



# **Yoga Teacher Training**

## **Yoga for Specific Issues**

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### **Introduction**

Yoga therapy is the use of yoga to address mental and physical problems, while integrating body and mind, as well as a means to develop our full physical, mental and emotional potential. Yoga therapy can be done one-on-one or in group sessions with people experiencing similar problems, or who wish to experience similar breakthroughs.

Yoga therapy adapts the practices of yoga to the needs of people with specific or persistent health problems – either physical or mental in nature, as well as for those who want to strengthen a particular area of their health to its fullest potential. Yoga therapists often prescribe specific regimens of postures, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques to suit individual needs. Frequently the students in yoga therapy programs need one on one attention. Yoga therapy can also serve as a transition between individual instruction and group instruction. People can benefit more quickly from a yoga program that is designed for their specific needs. Yoga therapy is the practical application of yoga principles for people with special physical, emotional, or spiritual needs, challenges or goals. Yoga can help people develop strength and balance in their bodies, clarity and focus of their minds, and a courageous spirit.

Yoga, in general, can help people both physically and mentally, because once a person is free of stress and the mind is focused and calm, the body can begin to heal itself. Any practice of yoga encourages health by reducing stress, enhancing concentration, stretching and strengthening muscles, increasing feelings of comfort, and bringing things back into balance. Yoga therapy simply focuses on a specific area of need and creates a yoga program that will meet that specific health need.

### **Benefits of Yoga Therapy**

Medical research has shown that yoga therapy is among the most effective complementary therapies for several common ailments.

Yoga can help people heal in the following ways:

- Increasing flexibility
- Strengthens muscles
- Improves balance
- Improves immune function
- Improves posture
- Improves lung function
- Improves joint health
- Improves function of the feet
- Increases control of bodily functions
- Strengthens bones
- Promotes weight loss

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- Relaxes the nervous system
- Improves function of the nervous system
- Improves brain function
- Lowers the levels of the stress hormone cortisol
- Lowers blood sugar
- Lowers blood pressure
- Improves bowel function
- Relieves pain
- Improves psychological health
- Leads to healthier habits
- Encourages involvement in own healing

Some of the specific health conditions that have been shown by scientific studies to be helped by yoga include:

- Alcoholism and other drug abuse
- Anxiety
- Asthma
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Emphysema
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Eating Disorders
- Epilepsy
- Heart Disease
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Menopausal issues
- Headaches
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Osteoporosis
- Pain (chronic)
- Post-Heart Attack rehabilitation
- Postoperative recovery
- Pregnancy
- Scoliosis
- Sinusitis

### **How Yoga Therapy Differs from Traditional Western Medicine**

Western medicine was traditionally concerned with alleviating symptoms of disease. Yoga is focused on optimizing every physical system in the body, as well as a person's emotional and spiritual wellbeing through a holistic approach. Rather than focusing solely on the physical issues related to any health problems, it looks at the mind body connection. Along with prescriptive asana based practices, yoga therapy incorporates specific mental practices, such as meditation and visualization, to improve health outcomes. Disease or challenges are not viewed in isolation, but as part of a larger whole. In yoga, the goal of this larger whole is not simply the absence of disease, but the optimization of well being. Yoga therapy also emphasizes focusing on the what we want our best overall health outcomes to be, rather than focusing on what we don't want. For example, if someone has chronic low back pain, in addition to practicing specific asanas to strengthen and stretch the right muscles, yoga therapy may also include creative visualization, giving the student a chance to imagine their back as strong, flexible and in perfect health. In this way, yoga therapy focuses on optimal health rather than on simply ridding the person of negative symptoms.

People often try to pit yoga therapy against western medicine. However, rather than being in competition with traditional western medicine, yoga can be a valuable complement to it. Someone may need surgery for a specific problem, and can then use yoga therapy to help themselves heal and regain their strength more quickly and to help limit the need for too many pain medications. Yoga allows you to take what you can use and then ignore the rest, and there are no side effects.

The remaining parts of this workbook will examine specific health conditions and offer specific yoga-based solutions to help.

### **Yoga for Back Pain**

Many people develop chronic back pain at some point in their lives that may persist for years. This is the type of back pain (not acute) that yoga therapy can most effectively treat. The normal s-curves of the spine are important to the structure of the body and also act as shock absorbers. When these curves get distorted through improper repetitive movements or through muscular imbalances, it can lead to chronic back pain and affect a person's overall health. Furthermore, different muscles in the back can be affected by muscles in the arms and legs. For example, if someone has tight hamstrings, they will pull on the bottom of the pelvis in a way that affects the lumbar spine – flattening out the normal curve of the lumbar spine. Over time, this pull can lead to chronic low back pain. By stretching the hamstrings, that pull and pain can be relieved.

Another type of back pain is associated with damaged or degenerating intervertebral disks. Without moving the spine in all directions, these disks can become more brittle and prone to problems. Back pain can also be associated with weak back muscles. Many people who work for much of the day slumped over a desk may find that their back muscles become weak, which causes discomfort as the muscles struggle to support the spine. Finally, stress can contribute to back pain – especially in the upper back and neck. As we feel stress, we tend to tense in our upper back and shoulders, which can make those muscles tired and sore by the end of the day.

### **How Yoga Helps**

Yoga can be helpful for back pain because you are able to gently stretch and strengthen the muscles in those areas without worsening any existing pain. Yoga can help balance the strength and flexibility of the muscles on either side of the body, which often are uneven from long-term unequal use, and can be the cause of chronic back pain. Yoga also works to correct improper movement patterns that may be causing pain.

The arms, legs, chest all attach to the spine via the shoulder girdle, pelvis and ribs. The weight of the head is perched on the end of the spine. Therefore, the spine affects and is affected by every movement the body makes. For example, if your head is not properly balanced, the natural curve of the neck becomes distorted. If the arms and legs don't have full range of motion, the spine must compensate by extra twisting and bending. Many people with back or neck pain suffer from imbalances of the flexors, extensors and rotators of the spine, arms and legs. An intelligent yoga program can bring these muscle groups back into balance.

According to a recent study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, yoga may be more effective for the treatment of low back pain than traditional exercise. The study, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, followed participants who

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suffered from chronic but not serious back pain. Participants either took yoga classes, attended therapeutic exercise classes, or practiced therapeutic back exercises from a book. At the end of 26 weeks, those who tried the yoga classes experienced the most improvement in back function and were most likely to have reduced their pain medication, and these benefits persisted for at least several months.

However, not all yoga programs will help with back pain. If you try a very vigorous yoga practice while having back pain and fail to listen to the signals from your body, back pain could actually get worse. It's important to take it slow, listen to signals from your body and practice yoga exercises that are appropriate for helping back pain.

There are a number of reasons that yoga is an effective way to relieve back pain and improve the overall health of your back.

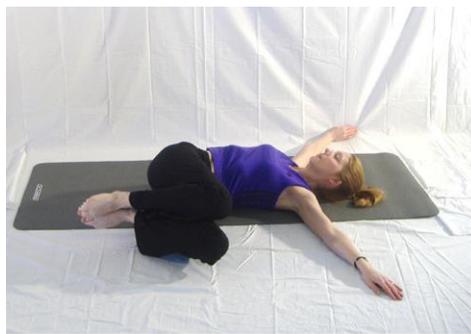
- 1) Yoga helps increase strength in very specific muscle groups and works to strengthen all major muscle groups that support the spine.
- 2) The stretching postures in yoga increase blood flow to the tissues that support the spine, improving the health of the intervertebral discs and muscles along the spine.
- 3) Yoga increases flexibility in your shoulders and hips, which decreases demands on your back, and yoga increases flexibility of the muscles in your back and along your spine, allowing your spine to rotate properly.
- 4) Yoga's focus on breathing and connecting breath with movement improves body awareness, making you more conscious of movements that may contribute to back pain.
- 5) The "spine lengthening" poses in yoga promote good posture and proper alignment of the vertebrae. When the spine lengthens, it naturally moves towards correct alignment. Having proper posture ensures that you are not placing undue stress upon your back.

### **Exercises for Lower Back and Back of Hip**

The following exercises are helpful for those with lower back strain or for chronic back pain. These exercises are not for anyone in acute or severe pain. If the pain is accompanied by other symptoms (numbness or weakness in the legs) have your student check with their doctor before doing yoga.

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### Knees side to side



How it helps: Stretches the spine, back, hips, and helps develop core strength. Relaxes area near sacrum.

#### Steps:

- Start lying on back
- Bring knees to chest
- Place arms out in T position with palms down
- Drop knees to right, back to center, then to the left and back to center

### Spinal Flexes (cat/cow)



How it helps: Improves spinal flexibility, relieves back tension

#### Steps:

- Start on all fours with knees about hip width apart and hands about shoulder width apart
- Check that wrists are placed directly under shoulders and knees are directly under hips
- On exhale, round your back, lifting up through abdomen and tuck chin to chest
- Inhale, drop belly, look up and draw shoulders back
- Repeat 6-8 times

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### Spinal balance



How it helps: Strengthens the long muscles along the spine. Strengthens low back muscles.

#### Steps:

- Start on all fours with wrists directly under shoulders and knees about hip width apart
- Look towards floor, keeping neck long
- Inhale, extend right arm and left leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Inhale, extend left arm and right leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Continue extending opposite arm and leg, 4-7 times on each side
- Keep extended arm and leg parallel to the floor, lengthening through the spine (not arching)
- After completing the flowing spinal balance, students can also hold the pose, breathing softly for 3-4 breaths while extending opposite arm and leg.

**Seated Twist (Bharadvajasana)**



How it helps: Opens the chest and shoulders. Improves spinal flexibility. Stimulates digestion

Steps:

- Start sitting
- Bend left knee, placing left foot next to right sitting bone
- Bend right knee, placing right foot to the outside of the left knee
- Place right hand just behind right hip
- Wrap left arm around right knee, hugging right thigh in close to body
- Make sure that the sitting bones on both sides are still pressing down into the floor.
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, twist to the right and look over the right shoulder
- On every inhale, sit a little taller. On every exhale, twist a little deeper
- Work into this position for 3-4 breaths
- Turn back to center and release left arm, extend both legs out.
- Repeat on the other side

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### **Cobra (Bhujangasana)**



How it helps: Improves back and spinal flexibility. Stretches chest. Improves low back strength.

#### Steps:

- Start lying in prone position (belly on floor)
- Place hands under shoulders
- Inhale, lift head and chest
- Exhale, press down through hands, but only so far that low belly remains on floor and elbows are bent
- Keep elbows in next to ribs
- Press shoulders down, away from ears (so shoulders are not hunched)
- Focus on a spot just passed the front of the mat, keeping neck long and relaxed
- Stay in this position for 4-5 soft breaths
- Exhale, slowly roll back down
- Counter with Child's Pose or Down Dog when you are done

#### Variation:

- Spread feet wider apart
- Press down through hands, lifting chest and belly and extending elbows as much as possible.
- Look over right shoulder, rolling onto left hip
- Look over left shoulder, rolling onto right hip
- Slowly roll back down

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### Bridge (Setu Bandhasana)

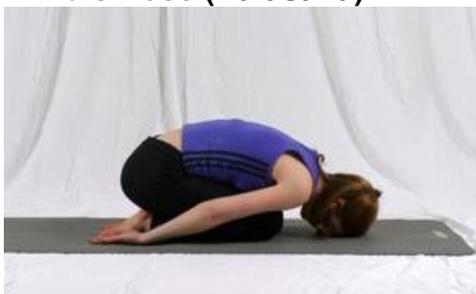


How it helps: Strengthens the erector spinae muscles in the midback and lower back. Strengthens muscles between the shoulder blades. Stretches chest and abdomen. Counters the effects of sitting for long periods of time.

#### Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up as you press down through hands and feet
- Exhale, begin rolling shoulders under, lifting up through chest and bringing hands towards each other and clasp hands together
- Check that knees stay fairly close together and that feet stay parallel
- Stay in this position for 3-4 long, deep breaths
- Slowly roll back down
- Bring knees to chest and rock side to side to relax the muscles of the back

### Child's Pose (Balasana)



How it helps: Gently stretches the back. Alleviates headache. Stretches the ankles, knees and hips.

#### Steps:

- Sit on heels
- Fold forward, bringing chest towards thighs and forehead towards floor
- Keep hands at sides with palms turned up
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths, breathing into back

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- Raise head and chest to come back to sitting

### **Locust with legs spread (then together) hands down**



How it helps: Strengthens large muscles of the back and buttocks. Strengthens hip rotator muscles.

#### Steps:

- Lie on stomach, inhale lift head and chest, and lift legs, keeping them spread.
- Exhale, bring knees together (keeping legs straight and up).
- Inhale, open legs wide.
- Exhale, lower to ground.
- Repeat.

### **Bridge**



How it helps: Strengthens muscles supporting hip joint. Strengthen erector spinae muscles in the mid and lower back. Develops core strength. Strengthens muscles between the shoulder blades. Improves flexibility of upper back and shoulders

#### Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up as you press down through hands and feet
- Exhale, begin rolling shoulders under, lifting up through chest and bringing hands towards each other and clasp hands together
- Check that knees stay fairly close together and that feet stay parallel
- Stay in this position for 3-4 long, deep breaths

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- Slowly roll back down
- Bring knees to chest and rock side to side to relax the muscles of the back

### Lying hamstring stretch



How it helps: Stretches hips, hamstrings and psoas muscles. Relieves sciatica and low backache. Relaxing – relieves stress

#### Steps:

- Start lying on back, with knees bent, feet on floor
- Bring right knee to chest
- Exhale, extend right leg, placing hands around right thigh, calf, or foot
- Gently pull leg towards head
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow breaths
- Repeat on other side

### Reclined spinal twist



How it helps: Stretches and strengthens muscles around the hip. Relieves lower backache and sciatica. Relieves indigestion.

#### Steps:

- Start lying on back, arms out in T position with palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Lift right leg and cross right leg over left leg
- Drop knees to the left and look towards the right hand
- Keep both shoulder blades down
- Stay in this position for 5-6 deep breaths
- Let the weight of legs pull you deeper into the stretch
- Bring knees back to center and uncross legs

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- Repeat on the other side

### **Happy Baby (stretches hips and low back)**

How it helps: Stretches hips and low back

Steps:

- Lie on back
- Raise feet in air and bend knees. Bring hands to feet and hold onto insteps of feet (or hold onto calves if can't reach feet).
- Gently pull knees towards armpits.

### **Knee to Chest**



How it helps: Stretches the hips and low back.

Steps:

- Start lying on your back
- Bring one knee towards your chest, wrapping your hands around your shin
- Draw that knee towards the armpit on the same side
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Repeat on the other side

### Mental Practices to Help Relieve Back Pain

Sometimes the inner commentary that we have about pain and our resistance to pain, makes that pain more difficult to bear. The following script can be used to help deal with pain. Try it out now and make note of your experience.

#### Pain Relief Script

“Sit in a comfortable but alert posture. Gently close your eyes. Take a couple of deep breaths, and, as you exhale, settle into your body, relaxing any obvious

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tension or holding. Then, breathing normally, bring your awareness to your body, sensing for a short while how the body presents itself to you. There is no particular way to be; just notice how you are at this moment.

Then, from within the body, as part of the body, become aware of your breathing, however it happens to appear. There is no right or wrong way to breathe while doing mindfulness practice; the key is to simply notice how it actually is right now. Let the breath breathe itself, allowing it to be received in awareness. Notice where in your body you feel the breath most clearly. This may be the abdomen rising and falling, the chest expanding and contracting, or the tactile sensations of the air passing through the nostrils or over the upper lip. Wherever the breath tends to appear most clearly, allow that area to be the home, the center of your attention.

When a strong physical sensation makes it difficult for you to stay with the breath, simply switch your awareness to this new predominant experience. The art of mindfulness is recognizing what is predominant and then sustaining your attention on whatever that is. As if your entire body was a sensing organ, sense or feel the physical experience; without any resistance to what is. Simply allow it to be there. Drop whatever commentary or evaluations you may have about the experience in favor of seeing and sensing the experience directly in and of itself. Carefully explore the particular sensations that make it up - hardness or softness, warmth or coolness, tingling, tenseness, pressure, burning, throbbing, lightness, and so on, without attaching any emotions to those descriptions. Simply notice as though you are a curious outside observer. Notice what happens to the sensations as you are mindful of them. Do they become stronger or weaker, larger or smaller, or do they stay the same?

If the physical sensation has disappeared or is no longer compelling, you can return to mindfulness of breathing until some other sensation calls your attention.”

Make any notes for yourself about this meditation.

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### Yoga for Neck Pain

Everyone gets a stiff neck sometimes. Often yoga can help. Of course, before your student does anything, it's important to know if the neck pain is the sign of something more serious. Make sure your student sees a doctor if:

- The neck pain persists for more than three days or keeps coming back.
- They suffer from neck pain after a fall or accident.
- Pain radiates from the neck down the arms or legs.
- Neck pain is associated with nausea or dizziness.

If you determine the student simply has a stiff neck, specific yoga exercises will help strengthen muscles and increase flexibility in the neck. Even gently exercising the neck helps lubricate and speed nutrients to the area. Here are a few exercises for the neck that are particularly helpful.

### Neck Stretches

Follow these steps when practicing neck stretches:

- Start in seated position (cross legged)
- Sit up tall, reaching up through the top of the head
- Draw shoulders back
- Exhale, drop chin towards chest, keeping elbows and shoulders pulled back. Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths. Inhale come back to center.
- Exhale, slowly drop right ear towards right shoulder. Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths. Inhale, raise head back to center.
- Look over each shoulder
- Look to each armpit

(These neck stretches help lengthen the muscles that connect the head to the neck and shoulders. As they lengthen, the space between the vertebrae will increase, making it easier to realign the head and shoulders. With more space between vertebrae, there is less stress on the cervical discs and facet joints.)

\*Note: No head rolls – Facet joints of the neck do not have ball and socket configuration like hip joint, so head rolling causes the edges of facet joints to grate against each other and can cause arthritic changes and muscle spasms.

### Half-Circles

Rolling your head around in a full circle—as some people do to "loosen" their neck muscles—can actually cause more damage, so avoid it. However, half circles in the front can be done instead. To do this, first drop your chin to your chest. Move your chin towards the right shoulder then back to your chest. Then move your chin towards the left shoulder and back towards the chest. Repeat this movement three to five times.

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### Shoulder Moves

Hunch your shoulders as high as possible, then let them relax completely. Repeat this movement 5-6 times. Next, roll your shoulders in a backwards circular motion (lifting shoulders up, squeezing them back, dropping them down and then bringing them forward again). Repeat this motion 5-6 times, then move your shoulders in a forward circular motion. All these shoulder movements help to relax the muscles in your neck and upper back. Many of us hunch our shoulders unconsciously much of the time. Notice how they feel when they are relaxed and try to keep them this way.

### Chest Expander

Stand up with your feet close together. Bring your hands behind your back and interlace your fingers. Tuck your tailbone in, so you don't arch your low back too much. As you inhale, lift your hands away from your tailbone. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and you lift your arms and stay in this position for 3-4 breaths. On your next exhale, lower your arms back down. This exercise helps strengthen the muscles in your upper back and relieve tension in your upper back and shoulders.

### Arm Lifts

Bring your arms straight out in front of you with your palms facing each other. As you inhale, reach your arms overhead, bringing your arms next to your ears, if you can do so without any pain. As you exhale, bring your arms back down in front of you. Repeat 4-8 times. This helps to relieve tension and build strength in the muscles in the upper back.

### Press It - Resistance Exercises



Muscular resistance exercises for the neck protect it from pain or injury by improving strength and flexibility. Place the palm of your hand against the back of your head and gently press while resisting with your head. Hold for a count of ten. Repeat with your palm on your forehead. Now place the palm of your right hand against the right side of your head and press, again resisting the movement with your head. Repeat on the left side. This exercise helps to strengthen the muscles in your neck and makes them less prone to strain.

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### Shoulder stretches

The following exercises are helpful in relieving tension in the neck, shoulders and upper back, and in developing flexibility in those areas.

Opposite elbow stretch: Hold opposite elbows at shoulder height, pull elbows to right, then left .

Shoulder circles: Arms at sides, move shoulders slowly in a backwards circular motion, then in a forwards circular motion (helps to warm up shoulder blades)

Arm Circles: Release shoulder joints. Do the circles slowly, reaching up on inhale, pressing down on exhale

### **Chest Expander**



How it helps: Stretches shoulders and chest. Strengthens spine. Relieves neck and shoulder tension.

### Steps:

- Begin in mountain pose
- Bring your hands behind your back, interlace fingers (hold a strap if you can't reach your hands together)
- Check your posture. Keep hips neutral.
- Inhale, roll your shoulders back, opening chest
- With fingers interlaced (or holding strap) raise hands away from tailbone
- Press your shoulders down, squeeze shoulder blades together
- Take 3-4 slow breaths in this position
- Pressing hips back, fold forward, bringing your head towards your knees
- Lift hands away from your tailbone, keeping your back straight
- Take 4-6 slow long breaths in this position
- Release your hands back down to your tailbone
- Slowly rise back up to standing

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### **Clock Face**

How it helps: Stretches the muscles in the shoulders and chest. Strengthens the muscles in the upper back.

Steps:

- Stand with your right side next to wall, reach up with right hand, arm straight.
- Try to place your right armpit next to the wall
- Slowly move hand down behind you, moving it towards a 3:00 position.
- Hold for a three slow breaths, then release.
- Do other side

### **Standing Twist – at wall**

How it helps: Stretches the shoulders and chest. Relieves tension in the upper back.



Steps:

- Stand with right side next to wall
- If you like, you can place your right foot on the seat of a chair in front of you
- Turn chest towards wall
- Place hands on wall at shoulder height.
- Press against the wall to feel the stretch in upper back (press more with right hand)
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Repeat on other side

### Camel



How it helps: Lengthens pectoral (chest) muscles and the muscles between the ribs, improving the carriage of head and upper body. Also strengthens upper back muscles.

#### Steps:

- Start in a kneeling position with knees about hip width apart and your hands on your hips, elbows back
- Point feet straight back with top of the feet on the floor
- Inhale, stretch up through the top of your head
- Exhale, press hips forward as you arch back and head falls back
- If possible, students can place hands one at a time on each heel, but only if they can keep their hips pressed forward (hips directly over knees)
- Allow the chest and throat to fully open
- Take 4-5 deep breaths through the nose in this position.
- Slowly come back up, bringing one hand up at a time
- Sit back on heels and rest in child's pose (chest dropped to thighs) for 3-4 breaths
- Come back to kneeling and repeat on other side

### Hare/Rabbit Pose



How it helps: Stretches the upper back, neck and shoulders. Strengthens the hips. Relieves tension.

#### Steps:

- Start in Child's Pose
- Place hands around the soles of the feet
- Inhale, lift hips, while keeping hands on feet, trying to bring knees to a right angle
- Exhale, tuck chin to chest, bringing the top of the head to the floor
- Continue to actively press up through the hips to stretch more through the shoulders and upper back
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow breaths
- Exhale, slowly bring hips down, sitting back on heels – back to Child's Pose

### Thread the Needle



How it helps: Stretches the shoulders and upper back. Relieves tension in the upper back.

#### Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Lift your right hand off the floor and thread it between your knees and your left hand.
- Stay in this position for 5-6 breaths
- To go further into the position, you can either press down through your left hand, or wrap your left hand behind your back
- Repeat on the other side

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### Cow's Face



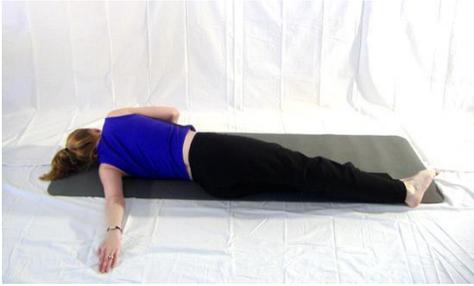
How it helps: Improves shoulder flexibility, relieves tension in shoulders and upper back. Improves posture.

#### Steps:

- Start in kneeling position, sitting back on heels
- Reach right arm overhead, then bend right elbow, dropping hand down the back
- Exhale, bring left arm behind back, then reach left hand up the back towards the right hand
- Clasp hands together. If hands don't reach each other, use a strap to hold between the two hands
- Breathe deeply through the nose. Stay in this position 4-5 breaths
- Release hands
- Repeat on other side

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### Prone Twist



How it helps: Relieves tension in upper back and shoulders. Improves flexibility of the chest and shoulders. Improves spinal flexibility

#### Steps:

- Start lying in prone (belly down) position on mat
- Bring arms out to T position with palms down
- Roll onto left side, keeping left arm straight out behind you and bringing right hand next to chest
- Relax head and neck to floor and press down with right hand to twist more
- To go further into the twist, bend right knee, placing right foot on floor just behind left leg
- Let belly go soft and breathe fully, breathing into the twist
- Stay in this position for 3-4 slow deep breaths
- Slowly roll back onto belly, bringing both arms back to T position
- Repeat on other side

### **Yoga for Knee Problems**

Of all the joints in the body, knees may be the most susceptible to pain or injury. Our knees are subject to numerous stresses as we go about our daily lives, walking, lifting, kneeling. When we participate in high impact activities, such as jogging, skiing or basketball, we're putting more much pressure on the knee as we twist, turn, jump, stop and start. Pain in the knee is usually a direct result of these daily and extra stresses, either from injury or simply from excessive wear and tear over time.

Cartilage is found in the knee in three places: under the kneecap, on the ends of the femur and tibia, and in the joint itself. Excessive wearing of the cartilage can be caused by trauma or from overuse of the knee. Cartilage can also be tom by forcefully rotating the knee beyond its normal range of motion.

When tendons are injured and become inflamed, it is known as tendonitis. It is usually caused by repetitive motion that overstresses the tendon. For the knees, this is usually jumping or running.

When cartilage of the knee degenerates and gradually wears away, it is known as osteoarthritis. It's usually caused by excess stress on the joint over an extended period of time.

Treatments for knee injuries can involve pain medications, surgery, physical therapy, exercise programs, applying ice, wearing a brace, or limiting activity, depending on the person and the nature of the injury. Yoga can be helpful for people with chronic knee problems or for those who have had knee surgery, once they get their doctor's approval. Yoga can help restore flexibility to the joint and strength to the muscles surrounding the knee.

When working with a student with knee problems, it's good to remember that many people with knee problems come from a competitive sports background, and may have a "no pain, no gain" attitude towards exercise and towards yoga. However, when dealing with a sensitive area, such as the knee, it's important to let your students know that they need to take it slow and relax, and to stop if they feel any pain.

### **Yoga Exercises for Knees**

The following yoga exercises can be helpful in rehabilitating injured knees. If your student has had a serious injury or is in acute pain, make sure they talk with their physician before practicing yoga. Ideally, students should do most of the following exercises twice per day until the condition improves. Then, they can cut back to four times per week.

### **Modified locust**

How it helps: Strengthens your hamstrings and the muscles that support the back of your knee and your buttocks.

Steps:

- Lie on your belly with your legs slightly apart and the tops of your feet on the floor.
- Place your forearms on the floor in front of you, with your elbows underneath your shoulders.
- Inhale, raise your chest to a comfortable level
- Then raise your right leg as high as is comfortable
- As you exhale, bend your right knee, bringing your heel towards your buttocks.
- Inhale, straighten the right leg again.
- Continue flexing and extending your right leg 6 to 8 times
- Repeat with the left leg.

### **Seated leg raises**

How it helps: Strengthens your thighs, the deep hip flexors (psoas), and the muscles of the legs that support the knees.



Steps:

- Sit on the floor with your legs extended straight out in front of you – make sure you are sitting up tall
- Place a rolled yoga mat or folded blanket under your knees
- Place the palms of your hands on the floor behind you
- Exhale, tighten your right thigh and flex your right foot, lifting your foot just off the floor. Stay in this position for 5-8 seconds.
- On your next exhale, lift your right leg until the heel of your right foot is just above the toes of your left foot. Hold for another 5-8 seconds
- Slowly lower your right leg back to the floor.
- Repeat with the left leg

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### **Knees to chest (modified)**

How it helps: Flexes the hips and knees and promotes circulation to your lower body.

Steps:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent
- Bring your knees to your chest and place your hands on the back of your thighs – between your thighs and calves
- As you inhale, move your knees away from your chest, but keep your feet off the floor
- Exhale, bring your knees back to your chest
- Repeat this movement about 7-10 times.

### **Bent knee hamstring stretch**

How it helps: This stretch loosens the hamstrings and flexes the hips.



Steps:

- Lie on your back with knees bent and feet on the floor
- Bring your right knee towards your chest and hold the back of your right thigh or place a strap around the sole of your right foot
- Inhale, extend your right leg as high as is comfortable.
- Exhale, return your leg to the bent position.
- Keep your head and hips on the floor
- Repeat the leg extension 4-5 times
- Lower your foot to the floor and repeat on the other side

### **Open and close reclined bound angle**

How it helps: Stretches and tones the inner thighs (adductors) and the groin. Helps bring circulation to the pelvis area and low back.

Steps:

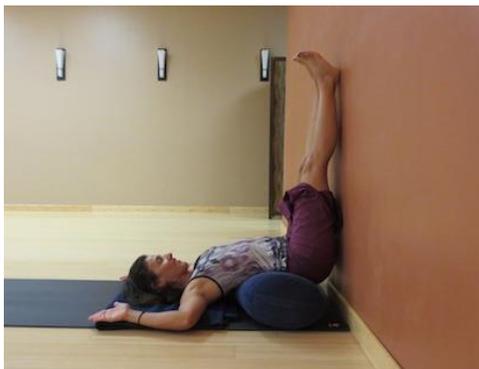
- Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor
- Place your hands on the floor with your palms up
- Inhale, slowly open your knees wide, bringing the soles of your feet together
- Exhale, slowly bring your knees back together

## Yoga for Specific Issues

- Continue opening and closing your knees 4 or 5 more times

### **Legs on a Chair (or up a wall)**

How it helps: This relaxation technique calms the nervous system, while increasing blood flow to the feet, legs, hips, and lower back.



### Steps:

- Place a chair in an area where you have room to lie down in front of it.
- Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor.
- Lift your feet off the floor and lay your calves on the chair seat, with the front edge of the chair seat tucked into the backs of your knees.
- Use deep slow nose breathing for 15-20 breaths.
- Breathe normally and stay in this position for another minute or two.
- Slowly come back to sitting.

### **Yoga for Arthritis**

About 42 million Americans suffer from some form of arthritis. And 85 percent of people over age 65 show evidence of arthritis on x-ray, with at least half of those experiencing symptoms. Arthritis has everything to do with movement, which is one reason that yoga therapy can be effective in helping it. If someone has arthritis, they tend to reduce their movement in those joints, and when the joints aren't moved enough they become more stiff and pain increases. However, the pain of arthritis can be relieved through the right kind of movement, which then leads to more movement and less pain.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. Osteoarthritis is caused by repetitive overuse or injury causing cartilage to be destroyed, leaving the ends of the bone unprotected. The joint then loses mobility and becomes painful. You can get osteoarthritis in the joints of your fingers, feet, hips, knees or spine.

Rheumatoid arthritis is the second most common type of arthritis. An autoimmune disorder causes your own antibodies to attack perfectly healthy joint tissues, causing extreme swelling and pain. Unlike osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis causes swelling in many joints and locations, not just a specific area.

Arthritis affects not only the joints, but also the muscles near those joints. Because people use the joint less due to pain, the muscles near that joint are used less and become weaker and stiffer. Relief is only possible with proper exercise to move the joints and rebuild the muscles. Also, just because someone has achy joints doesn't necessarily mean they have arthritis. Overuse can result in other conditions such as tendinitis, bursitis, or carpal tunnel syndrome.

There is no current cure for arthritis. However, yoga can help slow it down and ease the symptoms enough to relieve much of the pain.

Many studies have shown that the best way to prevent and treat arthritis is to keep moving. Most physicians now recommend a program of flexibility, strengthening and endurance exercises to decrease pain and slow the arthritic process. Yoga provides exactly the kind of movement arthritic joints need because there is no bouncing, no impact and no pushing beyond your limits. Yoga is also helpful for rheumatoid arthritis because studies have shown that it may become worse with stress. Calming the mind and relaxing the body in yoga may reduce the pain of arthritis and promote healing of arthritis.

### **Yoga Exercises for Arthritis**

For those with arthritis, yoga exercises should focus on the specific joints affected. Below are some exercises for the most common joints affected by arthritis. Notice that for arthritis it is usually best to keep the joint moving, rather than holding a position for too long.

#### **Seated alternate arm raises**

How it helps: This exercise can be energizing while improving the range of motion in the shoulder joints.

Steps:

- Start in standing or seated position
- Let your arms hang at your sides with your palms facing backwards
- Inhale, raise your right arm forward and up overhead until it is vertical
- Exhale, bring your right arm back down to the starting position
- Inhale, raise your left arm forward and up overhead until it is vertical
- Exhale, bring your left arm back down to the starting position
- Repeat this movement 8-10 more times, alternating arms

#### **Shoulder rolls**

How it helps: Improves range of movement in the shoulder joints and the shoulder girdle.

Steps:

- Start in a standing or seated position.
- Let your arms hang at your sides with the palms turned back.
- Inhale, roll the shoulders up and back
- Exhale, drop and press your shoulders down.
- Repeat 4-6 times
- Repeat in the opposite directions (up, forward, then down)

#### **Hand clenching**

How it helps: This exercise increases blood flow and improves the range of motion in your hand, wrist, and finger joints.

Steps:

- Start in a seated position
- Keeping your right arm straight, bring it out in front of you at shoulder height (parallel to the floor) and palm facing in.
- Make a fist and tuck the thumb into the fist
- Inhale, open the hand and stretch your fingers and thumb as wide and straight as possible.
- Exhale, make a fist again with the thumb tucked in.
- Repeat 8 to 10 times.
- Repeat with the left hand.

### **Wrist bending**

How it helps: It improves range of motion in the wrist.

Steps:

- Start in seated position
- Bring your right arm straight out in front of you at shoulder height, so your arm is parallel to the floor
- Turn the palm of your right hand down, facing the floor.
- Inhale, bend your right hand at the wrist backwards as though you were pressing your hand against a wall.
- Exhale, bend your hand down at the wrist until you feel a light pull up your forearm.
- Repeat this movement 6-8 times
- Repeat with the left hand.

### **Wrist-joint rotation**

How it helps: Improves the range of motion of the wrists.

Steps:

- Start in standing or seated position
- Bring your right arm and hand up in front of you to shoulder height, parallel to the floor.
- Make a fist with your thumb tucked inside and your palm facing down.
- Focus on your breath as you rotate your right wrist in clockwise circles 6-8 times.
- Change direction and rotate the wrist counterclockwise 6-8 times
- Repeat with the other wrist.

### **Seated ankle bending**

How it helps: It loosens up the ankles and feet, improving circulation and flexibility.

Steps:

- Sit on the floor with your legs extended in front of you.
- Place your hands on the floor behind you to help you sit up tall and for support.
- Inhale, flex your right foot back towards you, as far as is comfortable
- Exhale, point the toes of your right foot (forward and down)
- Repeat 8-10 times.
- Repeat with the other foot.

### **Seated ankle rotation**

How it helps: It increases ankle flexibility and blood flow to the area.

Steps:

- Sit on the floor with your legs extended in front of you.
- Place a yoga mat or folded blanket under your knees.
- Place your hands on the floor behind you to help you sit up tall and for support.
- Flex your right foot back toward you, then slowly rotate your ankle clockwise 8-10 times.
- Reverse it and rotate your right ankle counterclockwise.
- Repeat this with your left ankle.

### **Hip Rotation (Leg Circles)**



How it helps: It increases blood flow to the hip joint and improves hip flexibility and range of motion.

Steps:

- Start lying on your left side, supporting your head with your left hand
- Lift your right leg and begin making clockwise circles with your right leg
- Include a variety of smaller and larger circles
- Then make counterclockwise circles with your right leg (8-10 times)
- Turn onto your right side and repeat the circles with your left leg.

### **Legs on a Chair**

How it helps: This relaxation technique calms the nervous system, while increasing blood flow to the feet, legs, hips, and lower back.

Steps:

- Place a chair in an area where you have room to lie down in front of it.
- Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor.
- Lift your feet off the floor and lay your calves on the chair seat, with the front edge of the chair seat tucked into the backs of your knees.
- Use deep slow nose breathing for 15-20 breaths.
- Breathe normally and stay in this position for another minute or two.
- Slowly come back to sitting.

## **Yoga for the Respiratory System (Allergies, Asthma)**

The respiratory system consists of the nose, mouth, sinuses, and lungs, plus the various air passages (including the larynx, trachea, and bronchi). Its main purpose is to take in air, extract oxygen and get rid of carbon dioxide. (152)

Everyone's respiratory system gets compromised sometimes. The most common problems are allergies, asthma and the common cold. A good diet, exercise and not smoking can be helpful in avoiding common respiratory problems, and yoga can be an effective addition to these things.

Allergies affect more than 20 percent of the U.S. population. Allergy attacks happen when the immune system goes into overdrive. When a substance that is normally harmless causes your immune system to react as if the substance were harmful, you have an allergic reaction. The body goes on attack to protect itself from danger.

Asthma is a constriction of the air passages within the lungs. Airways become inflamed and then go on to become narrowed. It is the narrow airways that cause the wheezing sound and make it difficult to breathe. When people have an asthma attack, it can feel like the lungs are burning or that they are choking. Of course, during an attack, medicine is the best treatment. But, yoga can be particularly helpful for someone who suffers from asthma because it centers on deep focused breathing and tension relief, which can help improve lung capacity and reduce the fear of an asthma attack. A number of studies have indicated that practicing yoga can result in better heart and lung function, and considerably less use of inhalers and other medication. A regular yoga practice helps to improve lung capacity and exchange air more efficiently, which allows a person to feel less short of breath.

One of the reasons yoga can help respiratory ailments is the stress factor. Allergies, asthma and colds all happen more frequently and with more severity when a person is under stress. Studies have also shown that exercise reinforces the immune system by increasing the number and strength of immune cells and slowing the release of stress hormones. The strength of the immune system is one of the most important determinants of whether you will catch a cold, and it affects your susceptibility to allergies and asthma attacks.

### **Yoga Exercises for Allergies and Asthma**

Various pranayama are particularly helpful for allergies and asthma. It's also helpful to practice postures that stretch the sides or front of the chest.

#### **Viloma Pranayama**

How it helps: Strengthens the respiratory system. Relaxes the body

Steps:

- Lie straight and relaxed on your back. Close your eyes and lie quietly for a minute.
- Exhale completely until lungs feel empty.
- Inhale for 2 or 3 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Without exhaling, inhale again for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Repeat this process until the lungs are completely full. One complete inhalation may include 4 to 5 pauses, but there should be no strain throughout the practice.
- Hold the breath for a second or two.
- Exhale for 2 or 3 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Without inhaling, exhale again for 2 seconds, then hold the breath for 2 seconds
- Repeat this process until the lungs feel completely empty. One complete exhalation may include 4 to 5 pauses.
- Repeat the inhale and exhale 3-4 more times.
- After your last exhalation, gradually relax your abdomen.

#### **Shining Skull Breath (Kapalabhati Pranayama)**

How it helps: Strengthens the diaphragm. Increases energy. Relieves congestion. Removes toxins.

Steps:

- Exhale completely, pressing all the air out through the nose
- Allow the inhalation to happen automatically – let the air simply fill the void left by the exhalation
- Then, pull the abdominal muscles in quickly forcing the air out through the nostrils in a quick thrust
- Again, allow the inhalation to happen automatically.
- Pull the abdominal muscles in quickly, forcing the air out through the nostrils
- All your effort should be spent on the exhalation
- Repeat 8-12 times

### **Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama)**

How it helps: Clears sinuses. Brings the two sides of the body back into balance.

Steps:

- Bring the right hand to your nose
- Place the right thumb gently on the right nostril and the right pinky and ring finger on the left nostril. Place the index finger and middle finger just above the bridge of the nose
- Exhale completely
- Block the right nostril with the right thumb, inhale left (inhale slowly to count of four)
- Switch, releasing the right nostril and blocking left nostril, exhale right (slow, full exhalation)
- Inhale right (full inhale to slow count of four or five)
- Switch, releasing the left nostril, block the right nostril, exhale left, inhale left
- Switch, releasing the right nostril, block the left nostril, exhale right, inhale right
- Continue this pattern of breathing, switching the side that is blocked after each inhalation
- Repeat for 8-10 breaths
- Make sure you are inhaling and exhaling slowly and completely

### **Alternate Arm Raises**

How it helps: Increases circulation and stretches through the sides of the body.

Steps:

- You can start standing
- Place your hands in prayer position at your heart.
- Inhale, reach your right hand up, while you press your left hand down.
- Exhale, bring your hands back to your heart.
- Inhale, reach your left hand up, while you press your right hand down.
- Exhale, bring your hands back to your heart.
- Repeat this motion as you inhale and exhale for 10-15 more time.

### Crescent Stretch



How it helps: Stretches waist and sides of body. Improves circulations. Opens the chest.

#### Steps:

- Start standing with your feet parallel and close together
- Inhale, raise your arms overhead, interlacing your fingers and stretching your arms up as far as possible
- Exhale, reach your hands to right, as you press your hips to left
- Still reaching to right, open your chest towards ceiling, and take 3 slow, smooth breaths
- Inhale, reach your hands back up towards ceiling, fingers still interlaced
- Exhale, reach hands to left, press hips to right (3 breaths here)
- Bring your arms back to center.
- Release your arms to the sides and shake them out.

### Spinal Flexes (cat/cow)



How it helps: Improves spinal flexibility, relieves back tension

#### Steps:

- Start on all fours with knees about hip width apart and hands about shoulder width apart
- Check that wrists are placed directly under shoulders and knees are directly under hips
- Exhale, round your back, lifting up through abdomen, tuck chin to chest
- Inhale, drop belly, look up and draw shoulders back
- Repeat 6-8 times

## **Yoga for High Blood Pressure and Heart Disease**

The circulatory system consists of the heart and the blood vessels. The heart pumps blood into the arteries, which supply the body with oxygenated blood and nutrients. The blood returns from the organs back to the heart through the veins. The circulatory system works well when the heart pumps efficiently. However, many times the heart cannot effectively pump blood and problems arise. These problems include hypertension and coronary artery disease. Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, affects about 25 percent of all American adults, and about half of those over age sixty. Many studies have shown that the pervasiveness of high blood pressure is mainly due to the U.S. lifestyle of too much salt, fat, cholesterol, and alcohol consumption, as well as too much stress and not enough exercise. When blood pressure rises above normal, it can cause damage to many of the body's organs.

Coronary artery disease is the most common form of heart disease. It results when the coronary arteries are clogged with plaque. The clogging of the arteries happens when the arterial walls are damaged by high blood pressure, by toxic substances entering the body (i.e. cigarettes, fatty foods), or by excess adrenaline flowing through the bloodstream because of stress.

Many studies have established the benefits of using yoga to treat high blood pressure. One of the first studies done in 1969 showed that the daily use of just one pose (savasana) significantly reduced blood pressure after only three weeks. Several studies have shown that the stress reduction through yoga helps lower blood pressure.

Dr. Herbert Benson explained yoga's effect on the circulatory system in his book, *The Relaxation Response*. His book focused on the physiology of our relaxation, and he found that the relaxation breathing we practice in yoga stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for telling our bodies to relax. This in turn reduces the heart rate and the intensity of the heart pump, which lowers blood pressure.

### **Yoga Exercises for Hypertension**

Along with relaxation breathing, gentle forward folds can be helpful in slowing down the heartrate and, eventually, decreasing blood pressure. Below are some examples of breathing exercises and yoga postures that can help lower blood pressure.

### **Cobbler's Pose**



How it helps: Opens hips. Relieves stress and tension.

Steps:

- From sitting, bring soles of feet together
- Press feet forward until legs make a diamond shape
- Hold onto shins or ankles and pull shoulders back
- Exhale, fold forward, bringing chest towards feet
- Relax head and neck, and drop elbows out to the sides
- Stay in this position for 4-5 long, slow breaths
- Slowly raise head and chest and come back to sitting

### **Child's Pose (Balasana)**



How it helps: Relieves stress and anxiety. Gently stretches the back. Alleviates headache.

Steps:

- Sit on heels
- Fold forward, bringing chest towards thighs and forehead towards floor
- Keep hands at sides with palms turned up
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths, breathing into back
- Raise head and chest to come back to sitting

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### Reclined Spinal Twist



How it helps: Relieves tension and stress. Improves digestion and circulation. Relieves lower backache and sciatica.

#### Steps:

- Start lying on back, arms out in T position with palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Lift right leg and cross right leg over left leg
- Drop knees to the left and look towards the right hand
- Keep both shoulder blades down (may need to scoot to the side to keep shoulder blades down)
- Stay in this position, breathing deeply into the open space on the side of the body
- Let the weight of legs pull you deeper into the stretch
- Bring knees back to center and uncross legs
- Repeat on the other side

### Knees to Chest or Legs Up a Wall



How it helps: Slows down heart rate. Improves circulation.

Note that while gentle inversions can be helpful for people with high blood pressure, more intense inversions are not appropriate.

#### Steps

- Have students begin with their knees to chest
- They can stay here, or place hands at sides with palms down
- Straighten legs, pressing the soles of the feet up towards the ceiling or use wall for support behind the legs.
- Breathe fully through the nose, staying in this position for 4-6 breaths

### **Complete Yogic Breath (full yogic breathing)**

This is a slow, deep breathing that fills the lungs, so that the abdomen, ribcage and upper chest expand on the inhale and relax back into place on the exhale.

How it helps: Exercises and aerates the lungs. Quiets the mind. Deepens relaxation. Increases circulation.

#### Steps:

- Exhale completely
- On inhale, first the abdomen expands with air, then the rib cage and finally, the chest (the inhale should feel like a wave of air rolling up the front of the body)
- Exhaling completely, allow muscles to relax and slightly drop
- Repeat 8-10 times

### **Viloma Pranayama**

How it helps: Strengthens the respiratory system. Relaxes the body and slows heart rate.

#### Steps:

- Lie straight and relaxed on your back. Close your eyes.
- Exhale completely until lungs feel empty.
- Inhale for 2 or 3 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Without exhaling, inhale again for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Repeat this process until the lungs are completely full. One complete inhalation may include 4 to 5 pauses, but there should be no strain throughout the practice.
- Hold the breath for a second or two.
- Exhale for 2 or 3 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Without inhaling, exhale again for 2 seconds, then hold the breath for 2 seconds
- Repeat this process until the lungs feel completely empty. One complete exhalation may include 4 to 5 pauses.
- Repeat the inhale and exhale 3-4 more times.
- After your last exhalation, gradually relax your abdomen.

### **Savasana**

Savasana is helpful in relieving stress and lowering the heart rate and blood pressure. Practicing savasana once a day can reduce blood pressure for those with high blood pressure.

## **Yoga for the Digestive System**

The digestive system is the journey your food takes from the time it enters your mouth until its waste products come out the other end. It consists of your mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestines (where the nutrients of food are absorbed), and the large intestine (colon).

The most common problems that can occur within the digestive system include: irritable bowel syndrome and heartburn. Nearly one out of six Americans experience irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). IBS is a disorder of the intestines that leads to crampy pain, gassiness, bloating, constipation or diarrhea. It is often called a functional disorder because there is no inflammation or sign of disease when the intestines are examined. It should not be confused with ulcerative colitis, which is a different disorder that is more severe and involves inflammation of the colon. In people with IBS, certain foods may trigger intestinal spasms that can lead to cramps, diarrhea, or constipation. Most people with IBS are able to control their symptoms through diet, exercise, stress management, or medication.

Heartburn or acid indigestion (otherwise known as gastroesophageal reflux disease) is experienced at least once a month by about 20 percent of all Americans. The disorder affects the lower esophageal sphincter. In normal digestion, this sphincter opens to allow food to pass into the stomach, and closes to prevent food and acidic stomach juices from flowing back into the esophagus. Reflux occurs when the sphincter is weak or relaxes inappropriately, allowing the stomach's contents and acid to flow back up.

## **Yoga Exercises for the Digestive System**

The best yoga exercises for the digestive system are those that include gentle folding and twisting motions. These postures help to soothe, stretch and move different parts of the digestive track, so it can function at its best. The following yoga postures and exercises can be helpful in developing a more healthy digestive system.

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### Spinal Flexes (cat/cow)



How it helps: Improves spinal flexibility, massages the digestive system.

#### Steps:

- Start on all fours with knees about hip width apart and hands about shoulder width apart
- Check that wrists are placed directly under shoulders and knees are directly under hips
- On exhale, round your back, lifting up through abdomen and tuck chin to chest
- Inhale, drop belly, look up and draw shoulders back
- Repeat 6-8 times

### Uddiyana Bandha (Navel Lock)

How it helps: It exercises and massages the organs of the digestive system.

#### Steps

- Start in a standing position with feet a little wider than hip width
- Bend your knees, placing your hands just above your knees on your thighs
- Inhale deeply, then exhale completely (exhaling all your air out)
- As you hold your breath after exhalation, pull your stomach in and up
- Hold your stomach in and up for a few seconds, then drop your stomach and let your muscles completely relax (while still holding your breath)
- Once your muscles are relaxed, inhale fully, and take a few slow deep breaths
- Repeat this process 3-6 times

### Seated Twist (Bharadvajasana)



How it helps: Opens the chest and shoulders. Improves spinal flexibility. Stimulates digestion

Steps:

- Start sitting
- Bend left knee, placing left foot next to right sitting bone
- Bend right knee, placing right foot to the outside of the left knee
- Place right hand just behind right hip
- Wrap left arm around right knee, hugging right thigh in close to body
- Make sure that the sitting bones on both sides are still pressing down into the floor.
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, twist to the right and look over the right shoulder
- On every inhale, sit a little taller. On every exhale, twist a little deeper
- Work into this position for 3-4 breaths
- Turn back to center and release left arm, extend both legs out.
- Repeat on the other side

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### Seated forward fold (with or without using a bolster)



How it helps: Stretches the calves and hamstrings. Improves digestion. Provides gentle massage for the digestive organs. Stretches the low back

#### Steps:

- Start sitting with legs extended out in front of you
- Scoot back through the hips, so you are sitting on the front part of your sitting bones, and flex your feet.
- You can bend your knees to bring your thighs to your belly, or place a bolster on your thighs, so it is pressing against your belly.
- Exhale, begin stretching your legs straight again as you fold forward. Make sure your belly stays in contact with the bolster or with your thighs.
- Breathe deeply through the nose, breathing into your belly
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Inhale, come back up to sitting. Repeat one more time.

### Knee to chest (or armpit) with Belly Breathing



How it helps: Stretches the hips and low back. Helps stimulate the colon.

#### Steps:

- Start lying on your back
- Bring one knee towards your chest, wrapping your hands around your shin
- Draw that knee towards the armpit on the same side
- Breathe deeply into the belly, so your belly presses against your thigh as you inhale.
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Repeat on the other side

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### Reclined spinal twist



How it helps: Provides a gentle massage to the digestive organs.

#### Steps:

- Lie on your back with arms out in T-position
- Bring your knees towards your chest
- Drop your knees to the right, while looking towards your left hand
- Scoot your shoulders, so both shoulder blades stay on the floor to increase the twist
- Stay in this position for about 5-6 slow breaths
- Repeat on the other side

### **Yoga for Headaches**

Headache is one of the most universal problems. Most everyone gets a headache every now and then. However, there are many people who suffer from more severe migraines or who experience daily headaches. While many systems of the body can be involved in headaches, it is the nervous system that is primarily responsible for the pain.

While tension headaches are the most frequently occurring type of headache, their cause is not known. The most likely cause is contraction of the muscles that cover the skull. When the muscles covering the skull are stressed, they may spasm and cause pain. Common sites include the base of the skull where the trapezius muscles of the neck inserts, the temple where muscles that assist the jaw to move are located, and the forehead.

There is little research to confirm the exact cause of tension headaches. Tension headaches occur because of physical or emotional stress placed on the body. Physical stress that may cause tension headaches include difficult and prolonged manual labor, or sitting at a desk or computer for long periods of time. Emotional stress may also cause tension headaches by causing the muscles surrounding the skull to contract.

Headache is defined as pain in the head or upper neck. It is one of the most common locations of pain in the body and has many causes.

Headaches have numerous causes, and in 2007 the International Headache Society agreed upon an updated classification system for headache. Because so many people suffer from headaches, and because treatment is sometimes difficult, the new classification system allows health care practitioners to understand a specific diagnosis more completely to provide better and more effective treatment regimens.

There are three major categories of headaches:  
primary headaches,  
secondary headaches, and  
cranial neuralgias, facial pain, and other headaches

Primary headaches include migraine, tension, and cluster headaches, as well as a variety of other less common types of headache.

Tension headaches are the most common type of primary headache; as many as 90% of adults have had or will have tension headaches. Tension headaches are more common among women than men. A tension headache refers to a kind of mild to moderate dull headache accompanied by a feeling of tightness in the muscles of head, scalp, forehead, temples, shoulders and neck. Unlike a migraine headache, a tension headache involves both sides of the head, is

## Yoga for Specific Issues

pressing and steady instead of throbbing and is generally not incapacitating. Tension headaches can be classified as episodic or chronic, depending upon how often they occur (15 days a month or more often). Like migraines, tension headaches are often times triggered by stress. Tension headaches can be triggered by: physical stress and the accompanying muscle fatigue (e.g., due to poor posture, overexertion and inadequate rest), mental stress (e.g., during exams), emotional trauma, hunger indigestion/gas and many more.

Migraine headaches are the second most common type of primary headache. An estimated 28 million people in the United States (about 12% of the population) will experience migraine headaches. Migraine headaches affect children as well as adults. Before puberty, boys and girls are affected equally by migraine headaches, but after puberty, more women than men are affected. An estimated 6% of men and up to 18% of women will experience a migraine headache.

Cluster headaches are a rare type of primary headache, affecting 0.1% of the population. An estimated 85% of cluster headache sufferers are men. The average age of cluster headache sufferers is 28-30 years of age, although headaches may begin in childhood.

Primary headaches affect quality of life. Some people have occasional headaches that resolve quickly, while others are debilitated. However, all primary headaches - tension, migraine, and cluster headaches - are not life-threatening.

Secondary headaches are those that are due to an underlying structural problem in the head or neck. There are numerous causes of this type of headache ranging from bleeding in the brain, tumor, or meningitis and encephalitis. Cranial neuralgia describes a group of headaches that occur because the nerves in the head and upper neck become inflamed and are the source of the head pain. These types of headaches are much more rare than primary headaches.

### **Yoga Exercises for Headache**

Since tension headaches are basically due to muscle tension, yoga can offer a perfect solution to treat them because yoga exercises are meant to relieve physical muscle tension as well as mental tension. Yoga exercises that involve full stretching of the upper back, neck, shoulders and the chest are ideal. They help alleviate the pain by releasing the muscular tension in the neck and shoulder regions. Gentle forward folds and placing gentle pressure on the forehead can also be helpful by increasing blood circulation to the head and stimulating the nervous system.

### Chest Expander



How it helps: Stretches shoulders and chest. Relieves neck and shoulder tension. Reduces tension headache.

#### Steps:

- Begin in mountain pose
- Bring your hands behind your back, interlace fingers (hold a strap if you can't reach your hands together)
- Check your posture. Keep hips neutral.
- Inhale, roll your shoulders back, opening chest
- With fingers interlaced (or holding strap) raise hands away from tailbone
- Press your shoulders down, squeeze shoulder blades together
- Take 3-4 slow breaths in this position
- Pressing hips back, fold forward, bringing your head towards your knees
- Lift hands away from your tailbone, keeping your back straight
- Take 4-6 slow long breaths in this position
- Release your hands back down to your tailbone
- Slowly rise back up to standing

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### Seated forward fold (with a bolster)



How it helps: Stretches the calves and hamstrings. Stretches the low back. Relieves tension and helps headache.

#### Steps:

- Start sitting with legs extended out in front of you
- Scoot back through the hips, so you are sitting on the front part of your sitting bones, and flex your feet.
- Place a bolster on your thighs, so it is pressing against your belly.
- Exhale, fold forward, placing your forehead on the bolster.
- Breathe deeply through the nose, relaxing more as you exhale.
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Inhale, come back up to sitting. Repeat one more time.

### Prayer squat with thumbs to forehead



How it helps: Opens the hips. Improves balance. Quiets the mind and relieves headache. Brings awareness to the body and breath

#### Steps:

- Start standing with feet a little wider than hip width apart and turned out
- With hands on your hips or out in front of you, squat down keeping your hips off the floor
- Keep your heels on the floor (or pressing towards the floor)
- Bring hands together and use elbows to press knees farther apart
- Drop head and press thumbs against forehead to encourage relaxation
- Stay in this position for 6-8 long, slow breaths
- Breathe into your belly to help relax the hips and quiet the mind
- Sit down when done and shake legs out

## Yoga for Specific Issues

### Frog



How it helps: Stretches shoulders and chest. Relieves headache. Quiets the mind

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Walk hands forward, bringing chest and forehead towards the floor, while keeping the hips raised (thighs stay vertical to the floor)
- Stay in this position for a minute or two, breathing into your back
- Slowly come back up to all fours

### Crocodile



How it helps: Relieves headache and anxiety. Relaxes muscles of neck and upper back. Relieves indigestion.

Steps:

- Start lying on belly (prone) with feet turned out
- Bring arms in front and hold opposite elbows
- Press elbows away, so they are slightly in front of shoulders (not directly underneath)
- Drop forehead to forearms
- Check that neck and shoulders are relaxed and chest is off the floor, while bottom ribs still touch the floor
- Breathe deeply through the nose, breathing into the belly, so belly presses into the floor on inhale and relaxes on exhale
- Stay in this position for 1-2 minutes
- Lift head and chest, place hands under shoulders and press back to child's pose

### **Child's Pose (Balasana)**



How it helps: Relieves stress and anxiety. Gently stretches the back. Alleviates headache.

Steps:

- Sit on heels
- Fold forward, bringing chest towards thighs and forehead towards floor
- Keep hands at sides with palms turned up
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths, breathing into back
- Raise head and chest to come back to sitting

### **Savasana (with eye pillow)**

The practice of relaxation in Savasana is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself and your students. The focus in savasana is to completely relax the body, which can be very helpful in relieving headache. To help specifically with headache, have students spend extra time relaxing their jaws and the muscles of their faces before going into savasana.

How it helps: Allows the mind to rest. Decrease muscular tension. Relieves mental stress and anxiety

Steps:

- Lie full length on your back on the floor (on your mat or thin blanket)
- Bring feet a little wider than hip width apart and let the feet drop out to the side (externally rotate)
- Bring your hands to your sides
- Draw your shoulder blades back slightly and turn your palms up to help open the chest
- Take a deep breath in through the nose and exhale through the mouth, saying “ahhh”
- Do this breath a couple more time, giving all your attention to releasing any tension with each exhalation
- Allow your breathing to become natural again
- Focus on each part of your body, feeling each part relax, starting with the feet and legs and working all the way up through the head
- Bring awareness back to the breath and with each gentle breath, bring your awareness more deeply inside your body, letting go of the outside world
- Rest here for 5 to 10 minutes

### **Depression/Anxiety**

Available reviews of a wide range of yoga practices suggest they can reduce the impact of exaggerated stress responses and may be helpful for both anxiety and depression. In this respect, yoga functions like other self-soothing techniques, such as meditation, relaxation, exercise, or even socializing with friends.

By reducing perceived stress and anxiety, yoga appears to modulate stress response systems. This, in turn, decreases physiological arousal — for example, reducing the heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and easing respiration. There is also evidence that yoga practices help increase heart rate variability, an indicator of the body's ability to respond to stress more flexibly.

To date, the most persuasive evidence of the benefits of hatha yoga, and in particular pranayama, stems from research conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience in India. New studies have shown a high success rate—up to 73 percent—for treating depression with sudharshan kriya, a pranayama technique taught in the U.S. as "The Healing Breath Technique." It involves breathing naturally through the nose, mouth closed, in three distinct rhythms.

According to Stephen Cope, a psychotherapist and author of *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*, hatha yoga's postures improve mood by moving energy through places in the body where feelings of grief or anger are stored. "Hatha yoga is an accessible form of learning self-soothing," he says. "These blocked feelings can be released very quickly, creating a regular, systemic experience of well-being." Yoga students may also benefit from their relationship with the yoga instructor, Cope said, which can provide a "container" or a safe place for investigating, expressing and resolving emotional issues. The instructor's encouraging and accepting words may also help students defeat self-limiting notions.

One of the most common, and useful, pranayama practices is called nadi shodhana or alternate nostril breathing. According to Ayurvedic medicine, this practice is intended to purify the pranic channels of the body. From a less esoteric viewpoint, nadi shodhana brings the body -- and by association the mind -- into a state of balance and neutrality by activating the same energetic pathways that in acupuncture are associated with balancing the hemispheres of the brain. On an even less esoteric note, Western medicine has long known that, while mouth breathing tells the body it is in a state of stress, nostril breathing tells the body it is in a state of homeostasis. This strategy of nostril breathing equals homeostasis has been employed by elite athletes for decades

## **Yoga Exercises for Depression and Anxiety**

Breathing exercises can be useful in helping people feel more at peace.

### **Restorative Hatha Yoga**

A general restorative hatha yoga practice also may help depression and anxiety. In restorative yoga, the yoga exercises are not done with a view to physical fitness, but rather as another form of mindful meditation, and as a means to relieve stress and calm the body. Working with the body and conscious breathing may help to become more mindful towards one's body and its signals, thus helping patients to avoid unhealthy patterns of behavior in future. The gentle stretching exercises may also make one feel more comfortable in one's body and thus make it easier to sit comfortably in meditation.

### **Laughter Yoga**

The human brain is wired to respond positively to laughter and smiles, generating 'feel-good' chemicals. The wiring is so strong that the brain responds even when we smile at ourselves in the mirror or simulate laughing with enthusiasm.

There is a complex reciprocal interaction between the body and the mind and what happens in one reflects in the other. If you change the quality of your thoughts, you will feel a change in body behavior. Conversely, if you bring a change in your body behavior you will experience a change of your mental state. All physiological functions are connected. Stress or relax one and you will stress or relax them all. In the bigger picture: Stress or relax your body, and you will stress or relax your head.

When we smile for example, the brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that produces feelings of happiness. Interestingly enough, this effect works both ways. The release of dopamine when we feel happy causes us to smile, and the mere act of smiling causes the brain to release dopamine, which in turn makes us feel happy.

Laughter yoga helps bring a positive change in our mental state by changing our physical state through a series of laughing exercises.

### **Mood Lifting Breathing Exercise**

How it helps: Helps relieve depression and anxiety. Relaxes the mind and body

Steps:

- Begin in a seated position (sitting anyway that is comfortable)
- Sit up tall, reaching up through the top of the head to lengthen the spine
- Close your eyes, and close your mouth and begin breathing through your nose
- Bring your focus to your breath, making it more long and relaxed
- As you breathe in, imagine that you are breathing in joy, peace and calm, filling your whole body with happiness
- As you breathe out, imagine that you are exhaling any tensions or worries and feel your body relax and let go
- Continue this visualization as you breathe in and out for about 8-10 breaths.

### **Complete Yogic Breath (full yogic breathing)**

This is a slow, deep breathing that fills the lungs, so that the abdomen, ribcage and upper chest expand on the inhale and relax back into place on the exhale.

How it helps:

- Exercises the lungs. Quiets the mind. Deepens relaxation. Increases circulation

Steps:

- Exhale completely
- On inhale, first the abdomen expands with air, then the rib cage and finally, the chest (the inhale should feel like a wave of air rolling up the front of the body)
- Exhaling completely, allow muscles to relax and slightly drop
- Repeat 8-10 times

### **Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama)**

How it helps: Brings the two sides of the body back into balance. Improves focus and concentration. Quiets the mind.

#### Steps:

- Bring the right hand to your nose
- Place the right thumb gently on the right nostril and the right pinky and ring finger on the left nostril. Place the index finger and middle finger just above the bridge of the nose
- Exhale completely
- Block the right nostril with the right thumb, inhale left (inhale slowly to count of four)
- Switch, releasing the right nostril and blocking left nostril, exhale right (slow, full exhalation)
- Inhale right (full inhale to slow count of four or five)
- Switch, releasing the left nostril, block the right nostril, exhale left, inhale left
- Switch, releasing the right nostril, block the left nostril, exhale right, inhale right
- Continue this pattern of breathing, switching the side that is blocked after each inhalation
- Repeat for 8-10 breaths
- Make sure you are inhaling and exhaling slowly and completely

### **Circular Breath**

How it helps: Relieves tension and stress

#### Steps:

- Begin in a seated position
- Breathe in through the nose
- Then, exhale through an open mouth
- Create a circular pattern with the breath – breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth
- Feel your face and jaw relax as you exhale through the mouth.

### **Viloma Pranayama**

How it helps: Strengthens the respiratory system. Relaxes the body. Helps focus the mind.

Steps:

- Lie straight and relaxed on your back. Close your eyes and lie quietly for a minute.
- Exhale completely until lungs feel empty.
- Inhale for 2 or 3 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Without exhaling, inhale again for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Repeat this process until the lungs are completely full. One complete inhalation may include 4 to 5 pauses, but there should be no strain throughout the practice.
- Hold the breath for a second or two.
- Exhale for 2 or 3 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 or 3 seconds.
- Without inhaling, exhale again for 2 seconds, then hold the breath for 2 seconds
- Repeat this process until the lungs feel completely empty. One complete exhalation may include 4 to 5 pauses.
- Repeat the inhale and exhale 3-4 more times.
- After your last exhalation, gradually relax your abdomen.

### **Seated Forward Folds**

Most any type of seated forward fold can be helpful when someone is suffering from anxiety. Folding forward helps to quiet the mind and body, and cues the body that it is time to relax, and helping the mind go inward. Going inward can help you focus more on your breath and on the present moment, letting go of fears and anxieties that are “out there.” Examples of seated forward folds include: Cobbler’s pose, one leg seated forward fold (janu sirsasana), or a two-leg seated forward fold using a bolster on the thighs.

### **Body Scan**

In the body scan, different body parts are “scanned” for areas of tension and discomfort. This is done by imagining you are breathing into the different body parts, starting with the feet and traveling upwards through the body. As you breathe into each part of your body, you imagine that body part completely relaxing. Start with the feet, then calves, thighs, buttocks, belly, chest, arms, shoulders, jaw, eyes, forehead, and top of head.

While the body scan is primarily a technique meant to prepare one for regular mindfulness meditation by allowing the mind to calm down and concentrate, it also helps to relax the body and thus relieve stress and (chronic) pain.

### **Savasana**

The practice of relaxation in Savasana is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself and your students. The focus in savasana is to completely relax the body. Learning to relax and breathe well will help you stay centered in the midst of days filled with multiple commitments – and will help you recover from nights when you had less sleep than you need. Practicing savasana by itself can help relieve fatigue and bring back your natural state of balance.

How it helps: Removes fatigue. Allows the mind to rest. Relieves mental stress and anxiety. Improves sleep

Steps:

- Lie full length on your back on the floor (on your mat or thin blanket)
- Bring feet a little wider than hip width apart and let the feet drop out to the side (externally rotate)
- Bring your hands to your sides
- Draw your shoulder blades back slightly and turn your palms up to help open the chest
- Take a deep breath in through the nose and exhale through the mouth, saying “ahhh”
- Do this breath a couple more time, giving all your attention to releasing any tension with each exhalation
- Allow your breathing to become natural again
- Focus on each part of your body, feeling each part relax, starting with the feet and legs and working all the way up through the head
- Bring awareness back to the breath and with each gentle breath, bring your awareness more deeply inside your body, letting go of the outside world
- Rest here for 5 to 10 minutes
- When you are done resting, slowly begin moving your hands and feet first, then stretch your arms overhead. Roll onto your side and come back up to sitting.

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

The sitting mindfulness meditation is originally a Buddhist meditation approach. In this technique, feelings, thoughts and sensations are simply observed without judging them. This cultivates a state of mindful awareness, which may not necessarily be pleasant, but allows one to truly live in the present and with an attitude of acceptance and inner peace.

Rather than working with a specific object for meditation as most conventional meditation techniques do, mindfulness focuses on perceiving whatever one is feeling, thinking, perceiving or doing. While the sitting meditation is central to the practice of mindfulness, its practice can and should also be extended to daily activities such as walking, eating, cleaning, and so on.

### Yoga for Post-Trauma

What is Trauma? Psychological trauma occurs when an actual or perceived threat of danger overwhelms a person's usual coping ability. The danger can come from a single stressful event, such as a car accident, or a series of events such as war or repeated sexual, physical or emotional abuse. All traumas are stressful, but not all stress is traumatic. For many reasons, individuals differ in their response to threat or acute stress. As a general rule, however, intentional human causes seem to be the most difficult to recover from, while acts of nature tend to resolve more quickly.

#### Neurophysiology of Stress

Most people have heard stories about superhuman strength in the face of stress (i.e. a mother lifting a car off of her trapped child). This is due to the body's fight or flight response to life-threatening situations. The surge of stress hormones enables us to mobilize enormous energy in preparation to fight or escape. Once the body has discharged energy and the danger has passed, the stress hormones subside.

When we are unable to discharge this excess energy by running or fighting, the brain continues to release stress hormones, and the body remains on high alert. Freezing, or immobility, is the third, lesser-known survival tool in response to threat. Fighting, escaping and freezing are all normal responses to extreme threat. What becomes problematic is when these responses persist in the body after the danger has passed. Bessel van der Kolk, an expert on traumatic stress, describes trauma as "hijacking the body." Brain, mind and body remain in a state of high alert (fight or flight) or under-arousal (freeze).

#### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Defined

The Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ("DSM-IV") outlines six criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD:

1. Exposure to Stressor. Intense fear, helplessness or horror experienced in the face of event(s) involving actual or threatened death, serious injury, or bodily violation.
2. Event Re-experienced through intrusive memories, distressing dreams, feeling as if the trauma were recurring, intense distress when exposed to cues symbolizing an aspect of the trauma, or physiological reactivity when exposed to cues.
3. Persistent Avoidance and Numbing. At least three symptoms are required from a list including avoidance of internal or external stimuli that arouse memories of the trauma; inability to remember an important aspect of the trauma; diminished interest in formerly pleasurable activities; feelings of detachment; and restricted range of affect.
4. Persistent Symptoms of Increased Arousal. At least two of the following: difficulty falling or staying asleep; angry outbursts or irritability; difficulty concentrating; hyper vigilance; and exaggerated startle response.

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5. Symptoms persist for more than one month
6. Life Disrupted / Functioning Impaired

As yoga teachers, our intention is to make our classes as warm, inviting and non-threatening as possible. We are likely to succeed more often than not for the average student. For the traumatized student, however, even our most heartfelt efforts can easily go awry. By hijacking the nervous system, trauma robs its victims of a sense of basic safety and security. On the other hand, trauma-sensitive yoga practice can help people “befriend their bodies,” which van der Kolk says is such a crucial aspect of trauma recovery.

### **Yoga Exercises and Instruction for Post-Trauma**

There are unlimited possibilities as to how the aftermath of trauma might show up on the yoga mat. Some common pitfalls that may trigger reactions include:

- Turning out lights for savasana
- Bending over in front of others
- Sexually provocative poses, e.g. happy baby, cat/cow
- Lack of structure or too much quiet time in a restorative pose might prompt dissociation
- Use of language with potentially sexual or aggressive meaning (see below)
- Physical assists can startle or trigger flashbacks of unwanted touch

### Creating Safety in a Yoga Class

1st stage of trauma recovery is safety – in the body and with people. Need a supported, structured, consistent environment. Universal triggers of stress (produce feelings of helplessness) include: uncertainty; lack of information; lack of control. Create structure and a sense of unity. For example, during breathing exercises: “Let’s breathe together.” Tell how many breaths, either counting down, or “two more.”

During the course of practice, most yoga practitioners naturally come to know their most comfortable poses, which they can use as a resting pose when they need a time out during class. Trauma survivors can be quite disconnected from their bodies and sensations. Teach some common resting poses, with the instruction that they are welcome to come into these poses any time they need to during class. Depressed or dissociative students might find comfort in child’s pose, while hyper-aroused students might prefer an upright seated pose with their back against a wall, so they can continue to monitor what is happening in the room.

Inviting students to “take some time and follow your own flow,” or “do any postures that your body needs” runs the risk of losing students who are prone to dissociation. It is probably better to err on the side of more specific instruction, repeated often.

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### Trauma-Sensitive Language

Language commonly used in yoga class can be unwittingly provocative. Here are some instructions to avoid, and suggested alternatives.

“I want you to...” Alternative... “If it’s comfortable/available to you...”

“Claw the mat...” Alternative “Root your fingers into the ground”

“Stick your butt out” Alternative “move your hip creases back”

“Close your eyes” Alternative “Gaze softly down at the floor in front of you, or close your eyes if you’d like”

A good instruction is to say, “If this is uncomfortable to you for any reason, come out of the posture and practice your mindful breathing.”

Supported arm balances done correctly can help students feel powerful, while also feeling supported, which can be useful in addressing trust issues. Some examples include:

Placing a bolster under the head for support during a side arm balance. Then working up to crow with the bolster under the forehead for support.

Other helpful supported postures include: forward folds with backside to the wall, child’s pose, and the practice of yoga nidra. It’s also important to start with “safe” hip openers such as Janu Sirsasana (seated one-leg forward fold) rather than with something like Happy Baby which could cause stressful feelings for many trauma survivors.

## Yoga for Low Energy and Chronic Fatigue

There are many reasons that people experience fatigue. Some of the most common reasons include:

1) Not getting enough sleep. Most people need 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night.

2) Sleep Apnea. With sleep apnea, your breathing briefly stops many times during the night, which wakes you up for a brief moment. The result is that even though you may be spending 8 hours in bed, you are not sleeping through the night and may therefore be sleep deprived.

3) Eating Habits. Eating too little or eating the wrong foods can cause fatigue. If you start your day with something high in sugar (i.e. a doughnut), your blood sugar will spike and crash, leaving you sluggish. It's helpful to eat a good breakfast with protein (i.e. eggs) and complex carbohydrates (i.e. whole grain bread).

4) Anemia. Anemia is the leading cause of fatigue in women. It occurs when the body doesn't have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen to your tissues and organs. It can be treated by taking an iron supplement or eating more iron-rich foods.

5) Fatigue. Headache and loss of appetite are among the common symptoms of depression. As noted earlier, yoga can be a helpful addition to depression therapy.

6) Hypothyroidism. The thyroid is a small gland at the base of your neck which controls metabolism. When the gland is underactive and the metabolism functions too slowly, you may feel sluggish and put on weight. Hormone therapy can help, and yoga can also help in bringing your body back into balance.

7) Too much caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant that improves alertness in moderate doses, but research indicates that too much caffeine actually causes fatigue in some people.

8) Diabetes. In people with diabetes, sugar remains in the bloodstream instead of entering the body's cells, where it would be converted to energy. The result is a body that runs out of steam, despite having enough to eat.

9) Food Allergies. Some doctors believe that food allergies can make you sleepy. If your fatigue intensifies after meals, you could have a mild intolerance to something you're eating.

In addition to any treatments specific for these causes, yoga and exercise can also help. If you have mild fatigue, the solution may be exercise. Research

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suggests healthy but tired adults can get a significant energy boost from a modest workout program. Yoga and other forms of exercise can also be helpful if you tend to get tired at specific points during the day – like in the afternoon after lunch.

Meditation can also be helpful. Numerous studies have demonstrated the fatigue-fighting effects of meditation. Mini-meditation can work wonders, says Judith Orloff, MD, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles and author of *Positive Energy*. "A three-minute meditation is a way to calm yourself down and stop rushing," she says. "You can replenish yourself. You can take control of your energy."

Orloff suggests getting the day off to a positive start with a mini-meditation while you're still in bed, then continuing with short meditation breaks throughout the day. Any quiet place in your home or office will do, Orloff says. You can even use the office bathroom for an instant energy boost.

### **Yoga Exercises for Fatigue**

A vinyasa style of yoga is a great way to combat fatigue. As a person keeps their body moving, they will trigger more energy in their body. Active pranayama such as bellows breath or shining skull breath is also energizing – improving lung function and bringing more oxygen into the body. Postures that help wake up the body include most back bending postures. The stretching of your muscles and relaxing of your mind in a yoga practice can also help you sleep better at night, which will allow you to feel more rested the next day. Arm balances, which typically, activate and fire up your core muscles can also provide a boost of energy.

### **Shining Skull Breath (Kapalabhati Pranayama)**

How it helps: Strengthens the diaphragm. Increases energy. Strengthens abdominal muscles

#### Steps:

- Exhale completely, pressing all the air out through the nose
- Allow the inhalation to happen automatically – let the air simply fill the void left by the exhalation
- Then, pull the abdominal muscles in quickly forcing the air out through the nostrils in a quick thrust
- Again, allow the inhalation to happen automatically.
- Pull the abdominal muscles in quickly, forcing the air out through the nostrils
- All your effort should be spent on the exhalation
- Repeat 8-12 times

### **Bellows Breath (Bastriki Pranayama)**

How it helps: Strengthens the diaphragm. Increases energy. Strengthens abdominal muscles.

Steps:

- Bastriki is similar to Kapalabhati, but rather than allowing the inhalation to happen automatically, it is forced and shorter
- Inhale through the nose, keeping abdomen somewhat firm
- Then, pull the abdominal muscles in quickly forcing the air out through the nostrils in a quick thrust
- Again, draw the breath in through the nose, keeping the belly somewhat firm
- Pull the abdominal muscles in quickly, forcing the air out through the nostrils
- Breath should be pumped in and out, taking about 1 second for inhalation and 1 second for exhalation
- Repeat 6-8 times
- Conclude with some slow, deep breaths

### **Arm Raising Breath**

How it helps: Increases circulation and improves energy

Steps:

- You can start seated or standing
- Place your hands in fists and bring your hands next to your chest, elbows next to your sides.
- Inhale, push your fists quickly straight up into the air overhead
- Exhale, forcefully pull your fists back to shoulder height (elbows close to your sides)
- Repeat this motion as you inhale and exhale for 10-15 more time.

### **Sun Salutations**

How it helps: Increases circulation, especially to the spine. Uses all the major muscle groups to warm-up and bring energy to the entire body. You can also using deep breathing while connecting your breath to your movement.

## Standing Backbend

(counter pose of standing forward bend)



How it helps: Arching the back helps to energize the spine and the muscles of the back. Increases circulation to the spine and back.

### Steps:

- Begin in mountain pose
- Bring your hands behind your back, placing your palms or fists on lower back
- Pull your elbows back, open your chest, relax your shoulders
- Inhale, reaching your chest up towards ceiling
- Exhale, pressing your hips forward
- Keep looking straight ahead (if your neck is very strong you can let it fall back)
- Take 3-4 deep breaths in this position
- Roll your shoulders forward, come back to standing
- Slowly fold forward, dropping your head, bringing your nose towards your knees
- Take 3-4 deep breaths into your back, stretching it
- Drop your hands to your sides, slowly roll up to standing

## Warrior 1



How it helps: Strengthens the arches, ankles, knees and thighs. Increases muscular endurance. Improves energy.

### Steps:

- Start standing towards the back of your mat with your hands at your sides and feet hip width apart and parallel
- Place your hands on your hips and step your right foot forward one full, but comfortable stride (about 3 or 3 ½ feet)
- Turn your back foot out slightly, so your heel and outside edge of your back foot press against the floor
- Use your hands to square your hips forward (so hips are not turned to the side)
- Exhale, dropping your hands to your sides
- Inhaling, sweep your arms overhead with your palms facing each other about shoulder width apart
- Exhale, bend your right knee until it is directly over your right ankle
- Draw your shoulders slightly back and down to open your chest
- Tuck your tailbone slightly
- Look forward or slightly up
- Take 4-5 breaths in this position
- Continue with Warrior 2 before repeating this exercise on the other side

## Reverse Warrior



How it helps: Strengthens muscles in the thigh and buttocks. Stretches the front of the body. Energizes the body

### Steps:

- From Warrior 1 (with right foot forward), drop left hand down the back of left leg
- Keep right knee bent over right ankle and stretch right hand straight up
- Look up towards right hand
- Take 4-5 deep breaths through your nose in this position
- Repeat on the other side – Warrior 1 then Reverse Warrior

## Prep for Arm Balances



### Steps:

- Start in a cross legged seated position
- Place blocks on either side of you
- Begin to put weight into your arms, pressing down on the blocks
- Lift your hips (and maybe your feet) off the floor
- Stay in this position for 3 to 4 breaths.
- Slowly come back to sitting on the floor
- Repeat 6-8 times

### Camel (counter with down dog)



How it helps: Stretches the thighs, torso, chest, shoulders and throat. Stimulates circulation. Energizes the spine.

#### Steps:

- Start in a kneeling position with knees about hip width apart and your hands on your hips, elbows back
- Inhale, stretch up through the top of your head
- Exhale, press hips forward as you arch back and head falls back
- If possible, students can place hands one at a time on each heel, but only if they can keep their hips pressed forward (hips directly over knees)
- Take 4-5 deep breaths through the nose in this position.
- Slowly come back up, bringing one hand up at a time
- Press back into down dog.

### Walking Meditation

How it helps: The walking meditation is an active meditation that can help you to calm and refocus your mind, helping to replenish your energy.

#### Steps:

- When walking somewhere (even just to the mailbox), bring your attention to the movement of your body.
- Focus on the feeling of the ground with each step you take.
- Notice how your hips and legs move.
- Relax your neck and shoulders and feel the muscles in your face relax.
- Then bring your awareness back to the feeling of the ground with each step.
- If thoughts begin to enter your mind, simply bring your attention back to the feeling of each step, back to the present moment.
- Take a few minutes to do this whenever you are walking somewhere – to the mailbox, at the shopping center, in a park, etc.