room if you find it distracting.

GET COMFY

Create a relaxing space by using candles, playing gentle music, turning down the lights and wearing comfortable clothes. You don't need any special clothing, just something that allows you to relax and stretch.

BE PREPARED

Have some props handy to help you get the most out of your practice, such as a blanket, bolster, block or brick and strap (p34). Don't worry if you don't own any. You can use items you find in the house such as a cushion, rolled towels and a thick book.

Calming kit



Yogamatters Singing Bowl Large
(£36; yogamatters.com)

Enrich your meditation practice with healing vibrations. Strike the bowl with the bamboo stick and move it round the outer rim.



Mio Liquid Yoga Space Spray,
(£21 for 130ml; mioskincare.co.uk)

Evoke calm by spritzing this soothing blend of lavender and mandarin essential oils plus cannabis seed oil and manganese mineral extract.



SpritzWellness London Yoga Mat Spray - Relax

(£12 for 50ml; spritzwellness.com)
Keep your mat smelling sweet by spritzing it with this soothing blend of lavender and tea tree oils.



SpritzWellness Liberty Print Aromatherapy Eye Pillow
(£25; yogamatters.com)

Drift away during poses with this ultra-fine cotton, lavender- and chamomile-scented eye pillow.

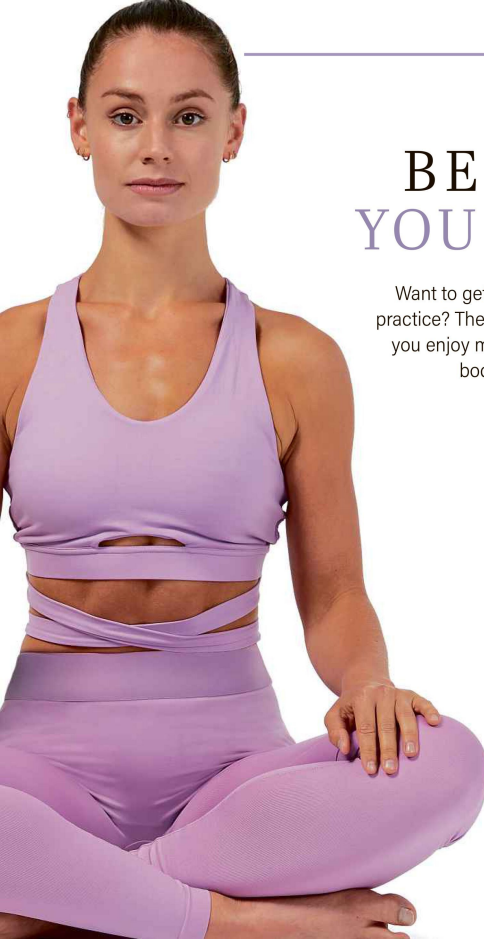


Asquith Scarf
(£20.70; asquithlondon.com)
Keep cosy in this soft bamboo fabric shawl that doubles as a Savasana blanket.



Manduka Energising Gingergrass Mat Wash

(£14 for 227ml; eumanduka.com)
Clean and refresh your mat, post practice, with a zingy blend of citrus, ginger and lavender essential oils.



BEFORE YOU START

Want to get the most from your practice? These expert tips will help you enjoy maximum benefits for body and mind

1 As with all yoga, you'll see immediate benefits as soon as you begin practising Restorative poses. However, for long-term benefits, it's best to practise regularly. This will also allow you time to get familiar with the practice and recognise how your body responds to the poses and what it needs to release tension.

2 If you have any health concerns or medical issues, check with your health practitioner that it's safe for you to start practising. If you have a specific health condition such as asthma or a back injury, consider joining a specialist group class or one-to-one session to help you learn the basics safely before practising at home.

3 If it's chilly, make sure you have a blanket to hand and maybe wear socks. You'll be resting in some of the poses for up to 10 or 20 minutes, during which time your body temperature will fall.

If you're doing a class, the teacher will sometimes cocoon you with blankets for warmth and comfort so keep some nearby to do the same.

4 Consider doing a warm-up before you start your practice (p46). Gentle mobility moves give your body and mind the chance to shed off any restlessness so it's easier to settle into stillness. A warm-up also prepares your muscles to release, encourages deeper breathing and improves your body awareness so you can notice any areas of tension.

6 Before you start your practice, check in with how you're feeling. What do your body and mind need from the session? During your first pose, allow your breath to settle, then begin to lengthen your out-breath to stimulate your body's relaxation response. Let your thoughts drift away and feel your heart rate slow down.

7 Be patient when you practise. Restorative poses can be held anywhere from several breaths to 20 minutes or longer. This is the amount of time needed to let your brain know it's safe to switch off its stress response and turn on its relaxation response. The more you practise, the easier you'll find it to stay longer in each pose and the quicker you'll be able to settle into deep relaxation.

5 Remember that Restorative yoga is all about what works for you – if you're practising with a group of people or following an online class, don't feel you have to do a pose that doesn't feel good for your body, or worry if you don't stretch as easily. We're all built in different ways so just adjust the pose to suit you or take a break in a relaxing posture of your choice.

8 Experiment with props to tailor each pose to the shape of your body. For instance, you may find you need an extra bolster to support your back or that your feet are happier when cushioned with a blanket on the floor. Adjust your position until you feel comfortable.

9 Don't rush between poses. We're so used to speeding from one thing to the next but, in Restorative yoga, it's important to slow things down. Take your time moving from one pose to another. Become aware of your whole body, noticing how each part moves and settles.

10 If you notice your mind wandering during a pose, gently bring it back to your breath. Notice where and how you hold tension, then use your breath as a tool to release it. Breathe into the area of tension and then, as you breathe out, let it release.

11 Try introducing Restorative yoga into your life in a gradual way. You could add a couple of Restorative poses to the end of your yoga practice. Or you could end your day with a sleep-inducing pose such as Legs up the wall (p84). Perhaps you could try devoting one yoga session a week to Restorative yoga.

As your body releases, you may feel unsettled or emotional. Just tune into your breath and allow any difficult sensations to pass

HOW TO BREATHE

Enhance your Restorative yoga practice by learning
some yogic breathing techniques

Stop what you're doing for a minute and take a moment to focus on your breath. Is it deep and slow or fast and shallow? Perhaps you're even holding your breath? Often, we're only aware of our breath when we're short of it – for instance, when we're exercising, running for a bus or feeling unwell. But, in fact, the way we breathe has a huge impact on our health wellbeing. Just think how good you feel after a brisk walk or a trip to the countryside. Those lungfuls of fresh air send fresh oxygen and nutrients around your body, nourishing every cell so you can perform at your best. They also help trigger your body's relaxation response.

Conversely, the tight, shallow breaths we take when we're feeling anxious, busy or distracted, can ramp up the body's stress response, triggering the release of 'fight or flight' hormones such as adrenaline which, in the long term, can leave you feeling burnt out and at greater risk of illness and disease.

YOGIC BREATHING

Good breathing is central to yoga. The breath is the connection between your mind and body. By learning to tune into and control your breath, you'll not only enjoy greater benefits from your practice, you can also improve your health and control the way your mind responds to stressful events. Even if you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious, consciously slowing down your breath sends your mind the message that all is well.

Learning yogic breathing techniques is one of the foundations of all yoga practice. And for Restorative yoga and meditation, the breath plays even more of a central part. Practise the method below and better breathing will soon become second nature during your sessions and also in your daily life. You can also add some tailored yogic breathing exercises (p116) to your sessions to reap even more benefits.



Restorative yoga breathing

> Breathe into your belly, letting it expand on the in-breath and release on the out-breath.

> Keep your upper body relaxed and imagine your breath filling deep into your lungs as you inhale and exhale.

> Follow the breathing instructions you'll find in the step-by-step guide to each pose in this book (p52).

> Let your breath fall into a soothing, relaxed rhythm.

> Aim to make your exhalation longer than your inhalation. Try extending each exhalation by a few seconds.



THE FULL YOGIC BREATH

This simple breathing technique will help you become more aware of your breath and how to breathe for relaxation

- ▶ Lie on your back with your head resting on two folded blankets or a block. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor, hip-distance apart. Lay your arms down by your sides, palms facing upwards, and gently close your eyes.
- ▶ Take a couple of deep breaths in through your nose then exhale through your mouth, releasing any tension as you breathe out. Now let your breath settle and your mind calm down.
- ▶ Bring your attention to your breath and your

natural breathing pattern. Is it fast or slow, shallow or deep? Can you feel your chest lifting or your belly expanding? Take your hands and place one hand on your front lower ribs at the top of your belly. See if you can feel your diaphragm rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale.

- ▶ Take your hands to your ribs. As you inhale, notice if you sense any movement beneath your hands.
- ▶ Finally, slide your one hand up to rest over your breastbone. Notice how your hand moves as you take a few slow, deep breaths.
- ▶ Now begin to direct your breath, breathing into your belly, then your ribs and finally your chest.
- ▶ As you exhale, reverse the process, emptying your breath from your chest, then your ribs and lastly your belly. Continue for a few slow breaths, then gently let your breathing return to normal.

Tip

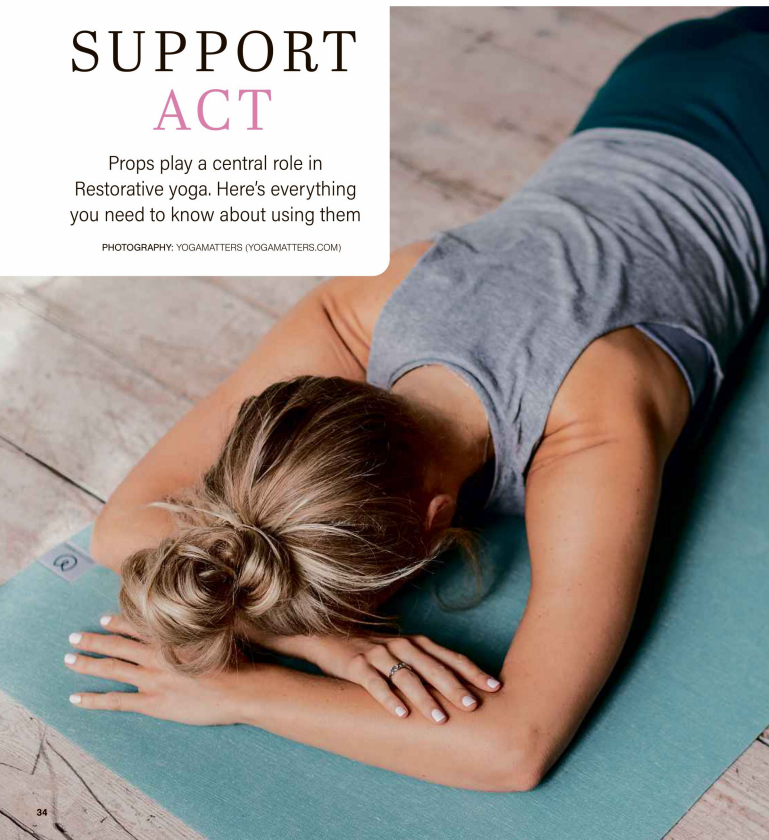
Your diaphragm and lungs are three-dimensional, so let your breath travel to the back and sides of your body as well as the front.



SUPPORT ACT

Props play a central role in Restorative yoga. Here's everything you need to know about using them

PHOTOGRAPHY: YOGAMATTERS (YOGAMATTERS.COM)





If you've ever attended a yoga class, it's likely you'll have come across yoga props. From straps to bricks, these handy tools are often used to aid students' practice. For instance, they can be used as an extension of your limbs if you can't touch the ground in a pose or to help you stretch more deeply if you're not flexible.

In Restorative yoga, props take on a whole new purpose. Central to many of the poses, props such as bolsters, straps and blankets are used to support your body so it can relax and surrender without effort or strain. When your bones and muscles feel supported, they can release more easily. And by increasing your comfort, props allow you to stay longer in beneficial poses. They can hold, stretch, support and nurture.

HEALING POWERS

BKS Iyengar, who popularised the use of props, believed they can help to stimulate our parasympathetic nervous system, triggering the 'rest and digest' responses in the body. 'When the body is lethargic, sluggish and fatigued, practice with props works wonders,' said Iyengar. 'The nervous system relaxes, the brain is calmed and the mind soothed.' Iyengar discovered that yoga poses practised with the help of props helped relieve many common ailments. 'They regulate blood pressure, ease breathlessness and asthma, and remove stiffness in the back, hips, knees and feet, alleviating rheumatism and arthritis,' he said.

HELPING HAND

Props can also be used to help tailor poses to suit your body shape and physical needs. The more your body is supported, the more deeply it can relax and move to a state of balance.

Yoga props can assist your practice in many ways. For instance, a folded blanket can help support your neck when you are in a reclining pose or to keep you warm when you're doing a long relaxation session. A bolster can provide a support for your legs during a reclining pose, or provide a comfortable rest for your head or chest when you're in a seated forward fold. These days, props have come a long way from the wooden stools and bricks used by BKS Iyengar. Foam blocks and bricks, cotton bolsters, colourful straps and woollen blankets are common in most yoga studios. If you're starting a home practice, it's worth investing in a few affordable props. Or alternatively, you can use household items such as pillows and cushions (see box below).

PROP SWAPS

If you can't get hold of props, these everyday items work well:

STRAP: BELT OR SCARF

BOLSTER: TWO FIRM PILLOWS

BRICK: A FEW SMALL HARDCOVER BOOKS

BLOCK: A PACK OF PRINTER PAPER OR
A FEW THINNER BOOKS



Yogamatters Sticky Yoga Mat in Ocean Green (£20; yogamatters.com). This mat comes in a rainbow of colours and is perfect for multiple styles of yoga.

YOGA MAT

A yoga mat protects your body from a hard floor and helps you feel more comfortable in yoga poses

A yoga mat is also a place where, over the course of your practice, you can build a relationship with yourself and get to know your body and deeper self. Your mat is a place of sanctuary where you can dedicate time to restoring yourself, undisturbed from the pressures of everyday life. In Restorative yoga, your mat is often the foundation for further props such as blankets and blocks. But consider investing in a mat that has cushioning for comfort and support. You may want to avoid a grippy yoga mat, though, as it can be handy to slide your mat around in certain poses.

A mat provides a base for other props in poses such as Heart opening pose with chair (p88).



A cushioned mat provides a comfortable rest during seated warm-up poses (p46).



Yogamatters Cork Block
(£11.50; yogamatters.com)

BLOCK

This rectangular cork prop can be used to support your head, chest or lower back in reclining poses

In Gentle supported bridge (p64), for instance, wide flat blocks are perfect for supporting your pelvis. Keep the blocks close by and slide them under you. You can use a block or two to raise your hips in seated poses to help bring your spine into alignment, such as in Easy seated twist (p47). Or, to rest your arms in a pose such as Reclining bound angle pose (p68). Available in foam, wood or cork, it's useful to buy two blocks, so you can stack them when you need more height, or have one under each hand or under both knees or hips.



Yogamatters Cork Brick
(£12; yogamatters.com)

BRICK

Taller and thicker than a block, a yoga brick can be used in many ways

It's ideal for resting your forehead on in a pose such as Child's pose or in Wide-angle seated forward bend (p74). You can also place a brick under a bolster to create a slope or to raise a body part, for instance in Supported wide-legged forward fold (p76). Yoga bricks were traditionally made from wood which can feel quite hard. Nowadays, it's more common for them to be made from lightweight foam or cork, which is kinder on your body.



Yogamatters Chair
with Front Bar (£40;
yogamatters.com)

CHAIR

A folding chair with open back can be a useful prop to help transform more challenging therapeutic poses into Restorative versions

For instance, in Legs up the wall pose with chair (p92), resting your legs on the chair is a more relaxing way to elevate your legs and boost your circulation rather than having to balance against a wall. You can also use a chair for an effortless Chair forward fold (p86) or for seated twists and side bends, rather than sitting on the floor. You can buy specialist metal yoga chairs, designed to take your weight. But you can use any folding chair as long as it is sturdy, weight bearing and has an open back for your feet to pass through.

Use a sturdy chair as a support for Bolster hugging pose (p82).



Sit on a chair for Chair forward fold (p86).





Yogamatters Organic Cotton Blanket (£28; yogamatters.com)

BLANKET

Blankets can be folded in four ways to create different height supports

A cotton yoga blanket can be rolled and used in place of a bolster for support during a lying pose or backbend, such as Supported bridge (p64). You can also roll just the edge of a blanket to provide a rest for your neck or heels for reclining poses or chair poses such as Corpse variation with chair (p90). A firm blanket can also be folded and sat on to straighten your spine during meditation or cross-legged warm-up poses. You can fold a number of blankets to a desired height to create a support for poses such as Restorative child's pose (p80).

It's handy being able to add or subtract layers of blankets to attain the height or support you need. Placed on a body part, such as your chest or legs, a folded blanket can also provide weight to help your muscles relax. You can place a blanket under your yoga mat, to provide more comfort and cushioning. Meanwhile, softer fleece blankets are useful for covering your body during longer-held poses or meditation, to keep you warm when your body temperature starts to fall.

Drape a blanket over you to keep you warm during relaxation.



HOW TO FOLD YOUR BLANKET

Blankets can be folded in four ways to create different height supports. You can fold the blanket in half widthways to create a half-fold blanket, and then fold this in half lengthways to create a quarter-fold blanket. You can fold your quarter-fold blanket in half lengthways to create a long eighth-fold blanket, or fold it in half widthways to create a square eight-fold blanket. You can then create a bolster-like support by rolling up your half-fold blanket. Or for a thicker support, roll up two half-fold blankets together.



Yogamatters Organic
Cotton D-ring Yoga Belt
(£8; yogamatters.com)

BELT

In Restorative yoga poses, belts (also known as straps)
generally act as ‘containers’

Secured around your limbs, belts or straps do the
work of your muscles so you can relax more fully.

In Reclining bound angle (p68), for example,
you can secure a belt around your thighs
to allow you to release your legs to the sides without
engaging your thigh muscles. D-ring yoga belts
are usually around 6ft long and come with
a sturdy buckle so they don't loosen
while you are using them.

A photograph showing two women practicing yoga on a wooden floor. They are lying on their sides on mats, with their heads resting on light blue cylindrical bolsters. The woman in the foreground has curly brown hair and a tattoo on her forearm. The woman in the background has blonde hair. The bolsters have a small logo and a tag.

Yogamatters
Organic Cotton
Small Rectangular
Buckwheat
Bolsters (£28;
yogamatters.com)

“Yoga with props creates a feeling of peace and tranquillity, culminating in renewed strength”

BKS IYENGAR



Yogamatters Organic Cotton Buckwheat Bolster (£40; yogamatters.com)

BOLSTER

Brilliantly supportive for all sorts of Restorative postures, bolsters come in a variety of shapes and sizes

Try resting your chest and forehead on a bolster in Supported wide-legged forward fold (p76).



Larger cylindrical bolsters can be used to ease lower back strain when placed under your knees in Relaxation pose (p54). They can help stretch your body in a pose such as Supported side stretch (p60) or even be used as a source of comfort in a pose such as Bolster hugging pose (p82). Smaller cylindrical bolsters are useful when you need less height or you are using a variety of different-sized props to create support, such as in Restorative child's pose (p80). A rectangular bolster, which is wider and flatter, is useful when you want to support the length of your back.

Open up your chest in a backbend by resting on a firm bolster. Try Supported backbend (p66).





PREPARE *your body*

Can't wait to try some Restorative yoga? Before you do, it's time to warm up your body. Just as you warm up before exercise, it also pays to prepare your body to relax too. If you spend all day sitting at a desk or standing on our feet, your body can become stiff and tense, making it hard to unwind. Doing some simple mobility moves and stretches before your Restorative yoga session can help your body relax more easily and deeply. You can also do these moves at the start or end of the day to help you stay supple and stress-free.

STRETCH AND FLEX

Get more from your restorative yoga sessions
by priming your body to relax

The idea of doing a warm-up before gentle Restorative yoga might seem strange. However, a few minutes of simple mobility movements and stretches will allow your body to relax more deeply once you start practising the postures. Whether you're stiff from sitting at a desk, stressed from a busy day or your mind is racing, taking your body through some easy, rhythmic movements opens up your joints and eases any areas of tension. It boosts

your circulation, increasing blood flow to your muscles to improve flexibility so you feel comfortable in any poses. Practised in tune with your breath, yogic warm-up moves also quieten a busy mind, bringing you into the present moment, ready to be still.

DAILY STRETCH

A few gentle stretches and mobility work for each part of your body, such as Shoulder shrugs (p50) and Spine rolls (p52), plus some breath-based

flows such as Cat/Cow (p54) and Reclining stretch (p55) will leave you feeling relaxed and limber, ready to take your practice deeper. This simple habit can have big rewards for your wellbeing. It's worth practising some of these easy exercises and stretches each day to keep your body supple and more able to deal with life's stresses and strains. Your joints will feel mobile, your limbs flexible and your body and mind will be relaxed and stress free.

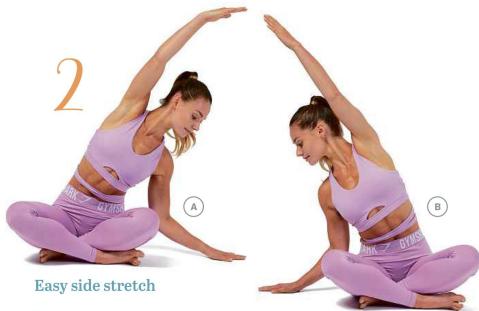
Shoulder shrugs

- ▶ Sit comfortably cross-legged on the floor, arms relaxed with your palms resting on your knees.
- ▶ Inhale and tense your shoulders as close to your ears as you can, keeping the rest of your body still (A).
- ▶ Exhale and let your shoulders fall back down, letting go of any tension (B).
- ▶ Repeat five times.

Benefit: Releases shoulder tension



TRY THESE MOVES
FIRST THING IN
THE MORNING TO
GET YOUR BODY
MOVING OR AT
YOUR DESK WHEN
YOU'RE FEELING
STRESSED.



Easy side stretch

- ▶ Sit in a relaxed cross-legged or kneeling position.
- ▶ Place your left hand on the floor beside you. Inhale and bring your right arm out and up over your head. Exhale then inhale and elongate your right side.
- ▶ Exhale and draw your right hand further to the left, feeling the stretch (A).
- ▶ Take a couple of breaths here.
- ▶ Inhale back to the centre and lower your arm. Repeat on the other side (B).

Benefit: Stretches your side body; deepens your breath

Neck stretch

- ▶ Sit in a comfortable cross-legged or kneeling position.
- ▶ Place your left hand on your left knee, palm down.
- ▶ Take your right hand over your head and rest it on the left side of your head.
- ▶ Exhale and gently press your head towards your right shoulder, feeling a stretch.
- ▶ Hold for a few breaths, then slowly return to the start.
- ▶ Pause and repeat on the other side (B).

Benefit: Relieves neck tension





Spine rolls

4

- ▶ Lie flat on your back and bend your knees into your chest (A), then hold the back of your thighs with your hands. Take a breath and then, on an exhale, start to roll backwards (B) and forwards (C) in a rocking motion, keeping your chin into your chest and your core engaged.
- ▶ Repeat up to 10 times, feeling the motion massaging your spine.

Benefit: Massages your spine

Knees to chest rolls

- ▶ Lie down on your back and bring your knees into your chest (A). Place the palms of your hands on your knees.
- ▶ Slowly start to roll your body slowly to the right (B) and left (C), using your breath and core to control your movement.
- ▶ As your hips warm up, you can make small circles too. Do the sequence several times in each direction.

5



Benefit: Keeps your lower back supple



6



Bridge

- ▶ Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart, your arms by your sides (A).
- ▶ Squeeze your buttocks, engage your core and draw your lower back into the ground.
- ▶ Pushing through your inner feet, push your tailbone upwards and lift your bottom off the floor. Wiggle your shoulder blades together and bring your arms below your body, parallel to each other.
- ▶ Lift your bottom towards the ceiling until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Lift your chin away from your chest and broaden your shoulder blades (B).
- ▶ Hold for a few breaths, then slowly return your pelvis back down to the floor (C).
- ▶ Repeat several times.

Benefit: Mobilises your pelvis and activates your glutes



7



Child's pose stretch

- ▶ Kneel on the floor, knees apart, big toes together and heels wide apart. Sit back onto the soles of your feet. Rest your palms on your thighs.
- ▶ Exhale and walk your hands forwards, lowering your torso between your thighs into Extended child's pose.
- ▶ Take your hands shoulder-width apart, palms facing down. Press your

hands into the floor and slide your shoulder blades down your back.

- ▶ Rest your forehead on the floor. Breathe deeply into the back of your ribs and sink further into the mat (A). Take a few breaths.
- ▶ Inhale then exhale and walk your hands to the left. Breathe into the right side of your body and feel the stretch (B). Take a couple of breaths.

- ▶ Inhale, exhale and lift your head, walking your hands to the right and repeat on this side (C).
- ▶ Close your thighs, and bring your arms back alongside your body to relax down into Child's pose for a few moments.

Benefit: Stretches your back and side body

Cat/Cow

- ▶ Start on all-fours, your knees beneath your hips and your hands beneath your shoulders.
- ▶ Exhale and release your head and tailbone towards the floor, bringing your tailbone under and rounding your back towards the ceiling into Cat (A).
- ▶ Inhale, tilt your tailbone up and release your spine down into a gentle backbend. Draw your shoulders down your back, take your chest forwards and up and look up into Cow (B).
- ▶ Alternate between Cat and Cow, following your breath in a slow, fluid motion. Repeat 5 times.

Benefit: Awakens your spine



Find it hard to fall asleep? Try some of these simple stretches before you go to bed to quieten your mind and relax your body.

Eye of the needle

- ▶ Lie on your back and rest your right ankle on your left thigh.
- ▶ Thread your right hand between your thighs and interlace your fingers behind your left knee (A).
- ▶ Draw your left knee towards your chest and press your right forearm into your right thigh to open your right hip.
- ▶ Take five deep breaths, then repeat on the other side (B).

Benefit: Opens your hips





Reclining stretch

- ▶ Lie on your back with your knees up, feet flat on the floor and arms relaxed by your sides, palms down.
- ▶ Settle your lower back into the ground and gently engage your core (A).
- ▶ Inhale and slowly lift your arms over

your head and all the way down to rest on the floor (B).

- ▶ Pause then on a long exhale, slowly bring your arms back over your head and down to your sides.
- ▶ Repeat several times, following the rhythm of your breath, lowering or

raising your arms when you need to inhale or exhale.

Benefit: Stretches your shoulders and deepens your breath



Easy twist

- ▶ Sit in a relaxed cross-legged or kneeling position and rest the back of your left hand on the outside of your right knee. Place your right hand on the floor behind your left hip.
- ▶ Inhale and sit tall, rooting down through your sitting bones and lifting your spine out of your pelvis.
- ▶ Exhale and rotate your spine to the right, moving from your waist then your upper body.
- ▶ Inhale, lengthen your torso and exhale further into the twist, looking over your left shoulder, if comfortable for your neck (A).
- ▶ Inhale back to centre and repeat on the other side (B).

Benefit: Mobilises your spine



THE *poses*

Ready to relax? It's time to try some Restorative yoga. In the following pages, you'll find a collection of tried-and-tested, therapeutic poses.

Whether you want to soothe aching muscles or beat backache, ease insomnia or recharge your batteries, you'll find a solution for your needs. Each pose comes with a list of props and step-by-step instructions. Read through the details first and then, to experience the benefits, just follow the steps and enjoy. Once you're familiar with the poses, you can dip in and out, or try the tailored sequences in the next chapter.

RELAXATION POSE

Savasana with bolster

Key to all yoga, Relaxation pose is profoundly restful, aiding recovery after strenuous practice and preparing you for meditation. Also called Corpse pose, it helps you withdraw from the outside world so your body and mind become one. Lying still can be surprisingly challenging so adding support and cushioning makes it more comfortable.

Tip

*Try covering yourself
with a blanket to
deepen your relaxation
and stay warm.*

Relax your shoulders
down to create a sense
of spaciousness in your
chest and throat.



PREPARE

► Place a bolster across your mat about half way down. Beyond it, place a folded blanket with rolled edge to create an ankle support. Fold another blanket and place it at the head of your mat.



PROPS

Two blankets
(One more optional)

One bolster

THE POSE

- Begin by sitting next to the bolster. Draw your knees over the bolster and rest your ankles on the blanket roll.
- Slowly lie back, resting your head on the folded blanket.
- Rest your arms down by your sides, palms facing downwards.
- Bring your chin slightly lower than your forehead, to still your mind.
- Breathing softly and deeply into your belly, consciously let go of any tension as you exhale. Soften your lower jaw, lengthen the back of your neck and let go of any tension in your face. Let your eyelids go heavy and feel your eyes sinking into their sockets.

- Let your mind become still and feel your body sinking into the floor.
- Rest in the pose for up to 20 minutes.

TO FINISH

- When you're ready to come out of the pose, draw your knees to your chest, roll to one side and press through your hands to come up to sitting.
- Rest in sitting for a few moments.

Benefits

- > RELAXES YOUR BODY
- > IMPROVES YOUR POSTURE
- > REDUCES STRESS
- > RELIEVES LOWER BACK PAIN
- > CREATES A FEELING OF COMFORT



Adjust the thickness of the blanket to ensure your heels are comfortable

IF YOU ARE PREGNANT

RAISE YOUR HEAD
AND CHEST ON A
BOLSTER OR PILLOW.

MOUNTAIN BROOK POSE

Supported salamba matsyasana

This restorative pose gets its name from the way your body flows over the props, just like water flowing down a brook. The props support the curves of your body, allowing you to relax fully while your spine and neck extend. The pose will leave you feeling relaxed but refreshed.

Tip

Keep an extra blanket to hand to cover yourself if you get chilly while in the pose.

Let your shoulders and arms sink into the space between the two blankets.

Let your breath expand into your chest and rib cage.



PREPARE

▶ Fold one blanket into a rectangular strip, another into a rectangle with rolled edge to create a neck support and the third with rolled edge to create an ankle support.

▶ Place a bolster across your mat about half way down. Place the rolled blankets at the each end and the strip near the top.



PROPS

Three blankets
(One more optional)

One bolster or pillow



THE POSE

▶ Lie down on your back with the bolster under your knees, the folded rectangle blanket under your back, one rolled blanket supporting your neck and the other to create an ankle support.

▶ Make any adjustments you need, decreasing or increasing the height of the blankets, to ensure that your neck is fully supported, your head is tilting gently back, your neck is extended and relaxed and your chest is open, but not strained.

▶ Extend your arms to the sides, palms facing upwards and gently close your eyes. Feel an opening sensation across your shoulder girdle.

▶ Breathe evenly and on each exhale,

allow any tension to melt away. Relax your jaw, shoulders, belly, hips and legs, letting your body sink into the mat.

▶ Rest in the pose for up to 10 minutes.

TO FINISH

▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, gently stretch your body and roll onto one side, before coming up to sitting.

▶ Sit quietly for a few moments.

Benefits

> OPENS YOUR SHOULDERS,
CHEST AND THROAT

> DEEPENS YOUR
BREATHING

> REDUCES FATIGUE

> LIFTS YOUR MOOD

IF YOU HAVE BACK
PROBLEMS,
ADJUST THE
THICKNESS OF THE
NECK AND BACK
BLANKETS TO
CREATE THE
RIGHT SUPPORT.

PRONE RELEASE

Prone savasana

Prone poses (lying on your stomach) are particularly restorative, calming your mind and stilling your body. In this prone release pose, the bolsters fully support your body, allowing your muscles to release totally. It's often performed at the end of practice and is also ideal when you're feeling really tired.

Tip

If you're feeling exhausted, try this pose at the end of the day instead of Savasana.

Relax the front of your body and breathe into your back.



PREPARE

- ▶ Place two bolsters in an upside down T-shape on the floor in front of you.
- ▶ Fold a blanket into a rectangle and drape it over the bolsters. Thinly roll a second blanket and keep it to hand.



PROPS

Two bolsters or pillows of the same height

Two blankets

THE POSE

- ▶ Begin by kneeling to face the bolsters.
- ▶ Once you're settled, gently lower your body down onto them.
- ▶ Let your pubic bone and everything above it rest on the bolsters.
- ▶ Let your thighs hang off the bolster onto the floor. If you find your feet pressing into the floor, place the thinly rolled blanket beneath the front of your ankles.
- ▶ Allow your arms to hang comfortably either side of the vertical bolsters with your forearms resting flat on the floor. If you are too high or low to do this, adjust the thickness of the blanket.
- ▶ Rest your head to one side and gently close your eyes.
- ▶ Let yourself relax, feeling your back broadening and your legs releasing.

- ▶ After five minutes, turn your head to the other side and rest for another five minutes.

TO FINISH

- ▶ When you're ready to come out, turn your forehead to rest on the bolster for one to two breaths. Then slowly lift your body back up to sitting.
- ▶ Sit quietly for a few minutes to absorb the effects.

Benefits

- > EASES EXHAUSTION
- > RELEASES BACK TENSION
- > MASSES YOUR INNER ORGANS
- > QUIETENS YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Allow the front of your feet to relax.



AVOID
THIS POSE

IF YOU'RE
PREGNANT,
BREASTFEEDING
OR RECENTLY
HAD BREAST
SURGERY.

SUPPORTED SIDE STRETCH

Thanks to deskbound jobs and digital lifestyles, our body can become stiff and our breathing shallow. This simple side stretch helps open up your side body, deepening your breath and relieving any back and neck tension. It's also said to energise your body while resting your mind.

Tip

*Use this pose as a transition between
Prone release and
Supported backbend.*

Relax your jaw
and shoulders.



PREPARE

▶ Place two bolsters on your mat in an upside-down T-shape.

▶ Fold a blanket and place it along the centre of the bolsters for extra support.

**PROPS**

Two bolsters or firm pillows

One blanket
(One more optional)

**THE POSE**

▶ Begin by sitting sideways to the bolsters with your legs in front you, right thigh next to the lower bolster.

▶ Slowly ease yourself down so that your right side rests on the lower bolster and your right arm lies along the top blanket.

▶ Bend your knees, resting your right ankle on your mat and rest your left leg on your right.

▶ Gently lie your head on your arm and close your eyes.

▶ Breathe evenly, feeling the gentle stretch along your right side. On each exhale, let your body sink further into the stretch.

▶ Rest in the pose for up to several minutes. Then slowly change sides and rest for another several minutes.

TO FINISH

▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, press your hand into the bolster and gently come back up to sitting.

▶ Rest here for a few moments.

Benefits

- > OPENS YOUR SIDE BODY AND LUNGS
- > IMPROVES YOUR BREATHING
- > RELEASES UPPER-BACK TENSION
- > RELAXES YOUR MIND AND BODY

If your feet are uncomfortable, rest them on a blanket.

**AVOID THIS POSE**

IF YOU HAVE
SHOULDER INJURIES,
ARE PREGNANT
OR MENSTRUATING.

SUPPORTED GATE POSE

Supported salamba parighasana

This supported side bend takes the stretch a little deeper. It feels great after a day hunched over a desk and mobilises your spine for more challenging poses such as Supported Backbend or Supported Bridge. The props remove all effort, leaving you feeling rested and refreshed.

Tip

Use this pose as a transition between Prone release and Supported Backbend.

Your shoulder and arm should be off the bolster.



PREPARE

▶ Place two bolsters or firm pillows on the floor in front of you in an upside-down T-shape. Leave a gap between them wide enough to fit your arm and shoulder.



PROPS

Two bolsters or firm pillows of similar height



THE POSE

- ▶ Begin by sitting sideways to the bolsters with your legs in front of you, right thigh next to the lower bolster.
- ▶ Slowly ease yourself down so that your right side rests on the lower bolster and your armpit is just off it with your shoulder nestled into the space between the two bolsters.
- ▶ Let your legs come to 90 degrees, as if you're sitting in a chair.
- ▶ Gently raise your left arm up and over your head to rest on the top bolster, feeling the gentle stretch.
- ▶ Rest here for up to several minutes. Then slowly change sides and rest for another several minutes.

TO FINISH

- ▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, roll onto your back (with your shoulder still in the gap) for a couple of breaths, to balance out your sides. Then slowly roll to one side to sit back up.
- ▶ Rest here for a few moments.

Benefits

- > IMPROVES YOUR BREATHING
- > RELEASES UPPER-BACK TENSION
- > OPENS YOUR SIDE BODY AND LUNGS
- > MAY BE HELPFUL FOR SCOLIOSIS

Rest your legs at 90 degrees to relax your lower back.



AVOID THIS POSE

IF YOU HAVE
SHOULDER INJURIES,
ARE PREGNANT
OR MENSTRUATING.



SUPPORTED BRIDGE

Supported setu bandha

Bridge is known as something of a cure-all pose, energising and rejuvenating your body and mind while stretching and strengthening your muscles. If you slide a support under your hips it becomes a relaxing, restorative pose allowing your spine and chest to safely stretch while fully held.



PROPS

One blanket



Breathe deeply
and fully.

Consciously relax
your hips and
pelvis into
the blanket.

PREPARE

- ▶ Fold a blanket and keep it to hand.

THE POSE

- ▶ Lie back on your mat with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart and parallel.
- ▶ Slide the folded blanket underneath your lower back and buttocks so your hips are off the floor.
- ▶ Relax your arms down by your sides, palms facing downwards. Extend the back of your neck and relax your shoulders down.
- ▶ Stay in the pose for up to a few minutes, breathing deeply into your belly. On each exhale, let your body sink further into the floor.

TO FINISH

- ▶ To release, exhale roll gently to one side. Rest for a moment, then press your hands down and push back up to sitting.
- ▶ Rest here for a few moments.

Benefits

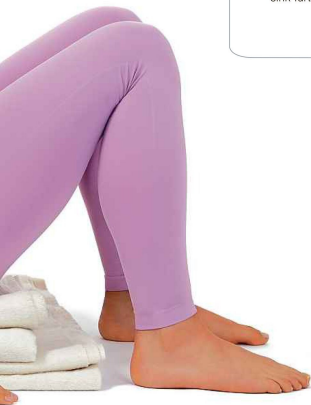
- > STRETCHES YOUR BACK, CHEST AND HIPS
- > CALMS YOUR MIND
- > RESTS YOUR HEART
- > AIDS YOUR DIGESTION

Tip

This pose is perfect if you spend time hunched over a computer.

AVOID THIS POSE

IF YOU HAVE NECK OR KNEE PROBLEMS, OR ARE MENSTRUATING.



SUPPORTED BACKBEND

Supported setu bandha variation

Backbend poses are a powerful way to improve your posture, stretch your spine and reduce anxiety. They can help reduce back and neck pain and deepen your breathing. By supporting your back with a bolster, you can experience all the benefits of a backbend free from physical strain or risk of injury.



PROPS

One bolster or pillow

Two blankets

Let your hips
go heavy and
consciously let go.



PREPARE

▶ Place a bolster or pillow across the middle of your mat. Fold two blankets and place them above and below the bolster.



THE POSE

- ▶ Begin by sitting next to the bolster with your legs in front of you.
- ▶ Gently lower yourself down to lie over the bolster. Bend your knees and rest your feet flat on the floor.
- ▶ Carefully adjust yourself so your lower back and lumbar spine are supported on the bolster and your buttocks hang off it.
- ▶ Take your arms out to the sides at shoulder height, and let them rest on the floor.
- ▶ Gently close your eyes and rest here

for five to 10 minutes, feeling your body gently opening and releasing along the front.

TO FINISH

- ▶ To come out of the pose, gently bring your arms in and roll to one side.
- ▶ Rest for a couple of breaths and then slowly come back to sitting.

Benefits

- > RELEASES UPPER BACK TENSION
- > EASES NECK AND SHOULDER TENSION
- > OPENS YOUR CHEST
- > REGULATES PERIODS

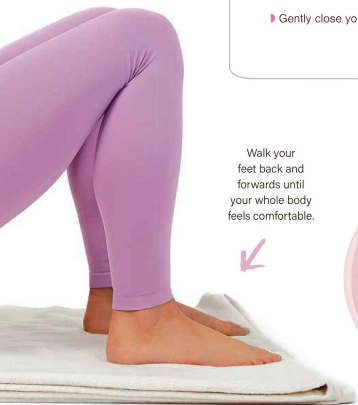
Walk your feet back and forwards until your whole body feels comfortable.



Tip

This pose is the perfect antidote to sitting at a desk.

AVOID THIS POSE
IF YOU ARE
PREGNANT OR
MENSTRUATING.



RECLINING BOUND ANGLE POSE

Supta baddha konasana

Bound angle pose is a great way to open your hips and stretch your inner thighs. Add props to support and hold your body and it becomes a powerful restorative cure, triggering the 'rest and digest' response to calm stress and allow you to let go totally, leaving you feeling rested and revitalised.

Tip

If your lower back feels uncomfortable, tuck a small folded blanket under it to lessen the curve.

Keep your neck long and relaxed.

Nestle your lower back into the end of the bolster.



PREPARE

- ▶ Place a bolster crosswise on the floor at the top of your mat and place another vertically on top of it.
- ▶ Place a third bolster across the bottom end of your mat and place a folded blanket in front of it, to act as a foot support.
- ▶ Place two small folded blankets diagonally on either side of the top bolster, to act as arm rests.



PROPS

Three bolsters or firm pillows

Three blankets
(One more optional)



THE POSE

- ▶ Sit cross-legged with your buttocks against the bottom edge of the top bolster, then draw it towards you so it nestles into your sacrum.
- ▶ Bend your legs and drape them over the bottom bolster, so the back of your knees rest on the bolster and your feet rest on the blanket.
- ▶ Bring the soles of your feet together and let your knees fall out to the sides, supported by the bolster.
- ▶ Rest your hands on the floor and slowly lower your back onto the bolster, adjusting your position so your head and neck are comfortable.
- ▶ Place your arms out to the sides on the folded blankets, palms up.
- ▶ Make any minor adjustments you need, so there is no strain anywhere in your body, adding or removing blankets as necessary.

- ▶ Gently close your eyes, connect to your breath and surrender your weight to the bolsters.

- ▶ Rest here for up to 10 minutes.

TO FINISH

- ▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, gently bring your knees together and roll your body over to the right, so your back comes off the bolster. Pause, then gently push back up to sitting.
- ▶ Rest here for a few moments.

Benefits

- > CALMS YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM
- > REGULATES YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE
- > OPENS YOUR HIPS AND CHEST
- > IMPROVES YOUR BREATHING

{ AVOID THIS POSE IF YOU HAVE KNEE INJURY OR LOWER BACK PROBLEMS. }

RESTORATIVE TWIST

Matsyendrasana variation

Twist poses offer a host of benefits for your body and mind. The rotation not only keeps your spine mobile and strong, it also massages your internal organs to aid detoxification and boost circulation. This supported supine variation allows you to twist safely while also resting your brain.

Tip
For a deeper stretch
turn your head to rest
in the opposite
direction to
your legs.

Draw your
shoulder
blades down
your back.

Ensure your elbows
are supported to
allow your shoulders
to relax.



PREPARE

▶ Place two bolsters or firm pillows in an upside-down T-shape on your mat in front of you. Place a couple of folded blankets along the centre, to provide extra cushioning.



PROPS

Two bolsters or firm pillows

Two blankets

THE POSE

▶ Sit sideways to the horizontal bolster with your right hip against the long end.

▶ Turn to look at the vertical bolster and place your hands on either side of it.

▶ Take a moment to settle and then exhale and come forwards onto the bolsters, placing your arms either side with your elbows and forearms on the floor and palms facing downwards.

▶ Let your upper back and shoulders spread and release.

▶ Bend your knees and rest your left leg on your right one.

▶ Turn your head to rest on your right cheek and gently close your eyes.

▶ Breathe gently into your back and side ribs, releasing deeper into the twist on every exhale.

▶ Rest in the pose for a up to a few minutes. Then turn and repeat on the other side.

TO FINISH

▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, press through your hands and slowly come back up.

▶ Move the bolsters to one side and rest in a comfortable seated position for a few breaths.

Benefits

- > RELIEVES BACK TENSION
- > CALMS YOUR BREATHING
- > MASSAGES YOUR INNER ORGANS
- > AIDS DETOXIFICATION

AVOID THIS POSE

IF YOU ARE PREGNANT,
OR HAVE RECENTLY
HAD SPINAL OR
ABDOMINAL SURGERY.



SUPPORTED HEAD-TO-KNEE POSE

Supported janu sirsansana

Head-to-knee pose is a deeply restful pose that soothes both body and mind. Here, props are used to rest your head and support you in the forward fold if you have a tight back or hamstrings. Iyengar yoga experts say this pose quietens the heart, easing insomnia.

PREPARE

▶ Place a bolster or firm pillow next to you on the mat.

▶ Keep a blanket and second smaller bolster or pillow to hand.



THE POSE

▶ Sit with your legs straight, feet together and ankles flexed, toes pointing to the ceiling. Fold your right leg in so your right heel touches your pubic bone and the sole rests on your inner thigh. Draw your left hip back and your right knee forwards to square your hips.

▶ Take a bolster or pillow and place it lengthwise in front of you, nestling it into your right foot and pelvis.

▶ Place your hands either side of your left thigh and the bolster. Flex your left ankle, spread your left toes and reach through the ball of your foot.

▶ Inhale, engaging your core and rooting through your fingertips and sitting bones to lengthen your torso.

▶ As you exhale, lead with the crown of your head to fold forwards from your groin, taking your chest over the bolster. Keep your spine long and shoulder blades down.

▶ If comfortable, rest your forehead on

the bolster. For more support, add a second smaller bolster, or folded blanket, crossways on top of the bolster.

▶ Breathe evenly and deeply for up to five minutes.

TO FINISH

▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, exhale and return to sitting.

▶ Repeat on the other side.

Variation

▶ If you struggle to fold forwards, place the bolster vertically inside your left knee. Place your hands either side of its base and gently come forwards to rest your head on the top of the bolster.



PROPS

One bolster or firm pillow

(One blanket and one bolster or pillow optional)

Benefits

> REDUCES ANXIETY

> IMPROVES YOUR DIGESTION

> RELIEVES INSOMNIA

> STRETCHES YOUR SPINE AND HAMSTRINGS

Tip

Don't force yourself forwards. Gently extend forwards from your groin.

VARIATION



Relax your shoulders down away from your ears.



For extra support, add a folded blanket under your bottom.



{ AVOID THIS POSE IF YOU HAVE ASTHMA OR SUFFER FROM MIGRAINES. }

WIDE-ANGLE SEATED FORWARD BEND

Upavistha konasana

The classic seated forward bend can be challenging if you have tight hamstrings. If you use props to support you and your breath to lead you, they can help you surrender into the pose, allowing your body to release and rest.

PREPARE

▶ Place a couple of bolsters or firm pillows, plus a folded blanket next to you on the mat.



PROPS

Two bolsters or firm pillows

One blanket

(One towel optional)

THE POSE

▶ Sit on the floor and take your legs wide with your kneecaps facing the ceiling.

▶ Use your hands to take the flesh of your buttocks backwards, so you can rest on the front of your sitting bones. If you find it a strain to sit like this, tuck a folded blanket under your buttocks.

▶ Place a bolster or pillow horizontally between your legs. Take another bolster and rest it vertically on the middle of the first bolster, nestling the base into your groin area.

▶ Inhale and lengthen your spine.

▶ Exhale, wrap your hands around the vertical bolster and fold forwards until the front of your torso is resting on it. Turn your head to the right and rest

your left cheek on the bolster.

▶ On each exhale, feel your body releasing into the bolster and a gentle stretch in your hamstrings.

▶ Stay in the pose for up to five minutes, breathing slowly and evenly.

TO FINISH

▶ To come out, inhale as you walk your hands back to bring you up to sitting.

Benefits

> DEEPLY RELAXING

> CALMS YOUR BRAIN

> EASES YOUR HIP JOINTS

> RELIEVES SCIATICA

Tip

Never force yourself into a forward bend. Ease gently forwards on each exhale.

AVOID
THIS POSE
IF YOU ARE
MENSTRUATING
OR HAVE
ASTHMA.

Keep your neck long and relaxed.



If you feel strain behind your knees, place a folded towel underneath them.

SUPPORTED WIDE-LEGGED FORWARD FOLD

Supported prasarita paddottanasana

Adding a bolster to this simple forward bend helps you achieve the pose without any strain. An inversion pose, it rests your body and nervous system while stretching your hamstrings. Iyengar yoga experts say it energises the heart and lungs. Try it after a challenging yoga sequence.

PREPARE

▶ Place a bolster lengthwise in front of you.



PROPS

One bolster or firm pillow

(One blanket optional)

THE POSE

▶ Step your feet wide with the inner edges parallel, toes spread and arches lifted. Root the outer edges of your feet into the mat.

▶ Rest your hands on your hips and, on an inhale, lengthen your spine. As you exhale, fold forwards from your hips with a flat back and take your spine horizontal to the floor.

▶ Now place your hands on the floor beneath your shoulders, then continue lengthening your spine as you inhale.

▶ Exhale and fold further, walking your hands forwards, until your forehead rests on the bolster. If your head doesn't reach the bolster, place a folded blanket on top of it to create more height.

▶ Engage your thighs and draw your kneecaps up. Press your hands into the mat and draw your shoulders away from your ears.

▶ Stay in the pose, breathing deeply and evenly for up to a minute.

TO FINISH

▶ Walk your hands back under your shoulders and inhale to come back up.

Benefits

> BALANCES YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

> REDUCES FATIGUE

> STRENGTHENS YOUR LEGS AND FEET

> EASES HEADACHES



SUPPORTED PIGEON

Supported *eka pada rajakapotasana*

If you're sitting at a desk all day your hip flexor and rotator muscles can become tight and contracted. Pigeon pose provides a deep stretch for these muscles (including the piriformis and psoas muscles) improving hip rotation. It can be a challenging pose so this supported version is a great place to start.

Tip

Press your front foot lightly into the floor to relieve pressure on your knee.



PREPARE

▶ Place a bolster lengthwise in front of you.



PROPS

One bolster or firm pillow

THE POSE

▶ Begin on all-fours in front of the bolster, with your hands shoulder-distance apart, just in front of your shoulders.

▶ Bring your right knee forwards and place it alongside the outer edge of the bolster.

▶ Slide your left leg straight behind you. Draw your right hip forwards and your left hip back to square your pelvis. Adjust the bolster so that it touches your pelvis.

▶ Inhale, then exhale and fold your torso forwards to rest the front of your right hip and torso on the bolster.

AVOID
THIS POSE

IF YOU HAVE A
KNEE INJURY.
TRY A RECLINING
HIP STRETCH
INSTEAD.

Direct your breath
towards any tension
in your hip to
help release it.

Relax the front
of your body
and breathe
into your back.



► Relax your forearms and hands on the floor, either side of the bolster. Turn your head to the right and rest your left cheek on the bolster.

► Inhale and root through your hands to lengthen your spine, extending through the crown.

► Exhale and let your body release into the bolster and floor.

► Stay in the pose for up to three minutes, breathing evenly.

TO FINISH

► When you are ready to come out, inhale and root through your hands to gently release your legs.

► Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

> BALANCES YOUR
NERVOUS SYSTEM

> REDUCES FATIGUE

> STRENGTHENS YOUR
LEGS AND FEET

RESTORATIVE CHILD'S POSE

Restorative salamba balasana

As a forward-bending pose, the classic Child's pose rests your body, quieting your mind and body. It's often used to recover after a challenging yoga pose or sequence. Supportive props help your body release and make the pose even more nurturing, soothing your nerves and providing refuge.

PREPARE

▶ Place a bolster or firm pillow across the top of your mat. Balance another vertically across its centre and cover this with a folded blanket, to create extra support. Place a folded blanket on either side of the bolsters.



PROPS

Two bolsters or firm pillows
Four blankets

THE POSE

- ▶ Kneel down on the floor in front of the blanket and bolsters with your knees apart and toes and ankles pointing behind you.
- ▶ Wiggle yourself forwards so your knees touch the edge of the blanket and the vertical bolster nestles into your groin, between your inner thighs.
- ▶ Take a couple of slow, gentle breaths then exhale and gently fold forwards to rest your chest on the bolster. Release your tailbone towards your heels to lengthen your lower back.
- ▶ Rest your forearms and palms of your hands on the folded blankets and let your shoulders relax down from your ears and spread a blanket on the back of your knees.
- ▶ Rest your head to the right, relax your jaw and let your belly soften. Let your body release into the bolster and feel any tension melting away.
- ▶ Rest in the pose for a few minutes,

turning your head to face the left half-way through.

TO FINISH

- ▶ To come out of the pose, place your hands under your shoulders and inhale as you gently press your hands into the blankets to raise your torso back upright.
- ▶ Rest in a comfortable seated position for a few breaths to absorb the benefits.

Variation

- ▶ To ground you and encourage your muscles to relax, bring the blanket from your shins up over your lower back. It will also keep you warm as you relax.

Benefits

- > CALMS YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM
- > SOOTHES YOUR MIND
- > DEEPLY RELAXING
- > AIDS INSOMNIA

Tip

Experiment with the bolsters - you may find you only need one.

VARIATION



Breathe slowly
and deeply into
your back.

Let your tailbone
release towards
your heels.



{ TAKE CARE IF YOU HAVE KNEE, ANKLE OR BLOOD PRESSURE PROBLEMS. }

BOLSTER HUGGING POSE

In this pose, the bolster adds extra comfort and security to an already restful forward bend. It's perfect for when you need grounding and stability in your life or you're feeling emotionally upset. 'If you don't have somebody to hug, find a nice snuggly position and get in touch with your soft animal,' says Aki Omori who designed the pose.

PREPARE

- ▶ Place a chair in front of you on the floor.
- ▶ Fold two blankets. Place one on the seat of the chair, the other on floor, in front of the chair.
- ▶ Lay a bolster next to the chair.



PROPS

- One bolster
- One sturdy chair
- Two blankets

THE POSE

- ▶ Sit down on the blanket, or a cushion, on the floor in a comfortable cross-legged position.
- ▶ Rest for a moment, to let your breath and mind settle.
- ▶ Now take the bolster and lean it vertically against the chair.
- ▶ Sit the bottom end of the bolster in your lap. Wrap your arms around the bolster as if you are hugging a teddy bear and rest your hands on the chair.
- ▶ Gently come forwards to rest on the bolster, ensuring the front of your body is in contact with the bolster. Turn your head to one side and rest your cheek against the bolster.
- ▶ Rest in the pose, taking in the snuggly feeling. If you like, you can turn your head halfway through.

TO FINISH

- ▶ When you're ready to come out of the pose, gently use your hands to press yourself up to sitting.
- ▶ Rest here for a few moments to absorb the benefits.

Benefits

- > CALMS YOUR MIND
- > RELAXES YOUR BODY
- > GENTLY RELEASES YOUR HIPS
- > COMFORTS AND NURTURES

Tip

*Try this pose when
you're craving
comfort.*

Relax your
shoulders
and arms.

Nestle your body
into the bolster.



{ IF SITTING CROSS-LEGGED IS HARD, SIT ON A CUSHION WITH YOUR LEGS STRETCHED OUT. }

LEGS UP THE WALL POSE

Uparita karani

This gentle inversion pose – a supported version of Shoulder stand – is said to be a cure-all for everything from insomnia to varicose veins. By slowing and deepening the breath, it triggers your body's relaxation response, calming it and reducing stress and anxiety. Elevating your legs assists your circulation and stretches your lower back and hamstrings. It's an easy way to bring your body into deep relaxation after a tiring day, or at the end of your regular yoga practice.

PREPARE

► Prepare a couple of folded blankets or a flat bolster and place them a few inches from a wall on your yoga mat.

► Fold a third blanket and keep it to hand.



PROPS

Three folded blankets or one folded blanket and a flat bolster

THE POSE

► Sit on the floor sideways to the middle of the two folded blankets or bolster with your hands on the floor, then turn your body so it's perpendicular to the wall, and raise your legs to rest your heels against the wall.

► Press into the floor with your hands and slide your buttocks closer to the wall, so your lower back rests on the blankets, and the back of your waist hangs off them. Gently lower your head and neck onto the third blanket, with your shoulders on the floor.

► Straighten your legs and flex your feet, spreading your toes and reaching through the balls of your feet. Make any adjustments to the blankets needed to make you feel comfortable.

► Take your arms to out to the sides with your palms facing upwards. Open your shoulder blades away from your spine and soften your throat.

► Gently close your eyes and rest in the pose. Try elongating your breath, slowly

inhaling and exhaling through your nose. Feel your body sinking into the blankets and floor.

TO FINISH

► To come out of the pose, bend your knees and place the soles of your feet against the wall.

► Raise your hips and push the blankets or bolster closer to the wall. Then push away from the wall with your feet, lower your hips to the floor and rest your legs on the blankets or bolster. Then roll over to your right and gently come up to sitting.

► Spend a couple of minutes sitting quietly to absorb the effects.

Benefits

> LOWERS ANXIETY
AND STRESS

> AIDS SLEEP

> IMPROVES YOUR
CIRCULATION AND LOWERS
YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

Tip

Try this pose before bedtime. It will help prepare your body for a deep sleep.

Keep your neck supported and in line with your spine.

Let your body sink into the floor.



{ AVOID THIS POSE IF YOU HAVE EYE PROBLEMS OR SERIOUS BACK ISSUES. }

CHAIR FORWARD FOLD

The joy of yoga is you can do it anywhere, anytime and adapt it to any need. This chair-based forward fold is a quick, easy way to relieve tension when you're sitting at your desk all day or travelling. It offers the benefits of a standing forward fold without strain, so is ideal for those who are injured or older. It has healing benefits when included in a restorative sequence.

PREPARE

- Find a sturdy chair and place a folded blanket onto its seat.



PROPS

- One sturdy chair
- One blanket

THE POSE

- Sit on the chair with your feet flat on your mat, hip-width apart. Place your hands on top of your thighs.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose. As you exhale, draw your chin to your chest, let your shoulders round and slowly roll down your spine until your torso is resting on your thighs.
- Slide your hands down to the floor and let your head hang between your knees.
- If comfortable, place the palms of your hands on the floor or just let them dangle. Let your body hang heavy and feel your head and neck relax.
- Remain in the pose for up to a few minutes, breathing evenly.

TO FINISH

- On an inhale, bring your hands up to rest on your thighs, press down and slowly roll back up to a seated position.
- Sit quietly for a few minutes to absorb the benefits.

Benefits

- > OPENS AND AWAKENS YOUR UPPER-BODY JOINTS
- > RELIEVES TENSION IN YOUR BACK AND SHOULDERS
- > STRETCHES YOUR LOWER BACK
- > AIDS SLEEP

Tip

If you find it hard to fold forwards, place a folded blanket on your lap for support.

Remember to keep breathing throughout the pose.

Gaze down at your feet.



{ AVOID THIS POSE IF YOU'RE PREGNANT, HAVE BLOOD PRESSURE PROBLEMS OR IBS. }

HEART POSE WITH A CHAIR

Like all yoga poses, heart-opener poses work on both a physiological and emotional level. Mobilising your thoracic spine and shoulders, they help improve your posture and breathing. But they also open your heart, bringing a sense of joy and abundance. This supported version supports your back while you reap the benefits.



PROPS

- One sturdy chair
- Two bolsters
- Two blankets
- Four smaller blankets or towels

PREPARE

► Find a sturdy chair that will support your legs and has space for your feet to pass through. Place it on your mat in front of you.

► Fold a blanket and place it on your mat, in front of the chair, as shown.



Soften your hips
and let your
legs release.

TAKE CARE

IF YOU HAVE LOW
BLOOD PRESSURE
OR SUFFER FROM
HEADACHES.

Let your arms relax
into the blankets.

► Place a bolster across the other end of the mat and then place another bolster vertically down the middle.

► Roll the edge of a second blanket and lie it on the seat of the chair. Fold four more small blankets or towels and keep them to hand.



THE POSE

► Begin in a sitting position with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor with the base of your spine against the vertical bolster.

► Holding the bolster to stabilise you, slowly lie back onto the bolster so it supports your spine.

► Bring your calves up onto the chair and rest the back of your ankles on the rolled blanket.

► Rest your arms down by your sides, palms facing down. If your elbows don't rest on the floor (or for extra comfort), rest each hand on a couple of small folded blankets or towels.

► Adjust yourself until you find the most comfortable position, then rest your neck and head back, relaxing your

shoulders down away from your ears.

► Rest here for several minutes, letting your body sink into the bolsters and feeling any tension melting away.

TO FINISH

► When you are ready to come out of the pose, gently bring your legs down to one side of the chair and use your hands to press yourself back up to sitting.

► Rest here for a few moments.

Benefits

- RELIEVES BACK TENSION
- OPENS YOUR CHEST AND SHOULDERS
- DEEPENS YOUR BREATH
- STRETCHES YOUR HIP FLEXORS

Tip

This pose is a great way to re-energise yourself after a tiring day.

CORPSE VARIATION WITH CHAIR

Savasana variation with chair

By elevating your legs higher than your torso, this variation of the classic Savasana relaxation pose helps release lower-back tension and improve circulation. You may also find it easier than lying flat on your back which can sometimes feel surprisingly challenging. The pose helps your body settle into relaxation more quickly and offers a number of restorative benefits.



PROPS

One sturdy chair
Three blankets
(Three more optional)

VARIATION



Tip

*This pose can help
reduce the symptoms
of restless
leg syndrome.*

Keep your throat
open and relaxed.



PREPARE

► Place a folded blanket on the middle of your mat to act as a back rest. Then find a sturdy chair that will support the weight of your legs and has space for your feet to pass through it.

► Place the chair on your yoga mat, facing you.

► Place two folded blankets next to you. Ideally have a couple more to hand.



THE POSE

► Sit on the floor in front of the chair.

► Slowly lie down on your back so your back is on the blanket and carefully bring your legs onto the chair, bending your knees so their backs are supported by the seat of the chair.

► Reach for a folded blanket and bring it under your head and neck to support them. Ensure your neck and head are level, to avoid compressing your throat.

► Rest your arms out to the sides, palms facing upwards. Place a small folded blanket or towel under each hand for extra support and under your lower back to support your pelvis.

► If your calves or feet aren't comfortable, place a rolled blanket under the backs of your ankles for support.

► Gently close your eyes and rest here for up to 20 minutes, feeling your body release any tension.

TO FINISH

► Once you are ready to come out of the pose, bend your knees, bring your feet down to the floor and roll to one side.

► Rest here until your breath becomes stronger and then slowly come back up to sitting.

Variation

You may find it more relaxing to rest your hands gently on your lower abdomen. Experiment and see which feels more comfortable.

Benefits

- > REVITALISES YOUR BODY AND MIND
- > RELEASES YOUR LOWER BACK
- > REFRESHES YOUR LEGS
- > EASES MENSTRUAL PAIN



Supporting your feet can help the rest of your body release.

AVOID THIS POSE

IF YOU HAVE SEVERE
VARICOSE VEINS,
LOWER-BACK INJURY
OR ARE PREGNANT.

LEGS UP THE WALL WITH CHAIR

Viparita karani with chair

If you've been on your feet all day and your legs need a quick break or your mind is feeling tired, this simple pose is an instant way to release your body and refresh your mind. All you need is a chair but, by adding extra props, you can make the pose even more relaxing and therapeutic.



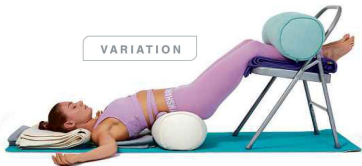
PROPS

One sturdy chair

One bolster or pillow of the same height
(One more optional)

Three blankets
(One more optional)

VARIATION



Feel your body
sinking into
the floor.

Tip
Don't have any props?
Try resting your
legs on the edge
of your sofa.



PREPARE

► Place a folded blanket on your mat. Then find a sturdy chair that will support the weight of your legs and has space for your feet to pass through it.

► Place the chair on your yoga mat, facing you and put a folded blanket on it.

► Place a bolster or firm pillow horizontally on the floor at the end of the blanket. Have two folded blankets next to you and, ideally, have another to hand.



Try placing a folded blanket on your shins to aid relaxation.

THE POSE

► Begin by sitting next to the bolster with the chair in front of you.

► Roll your pelvis and lower back onto the bolster and then lower your legs onto the chair. Adjust the bolster so it supports the whole of your lower back and pelvis, with your buttocks just hanging off.

► Make sure the backs of your knees are supported by the blanket, with your legs comfortably wide.

► Place a folded blanket under your head and neck to help align your spine and aid relaxation.

► Take your arms out to the sides at shoulder height and let them relax onto the floor so you feel a spaciousness around your shoulders and throat.

► Gently close your eyes and stay in this pose for 15-20 minutes, breathing evenly and feeling your body release into the floor.

TO FINISH

► When you're ready to come out of the pose, deepen your breath and slowly bring your arms and then your knees in.

► Move the bolster from under your back or push away from the chair and bring your feet to the floor.

► Pause here to allow your blood pressure to regulate. Then roll to one side and slowly come up to sitting.

Variation

Take another bolster and rest it on your shins. The extra weight can help you feel grounded and encourage the release of any tension.

Benefits

> RELIEVES TENSION IN YOUR BACK

> RELEASES YOUR HIPS

> REDUCES WATER RETENTION

> REFRESHES YOUR BRAIN

AVOID THIS POSE

IF YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, GLAUCOMA, HEADACHE OR YOU'RE MENSTRUATING.

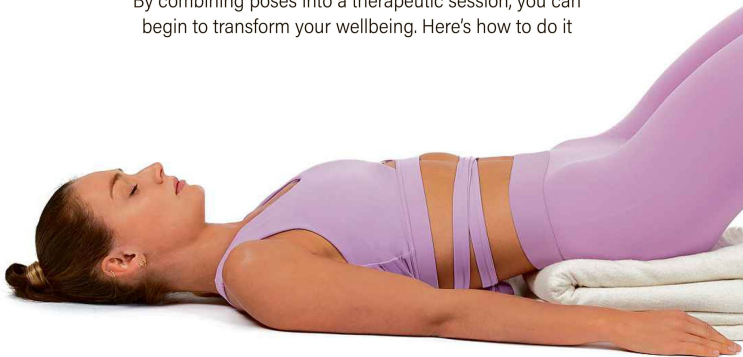


THE *sequences*

Now you've learnt the poses, you're ready to experience some Restorative yoga sessions. In this section of the book, top Restorative yoga teachers share expert sequences, specially tailored for your needs, from deep relaxation to beating burnout. For each session, you'll find a list of poses and props required, plus useful tips from the teachers. Read through the advice to make sure you're fully prepared. Then you'll be ready to enjoy the experience. We can guarantee you'll soon want to make these sequences part of your daily life.

SOOTHE WITH SEQUENCES

By combining poses into a therapeutic session, you can begin to transform your wellbeing. Here's how to do it



As you've now experienced, every Restorative yoga pose offers a wealth of rewards for your body and mind. Even practising just a couple of poses when you need them can make a positive change to your day. But, by combining a sequence of poses into a longer Restorative yoga session, you can multiply the benefits and tailor your practice to your goals and needs.

SMART SEQUENCING

In all forms of yoga, every pose is performed in relation to another. The effects of one pose will always be influenced by the pose that precedes it. For instance, if you're

practising a certain type of pose – backbends, for instance – it's wise to start with the gentlest and, as your body warms up, progress to more advanced variations. You could start with Supported backbend (p66) and follow it with Supported bridge (p64).

A 'transition' move can be placed between two contrasting poses to avoid a shock for your body. For instance, after doing Prone release (p58) you could follow it with Supported side stretch (p60) to gently open your body before coming onto your back in a pose such as Reclining bound angle (p68). Both these measures enhance your practice and help avoid strain or injury.



Tip

Try finishing your session with meditation (p122) or breathing exercises (p116).

POWERFUL PRACTICE

The other beauty of sequencing is that you create therapeutic sessions tailored to your needs. This is done by selecting a number of complementary poses that, together, will help meet a goal such as improve sleep, increase energy or encourage deep muscle release. This is where the experts come in. An experienced Restorative yoga teacher has the knowledge to design a sequence that's just right for a group or individual.

In this section of the book, top yoga experts will guide you through five sequences. They're all suitable for everyone but you'll probably find one particularly suits your goals. You can make these a part of your regular Restorative yoga practice.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

> Read through the instructions of your chosen sequence and gather together all the props that you'll need.

> Each sequence includes teaching tips, guidance on how long to rest in each pose and page references for the full guide to each pose.

> Remember to keep an extra blanket and pair of socks to hand in case you feel cold during the session.

> To ensure you'll be as comfortable as possible during the poses, carefully position the props in place for each move.

> Turn off your phone, let your household know you'll be practising yoga and ask not to be disturbed.

> Consider opening a window – having fresh air circulating will enhance your relaxation. But avoid any cold drafts.

> Think about whether you'd like silence or background music during your practice. You may find gentle music can help you relax, or you may prefer silence to avoid distraction. See what works best for you.

> Before you begin a sequence, practice a few warm-up moves (p46) to prepare your body for relaxation.

DEEP REST

Let go and experience the joy of deep recuperation with this restful set of poses by Restorative yoga expert

Aki Omori (@akisomatic)



“You can make variations to this sequence to tailor it to your individual needs. For instance, you could switch Reclining bound angle (p68) for something simpler such as Relaxation pose (p54) – simple yet effective”



This is my favourite Restorative sequence. The downward-facing poses take you quickly and deeply into relaxation and relieve you from exhaustion caused by both physical exertion and mental activity such as pressure and stressful thoughts. It's an extremely effective series of poses and easy to do. When you're lying face downwards in a pose (a prone position), it activates the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system which increases blood flow to your internal organs, away from the skeletal muscles, supporting healthy homeostasis to balance your body and mind. Downward-facing poses also release your thoracic diaphragm, due to the weight of your body on the ribs and sternum, which then releases your spine. This helps ease tension and tightness in your back muscles and, as a result, also in your head and neck muscles.

BALANCE YOUR BODY

Throughout the sequence, you will experience lying on all sides of your body which brings balance to your nervous system. You get to release and let go of any holding in the lower abdominal organs, including lower digestive and reproductive organs. This creates space, encouraging blood flow to the area, bringing more oxygen and releasing any holding patterns that may come from a posture or not feeling safe. The last pose brings calm and balance in the sacrum and hip areas which is useful following Badda konasana (Reclining bound angle, p68).

TAKE IT FURTHER

To find out more about Aki Omori's classes, courses, private sessions and online classes, visit akiomori.com.

DEEP REST SEQUENCE

1. Prone release (p58)

Lying on your front increases tone, preparing your body for the backbend. Hold for 15-20 minutes.

2. Supported side stretch (p60)

This side stretch gently brings you back from the prone position and prepares your body for the twist. Hold for two to five minutes.

3. Restorative twist (p70)

Ensure your pelvis and bolster are in contact. Breathe out, imagining your

spine lengthening. Hold for seven to 15 minutes in each direction.

4. Supported gate (p62)

Once you are in position, organise your legs so they are comfortable. Hold for 10-20 breaths.

5. Supported backbend (p66)

Focus on releasing and lengthening your belly to lengthen your lumbar spine. Hold for three to seven minutes.

6. Reclining bound angle (p68)

Use blankets or cushions to support your legs if you don't have a bolster. Hold for 10-20 minutes.

7. Supported bridge (p64)

This position pacifies the sacrum and hip areas following the previous pose. Hold for five to 10 minutes.

8. Relaxation pose (p54)

From Supported bridge, push the blankets towards your feet and rest your legs over them or use a bolster. Rest here for as long as you wish, to bring your body back into to the room.



END When you're ready to come out of Savasana, gently open your eyes and slowly stretch. Then gently press yourself up to sitting and rest for a few moments.



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2



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6



CREATING QUIET

Calm your mind with this second soothing
sequence from Restorative yoga expert

Aki Omori (@akisomatic)





This forward-bend sequence will calm your nervous system and make your mind quieter. In Restorative child's pose (p80) or other forward bend poses where there is contact between your front body and the bolster, it induces a similar effect to the downward-facing poses in the Deep Rest sequence (p100), balancing your nervous system and quieting your mind. They are good poses when you're feeling depressed. Forward bend poses, if performed correctly, help lengthen the back of your body which brings a sense of freshness and inspiration.

RESTORE & REVITALISE

Legs up the wall with chair (p92) relieves tired legs, puffiness and any stagnation of fluid in your legs. It also supports immune capacity. The Gentle supported bridge pose (p64) opens up the top of your lungs and encourages a freer breath. Together with the previous pose, this very subtle inversion will bring the blood flow back towards your head and gently bring back energy so that you're more ready to return to the world, after the deep relaxation of this sequence.

“In Bolster hugging pose (p82), allow the front of your spine to elongate and let the back of your body release downwards, as if your shoulder blades are two boats sailing all the way down your back”

TAKE IT FURTHER

To find out more about Aki Omori's classes, courses, private sessions and online classes, visit akiomori.blogspot.com.

CREATING QUIET SEQUENCE

1. Relaxation pose (p54)

We begin with a simple pose to release your spine from gravitational pull. Take a few breaths here.

2. Restorative child's pose (p80)

Keep your pelvis close to your heels. Place a rolled blanket under your legs or props between your feet and bottom to stay comfortable. Rest for up to 10 minutes.

3. Supported pigeon (p78)

Adjust the bolster position

to see what's most comfortable for you. Rest for five minutes on each side.

4. Supported head-to-knee pose (p72)

Root your front leg and tailbone into the floor. Rest for three minutes on each side.

5. Gentle supported bridge (p64)

Ensure your shoulder blades hover off the blanket to let your top lungs open. Rest for up to 10 minutes.

6. Legs up the wall with chair (p92)

Keep your legs at 45 degrees to stay comfortable. Rest here for 10 minutes.

7. Bolster hugging pose (p82)

Find a nice snuggly position. Stay for five minutes. You can turn your head halfway through if you like.

8. Relaxation pose (p122)

Sit with your hands facing up. Alternatively, rest in Relaxation pose (p54). Rest for at least three minutes.



Breathe away
any tension
and stress.

END Sitting with your palms facing up makes you more open again, following the forward bend. Covering yourself with a blanket or shawl will keep you warm and make you feel secure.



1



2



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5



6



EASE STRESS

Melt away tension and soothe anxiety in six, simple restorative poses from international yoga teacher

Esther Ekhart and the experts at

ekhartyoga.com





A regular yoga practice helps to regulate and relieve stress but sometimes, despite our attempts to organise and control it, life takes over and we only have a few minutes to spare. First of all, frustrating though it may be, try to remember yoga is as much about flexibility of the mind as it is about the body, and fighting facts will only exacerbate your stress levels. It doesn't matter if the time you spend connecting to yourself is an hour and a half or five minutes; it's the quality of your practice that counts.

RELEASE AND RESTORE

Here are six yoga poses for you to try – either in one sequence or individually – that may help you to tap into that place where your stillness resides. Try and stay in each pose for three to five minutes, but always listen to your body and, if you need to come out sooner, do. These poses may provide a stretch to areas of your body that feel tense or tight but this sequence is not about stretching or pushing, it's about release; allowing yourself to be physically supported but also letting go of the 'shoulds' and 'musts' and 'what ifs' and 'if onlys'...

“So even if you only have a few minutes, make them count; breathe deeply, draw inwards and completely absorb yourself in the present moment”

TAKE IT FURTHER

For a free Restorative yoga class with Esther Ekhardt visit:
ekhartyoga.com/classes/3623/yoga-to-relieve-fatigue.



EASE STRESS SEQUENCE

1. Reclining bound angle pose (p68)

Feel how your body is supported, the opening in your heart space, and the rise and fall of your breath.

2. Restorative child's pose (p80)

Feel your breath spreading across the back of your body. Feel this expansion as you breathe in, the contraction as you breathe out.

3. Seated meditation with hands on heart

Feel the wave of breath move from your belly towards your chest and spread across your collar bones.

4. Legs up the wall pose (p84)

Feel your body sinking into the floor and the spaciousness in your heart as your chest and shoulders relax.

5. Prone release (p58)

Resting your forehead on a bolster has a grounding and calming effect. Give your entire weight to the props, breathing fully and deeply.

6. Relaxation pose (p54)

Draw your attention inwards and bring your awareness deep inside. Try to notice where one thought ends and the other begins. Look for the space, such as the pauses between your breath.



END When it's time to come out of the Savasana, do it slowly. It's not only safer for your body, but more gratifying for your mind. Take the sense of ease and openness you've cultivated on the mat into the rest of your day.





Aim to stay in
each pose for
three to five
minutes.



3



4



SLEEP WELL

This simple sequence from the experts at [Yogamatters](http://Yogamatters.com) (yogamatters.com) is designed to release stress throughout your whole body, so preparing you for a good night's sleep. Incorporating gentle forward folds, subtle twists, heart openers and soft inversions, the poses ease muscle tension, open your joints, deepen your breathing and still your mind

Beginners,
start by staying
in each pose for
three minutes.

1. Legs up the wall pose (p84)

This gentle inversion triggers your body's relaxation response, which means it's perfect at the end of a busy day. Let your body sink into the floor and breathe slowly and deeply. Stay in the pose for five to 10 minutes.

2. Restorative twist (p70)

This pose will rest your brain and calm your breathing. Make sure

your elbows are supported and let your shoulder blades release down your back. Stay in the pose for five to 10 minutes.

3. Restorative child's pose (p80)

Experiment to see how many bolsters is more comfortable for you. Breathe deeply into your back and let your tailbone release towards your heels. Stay in the pose for five to 10 minutes.

4. Heart pose with a chair (p88)

By opening your chest and deepening your breath, this pose relieves back tension. Let your body sink into the bolsters, feeling your body release. Stay in the pose for five to 10 minutes.

5. Relaxation pose (p54)

Consider covering yourself with a blanket to keep you warm as you relax after the sequence. Stay in the pose for five to 10 minutes.



REVIVE YOUR ENERGY

Feeling low on energy? Not only do the poses in this refreshing sequence allow you to rest and restore, they also have an uplifting effect on your body. They deepen your breath to oxygenate your body and brain, stimulate energy flow and open your joints and gently stretch your muscles. You'll start with a warm-up to wake up your body and end with a supported relaxation pose to refresh your mind. You'll emerge feeling rejuvenated and ready to take on the world again

As you
exhale, release
any tension.

WARM-UP

► Spend several minutes doing the following Warm-up moves (p46): Shoulder shrugs, Neck stretch, Easy side stretch, Easy twist, Cat/Cow and Knees to chest rolls.

1. Restorative child's pose (p80)

Release your tailbone towards your heels, soften your belly and breathe into your back. Rest in the pose for three to five minutes. Turn your head halfway through.

2. Supported pigeon (p78)

If you've been sitting for long periods this will help stretch and revive your body. Rest in the

pose for up to five breaths on each side.

3. Supported gate (p62)

On each exhale, feel the gentle stretch along your side body. Rest in the pose for three minutes on each side.

4. Mountain brook (p56)

Let your breath expand into your chest and ribs. Rest in the pose for three to five minutes.

5. Reclining bound angle pose (p68)

Let your knees fall out to the side, feeling a release in your hips. Rest in the pose for three to five minutes.

6. Relaxation pose (p54)

Let your body sink into the floor and your thoughts drift away. Rest in the pose for five to 10 minutes.

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

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MINDFUL *moments*

By now, you'll have discovered just how therapeutic Restorative yoga can be. To deepen the experience and reap even more benefits, you can team the poses you've learnt with some simple breathing and meditation techniques. By helping connect your body and mind to bring you into the present moment, these easy techniques trigger powerful physical mechanisms that will heal your body and recharge your mind. Add some restorative, ayurvedic bodycare rituals, and you have a complete tool kit for wellbeing. Read on to discover how to do it.

BREATHE YOURSELF BETTER

Deepen your relaxation sessions with these yogic breath-control exercises

At the start of your Restorative yoga journey, we showed you how to re-connect to your breath and learn the full yogic breath. During your sessions you've probably already experienced the powerful benefits that deeper, fuller breathing can bring, slowing your heart rate, bringing you into a mindful place and helping ease away tension and pain.

Now, by adding some tailored breathing exercises to

your Restorative yoga sessions, you can take the benefits even further. Called Pranayama, yogic breathing techniques aim to control your prana or vital energy to balance, rest and restore your body and mind. There are many methods to choose from, ranging from energising to calming to detoxing. Here are a couple of simple Pranayama exercises to try, which are suitable for including in your Restorative yoga sessions.

GROUNDING BREATH

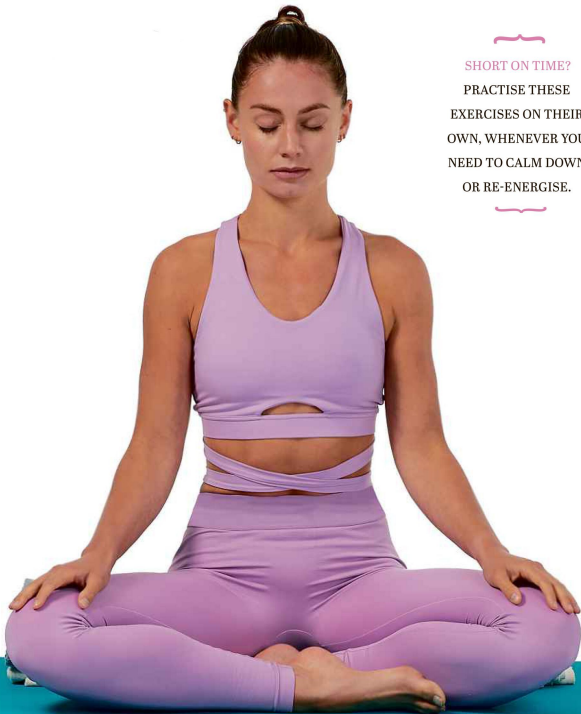
This simple breathing technique helps create a grounding connection with the earth below you, creating a feeling of nurturing and security

*Try this
when you're
feeling unsettled
or anxious.*

- ▶ Settle in a comfortable position and place your hands palm-down on your thighs. Sit tall with your shoulders above your hips. Allow your weight to sink down through your sitting bones
- ▶ Gently close your eyes and bring your attention to the tip of your nose. On a long, slow inhalation, visualise your breath travelling to a space above the crown of your head.
- ▶ Pause, then slowly exhale, and imagine your breath is travelling back to the crown of your head and down through your body to your tailbone.

Once there, feel your out-breath moving into the ground.

- ▶ Pause, then take your attention back to your nose. Repeat this cycle for several minutes, travelling up above the crown of your head as you inhale and down to the floor as you exhale.
- ▶ Breathe softly and sense a feeling of peace settle in and around you. When you're ready to finish, gently return to a regular breath.
- ▶ Gently open your eyes and pause for a moment or two, to absorb the effects of the practice.



SHORT ON TIME?

PRACTISE THESE
EXERCISES ON THEIR
OWN, WHENEVER YOU
NEED TO CALM DOWN
OR RE-ENERGISE.

OCEAN BREATH

Also known as Ujjayi breathing, this method balances your nervous system and energises your body and mind. It's said to have a cleansing effect

*Try this
when you need
a pick-me-up.*

- ▶ Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position or lie in Relaxation pose (p54). Take a few moments to allow your breathing to settle.
- ▶ Gently close your eyes and gradually deepen your breathing, inhaling to a count of three and exhaling to a count of six, allowing the pause between your breaths to lengthen.
- ▶ Let your breathing return to normal then, as you inhale, visualise a golden light streaming down from the sky to enter the front of your throat. Sense it travel to the back of your throat, then, as you exhale, sense the light move to the front of your throat and travel back out of your body to the sky.
- ▶ Focus on this golden ray of light entering and leaving your throat with each breath. Let your breathing become gentle and slow, as a stillness settles around you.
- ▶ Fully exhale. Then inhale through both nostrils and exhale through your mouth, making the sound 'ha'. Continue for a few more breaths.
- ▶ Close your mouth and continue silently making the sound 'ha' as you inhale and exhale. Feel the slight



constriction in your throat that this causes, and the subtle hissing sound your breath creates.

▶ Continue to breathe like this, now directing your breath into your lungs. Feel your chest opening and your diaphragm expanding sideways.

▶ Consciously release any tension as you exhale, letting your body melt deeper into the mat with every breath.

▶ Start with a few minutes of this technique. You can slowly build up to 10 minutes as you get used to it.



MOON BREATH

In yogic philosophy, the left nostril is associated with our body's cooling energy, symbolised by the moon. This exercise opens the lunar energy channel that flows between your left sitting bone and left nostril, creating a sense of calm.

*Try this
when you're
feeling agitated.*

▶ Sit in a comfortable cross-legged or kneeling position and bring your awareness to your breath, taking a few easy natural breaths.

▶ Once your breath has settled, take your right hand up in front of your nose and use your right thumb to close your right nostril.

▶ Start to inhale and exhale through your left nostril, breathing gently and slowly.

▶ Visualise a white light drawing in and out of your body along your spine, from your left sitting bone to your left nostril. Feel the flow of energy and notice the sensations this brings.

▶ Take several breaths in this way, then release your hand back into your lap and let your breathing settle, noticing any sense of space or change this exercise has created.

▶ When you're ready to finish, gently open your eyes and then sit for a few moments to absorb the benefits.

MEDITATION MAGIC

Take your Restorative yoga experience deeper by introducing some simple meditation techniques

As you've now discovered, Restorative yoga is a simple way to experience mindfulness. By drawing your attention inwards and connecting you with your breath, Restorative poses encourage you to focus on the present moment, allowing you to disconnect from the distractions and stresses of everyday life. If you're enjoying the feeling of wellbeing this brings, adding some basic meditation exercises to your Restorative yoga sessions will bring even more rewards.

In the West, meditation is often seen just as a relaxation

tool. But, in fact, this ancient practice is now scientifically proven to offer a host of benefits for mind and body. The act of meditating causes physical changes in the brain that affect the way we process external events, helping us manage stress more effectively and even stave off brain ageing and cognitive decline. During meditation, your breathing deepens, your heart rate drops and your body is flooded with feel-good hormones. Your blood pressure falls, protecting your heart health; anxiety and pain are minimised and brain power improves.

EXPERIENCE THE BENEFITS YOURSELF BY TRYING THESE TWO MEDITATION EXERCISES

BREATHING MEDITATION

This easy meditation method is perfect for beginners

- ▶ Settle in a comfortable sitting or lying position.
- ▶ Close your eyes and let your breath be calm.
- ▶ Focus your attention on your breathing.
- ▶ Focus on the rhythm of your inhale and exhale.
- ▶ Feel the sensation of the air flowing in and out of your nostrils.
- ▶ Breathe slowly and deeply, making your exhale

longer than your inhale.

- ▶ If your attention wanders, acknowledge your thoughts and return to focusing on your breath.
- ▶ When you're ready to finish, gently bring your awareness back to your body and external environment.
- ▶ Sit for a while, observing the benefits.



BODY SCAN MEDITATION

The body scan is a very simple meditation exercise that can help reduce stress, anxiety and physical pain



How to do it

- ▶ Ideally, allow at least 30 minutes to complete the practice. Find a quiet, comfortable space where you won't be disturbed and have a blanket to hand, to keep you warm.
- ▶ Lie on your back and gently close your eyes. Become aware of the areas of your body in contact with the floor and take your attention to your breath for a few moments, consciously following the rhythm of your inhalation and exhalation.
- ▶ On your next in-breath, imagine you're directing the air to the toes of your left foot. Allow any tension to release as you exhale. If your mind wanders, just acknowledge the thoughts without judgement and gently bring your attention back to your toes.
- ▶ When you're ready to move on, repeat the process, focusing on the sole of your left foot, then your ankle, lower and upper leg and hip. Each time, direct your attention to the body part, noticing any sensations and letting them go on an out-breath.



Continue the process, following this order:

- 1 From the toes of your right foot to your sole, ankle, lower and upper leg, and right hip.
- 2 To your pelvis and abdomen, your tail bone, lower back, mid and upper back.
- 3 To your chest, heart and lungs.
- 4 From your left fingertips to the back of your left hand, palm, forearm and upper arm.
- 5 From your right fingertips to the back of your right hand, palm, forearm and upper arm.
- 6 To your shoulders, and up to your neck.
- 7 To your jaw, tongue, mouth and lips.
- 8 To your cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and ears.
- 9 From the back of your head to the crown.
- 10 Once you've finished doing the scan, spend a few moments connecting to your whole body. Feel the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe in and out.
- 11 Take a few deep breaths, then gently open your eyes and slowly come back to the room.
- 12 Rest here for a few moments, absorbing the benefits of the exercise.

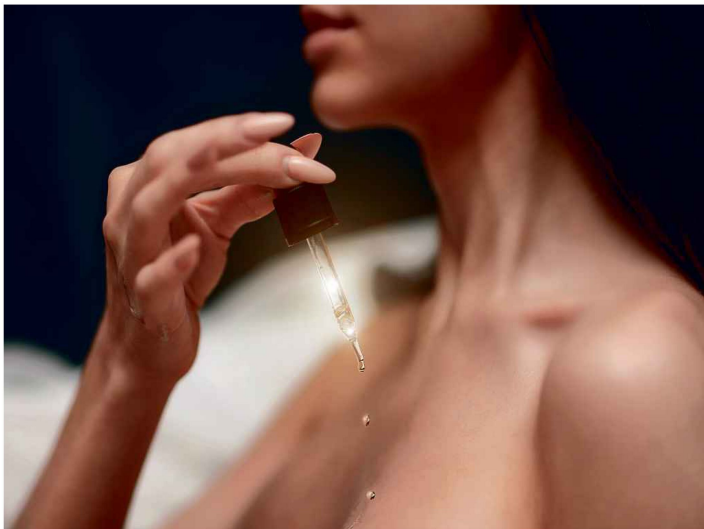


Tip

*Keep warm while
you relax by
covering yourself
with a blanket.*

MASSAGE MIRACLES

Take your relaxation further by adding an ayurvedic self
massage to your weekly schedule



We might see massage as a luxury but in the Indian system of medicine known as ayurveda (of which yoga is also a part), it's seen as an essential part of self-care. Ayurvedic physicians recommend a weekly self-massage to invigorate your body from within, as well as cleanse and nourish your skin.

The simple self-massage technique, *abhyanga* (meaning 'massage with oil'), is said to offer benefits ranging from reducing fatigue to aiding digestion and mental clarity while releasing muscle tension. Usually performed with sesame oil or an oil tailored to your 'dosha' or constitutional type, you sweep the oil from head to foot, to stimulate your body's 'marmas' or energy points.



WHAT YOU NEED

Sesame or castor oil
Or a tailored ayurvedic dosha oil

THIS ABHYANGA

MASSAGE (right) is created by Dr Mathew, Ayurvedic Doctor at Ananda in the Himalayas (anandaspa.com). You're sure to want to make it part of your weekly routine.

ABHYANGA BODY MASSAGE

- 1 Place a bottle of oil in a pan of hot water until the oil is pleasantly warm.
- 2 Sit or stand in a warm room on a towel. Make sure there's no draft.
- 3 Apply the oil generously to your entire body, beginning at your extremities and working towards the middle of your body. Use long strokes on your limbs and circular strokes on your joints. Massage your abdomen and chest in broad, clockwise, circular motions. On your abdomen, follow the path of the large intestine, moving up on the right side of the abdomen, then across, then down on the left side.
- 4 Massage your body for five to 20 minutes, with awareness and patience.
- 5 Give a little extra time and attention to massaging the oil into your scalp, ears and feet, at least once a week. Apply the oil to the crown of your head (*adhipati marma*) and work slowly outwards in circular strokes. Oil applied to your head should be warm but not hot.
- 6 Put a couple of drops of warm ear oil on the tip of your little finger

or on a cotton ball and apply to the opening of your ear canal. (If you have any ear conditions, check with your health practitioner first.)

7 When you massage your feet, wash them before you take a shower, so you don't slip.

8 Take a warm bath or shower but avoid using soap. Instead try using a paste of green moong lentils to help remove the oil. (Soak the lentils overnight then grind them to a coarse paste the next morning to use as a post *abhyanga* scrub.)

9 For the rest of the day, drink plenty of water and avoid eating heavy meals.

Benefits

- > REDUCES MUSCLE FATIGUE AND TIREDNESS
- > DEEPENS YOUR SLEEP
- > EASES INSOMNIA
- > IMPROVES YOUR DIGESTION
- > BETTER SKIN AND HAIR
- > IMPROVES YOUR MENTAL CLARITY

{ AVOID ayurvedic oil massage if you're pregnant, are menstruating, have an acute illness or medical condition, have had high sun exposure, have been fasting or doing extreme exercise. **}**



GLOW WITH HEALTH

This ayurvedic face massage not only gives you a healthy glow, it also boosts your body and mind and helps reduce the signs of ageing

More than a pampering treat, this DIY facial massage is said to stimulate your body's marma pressure points, improving the flow of prana (energy). This helps revitalise your body and mind, boosts your immunity and gives you a healthy glow. Meanwhile, the massage strokes help boost lymph flow and circulation in your skin while easing tension in your face to reduce the signs of ageing and fatigue. Try incorporating it into your morning routine and you'll soon notice a difference to how you look and feel.



WHAT YOU NEED

A light oil such as jojoba or an ayurvedic blend. Use your thumbs to make gentle, clockwise circles on your face. Press just enough to feel resistance from the bone or muscle below. Make 15-30 circles at each of the points. Then release the pressure, keep your thumb on your skin and slide to the next point.

THIS AYURVEDIC MASSAGE (right) is created by Swami

Saradananda, internationally renowned yoga and meditation teacher and author of *The Cleansing Power of Yoga* (Watkins, £14.99).

AYURVEDIC FACIAL MASSAGE

TO BEGIN Apply half a teaspoon of massage oil to your skin, sweeping it from your collarbones up and out over your face.

1 Start by pressing your thumbs into the points where your collarbones meet your breastbone. Release down towards your waist to boost your energy.

2 Slide your thumbs up the sides of your neck to the next points, four finger-widths below your earlobes. Press and circle here to improve circulation to your face.

3 Slide your thumbs inwards to each side of your jawbone. Press and massage upwards, behind the bone.

4 Slide your thumbs back down your neck to the 'V' of your clavicle. Press in a downward direction.

5 Slide your thumbs up to either side of the centre point of your chin and press. This connects you with your innermost feelings.

6 Press on the point in the middle of your upper lip. This

improves your mental clarity.

7 Press on the side of each nostril where it joins your face.

8 Press on the points halfway up your nose on either side. This helps clear your sinuses.

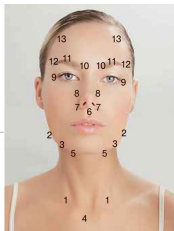
9 Gently massage the outside of each eye to help relieve eye strain.

10 Press the point just above the inside of each eyebrow. Gently press upwards, away from your eye to ease eye strain and headaches.

11 Press the point above the middle of each eyebrow to feel more centred.

12 Press the point just about outside of each eyebrow. Then slide your thumbs out to the hollow of each temple. This is said to improve your memory.

13 Slide your thumbs up the middle of each half of your forehead. Rub in a gentle, clockwise spiral to relieve tension and bring mental peace.



Benefits

> CLEARS YOUR ENERGY CHANNELS AND IMPROVES THE FLOW OF LIFE FORCE

> BALANCES AND RESTORES YOUR BODY

> STRENGTHENS YOUR IMMUNITY

> RELIEVES EYE STRAIN

> IMPROVES YOUR MEMORY

{ AVOID ayurvedic oil massage if you're pregnant, are menstruating, have an acute illness or medical condition, have had high sun exposure, have been fasting or doing extreme exercise. **}**

BODY RITUALS

Feel your best every day with these AM/PM massages
from international massage expert

Beata Aleksandrowicz (beata.website)



MORNING WAKE-UP

This will awaken you physically and mentally when you've not had enough sleep



1 Sit on the bed with your feet on the floor and arms relaxed. Place your hands on your lap and close your eyes. Take a deep, slow breath then, gently, breathe out. Repeat three times.

2 Put your right hand on your scalp. Comb your fingers through the roots of your hair, close to your forehead, and close your fist. Grasp as much hair as you can, take a deep breath and, while exhaling, pull gently on your hair. Keep your fist close to your scalp. Release.

3 Inhale and move your right hand to the back of your scalp, grasping as much hair as you can. Exhale and pull gently. Continue rhythmically pulling and releasing your hair over the whole right side of your scalp. Then use your left hand to work on the left side.

4 Place the fingers of both hands on your head and tap gently all over your scalp, breathing regularly. Increase the speed of the tapping until you feel a pleasant warmth across your scalp.

EVENING SOOTHER

This is a great way to finish the day and improve your sleeping pattern

- ▶ Sit on a chair or on the edge of the bed. Relax and rest your right foot on your left knee. Gently apply cream to the top and sole of your foot. Sandwich your foot between your hands, and make circles all over your foot, starting from your toes and sliding towards your ankle.
- ▶ Place both thumbs on the sole with your fingers supporting the top of your foot. Press your thumbs into the sole and make three outward, deep, slow circles. Lift and move your thumbs to another point on your sole, press again, and make another three outward circles. Work all over sole and heel, breathing regularly.
- ▶ Cup your heel in the palm of your left hand for support. Press your right thumb into your big toe. Make five slow circles in both directions, working on the whole surface of your big toe. Move to each of your other toes in turn, repeating the circles.
- ▶ Now, supporting your foot with your right hand, press your left thumb into the middle, top point of the sole. Slide down along this middle line to the edge of your heel, using your left thumb. Hold your foot between both hands, breathing deeply three times.
- ▶ Repeat the massage sequence above.
- ▶ Repeat on your left foot.

Restorative products



Tri-dosha Vata Relax Massage Oil
(£23, 100ml; tri-dosha.co.uk)

This blend of chamomile, frankincense and ajwain softens and nourishes your skin while relaxing your mind and improving digestion.



Neal's Yard Remedies Jojoba Oil
(£19, 100ml; nealsyardremedies.com)

Deeply nourishing and moisturising, this 100 per cent organic oil is perfect for face, scalp or body massage.



Made for Life Organics
Soothing Muscle Balm

(£28, 50ml; madeforlifeorganics.com)
Massage your limbs to relieve muscle and joint pain. Rosemary stimulates your circulation while calendula, chamomile and lavender calm.



Mio Liquid Yoga Body
Relaxing Bath Soak

(£28, 200ml; mioskincare.co.uk)
Soak away the day's stresses with uplifting peppermint, lemon and mandarin oils, calming cannabis seed oil, herbs and mineral salts.



Margaret Dabbs
Regenerating Foot Oil

(£22, 100ml; margaretdabbs.co.uk)
This silky oil will regenerate dry, sore skin. Jojoba oil relieves swelling and calendula keeps bacteria at bay.



Puresential Essential Oils for
Diffusion Relax Blend

(£11.50, 30ml; uk.puresential.com)
Sprinkle a few drops of this calming oil blend in a diffuser to soothe tension and help you sleep soundly.

THE EXPERTS

With thanks to the expert contributors who have helped create this book



Aki Omori

(Dip. IBMT, BMC, ISMETA
RSME/RSMT, NARM)
*Deep Rest and Creating
quiet* (p 98-105)

Aki Omori is a leading yoga teacher and experienced somatic movement therapist/educator. Drawing on over 30 years of rich yoga experience and somatic approach, Aki teaches a style of Restorative yoga

that is gentle and mindful, yet deep. 'I work somatically,' says Aki. 'We work with the body as it's experienced from within, rather than the body as it's looked at from the outside, so that body and mind are experienced as a whole.' Aki teaches Restorative yoga classes at London's Triyoga, plus private yoga and movement tuition. She teaches workshops on Restorative yoga, embodied anatomy, developmental movement, embryology and runs regular retreats, plus her own training programmes. Her classes are known for their explorative nature – fun and light, yet profound. She's a faculty member of several yoga teacher trainings, including advanced teacher training at Triyoga, teaching anatomy and somatic movement, contributing to the ever-evolving practices of yoga and human consciousness.

Yogamatters (yogamatters.com)

Support act (p34), *Sleep well* (p110) and props throughout book

Yogamatters is the UK's leading supplier of yoga props, equipment, accessories and clothing. The dedicated team of yoga professionals sources the best and latest products to support your yoga journey. Its new range of organic straps, bolsters and blankets, in a range of soothing colours, is made from certified organic cotton and is perfect for Restorative yoga. In this book Yogamatters' experts offer advice on getting the most from your Restorative yoga practice, plus a soothing sequence to help you sleep well. See their props in use throughout the book. Visit yogamatters.com.



Esther Ekhart

*Relaxation changes
everything* (p13) and
Ease stress (p106)

Esther Ekhart has been teaching yoga internationally for over 20 years. As one of the founders of EkhartYoga she has thousands of students worldwide following her online classes. She teaches dynamic styles such as Vinyasa Flow and Hatha, focusing on strength, stability and fitness, as well as slower practices such as Yin yoga and meditation, which allow for deeper connection with your body and mind.

EkhartYoga (ekhartyoga.com)

Born from Esther Ekhart's dream to share the love of yoga, Europe's biggest online studio has almost 4,000 classes in different styles guided by over 40 world-class teachers. Visit ekhartyoga.com for more restorative classes with Esther and other expert teachers. The first two weeks are free!



Dr Mathew

Ananda in the Himalayas
(anandaspa.com)
Massage miracles (p124)

Dr Shijoe Mathew is Ayurvedic Physician at Ananda in the Himalayas, an award-winning luxury destination spa offering ayurvedic therapies, meditation, yoga and therapeutic treatments. Dr Mathew has practised and learnt ayurveda under many eminent scholars in regions all over India, after studying its principles at Vishnu Ayurveda Medical College. In this book, Dr Mathew offers a step-by-step guide to abhyanga oil self-massage which can complement your yoga practice.

RESTORATIVE YOGA

Do you find it hard to switch off? Do you suffer from insomnia and fatigue or headaches and back pain? Whether you want to ease stress or heal your body, this book can help

Restorative yoga is scientifically proven to trigger deep rest and relaxation, easing muscle tension and stimulating your body's healing powers. Using simple props such as blankets and pillows, you can transform regular yoga poses into a therapeutic session for body and mind.



In this expert guide, you'll find everything you need to start practising Restorative yoga at home. Follow the step-by-step guide to the poses and then put them together into relaxing sessions that will ease stress, improve your sleep, refresh your mind and renew your body. You'll also find easy breathing and meditation exercises, plus soothing self-massage tips. With safety advice and product guides, it's suitable for all ages and abilities.

ISBN 978-1-78106-731-4



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