



*Yoga for Stress Management
and Relaxation*

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S-T-R-E-S-S



The bodies stress response...

When you “perceive” a threat your sympathetic nervous system takes over and kicks into a “fight or flight” response. The heart rate becomes more rapid, muscles tense up, breathing moves into chest breathing and the blood flows away from the internal organs and towards the muscles of the limbs. Senses become sharper preparing the body to either fight or flee danger.

The stress response is the bodies way of protecting us. It can keep us alert and can save us by helping us respond quickly to dangerous situations.

In small doses stress can help you perform under pressure and can motivate you to do your best.

OVER-STRESSED

Modern life has become fast-paced with many pressures, expectations and stressors.

When we experience these stressors in our everyday life and don't have a means of coping with the stress our bodies and nervous systems develop habitual stress responses.

When the body becomes over-stressed and the sympathetic nervous system is in over-drive, in a constant state of fight or flight, there can be negative effects both emotionally and physically.

Negative Effects from Stress

on your body

- headaches
- muscle tension or pain
- fatigue
- digestive problems
- autoimmune conditions
- diabetes
- back and neck pain
- high blood pressure
- heart problems
- weakened immune system
- ulcers

Negative Effects from Stress

on your mood

- anxiety
- restlessness
- lack of motivation/focus
- irritability or anger
- sadness or depression

on your behavior

- over-eating or under-eating
- angry outbursts
- drug or alcohol abuse
- conflict with others
- social withdrawal

Just Relax...

- re-lax-a-tion

the state of being free from tension and anxiety

When we are free from tension and in a relaxed state, we tap into our parasympathetic nervous system or our “relax and renew” system.

The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for bringing the body back to a state of equilibrium.

Parasympathetic Nervous System

The parasympathetic nervous system controls your rest, relax and digest response. This system is responsible for bringing the body to a state of calm and healing.

When the parasympathetic nervous system is dominant...

- breathing slows
- heart rate drops
- blood pressure lowers
- blood vessels relax
- digestion occurs
- all of the systems in the body function more optimally

Just Breathe

By controlling our breathing we can control our nervous systems response to stress.

Controlled breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and creates a state of calm in the mind and body.

Calming the breath calms the nervous system. A calm nervous system calms the mind.

Tense mind = tense body
Relaxed mind = relaxed body



Benefits of controlled breathing

Controlled breathing can...

- Lower blood pressure and heart rate
- Reduce lactic-acid buildup in muscles tissue
- Reduce levels of stress hormones in the body
- Balance levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood.
- Increase physical energy
- Increase immune system functioning
- Support healthy digestion
- Increase feeling of calm and well-being

Breathing for relaxation

- ujjayi breath
- 2-4 breath
- alternate nostril breathing
- falling out breath
- belly breathing

pranayama (breathing)

ujjayi breath

- Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or lying down.
- Seal lips
- Breathe in through nose
- Restrict back of throat
- Breathe out through nose creating audible sound of waves with breath.

2-4 breath

- Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or lying down.
- Breathe in through nose slowly for count of 2
- Breathe out through nose for count of 4
- Decrease or increase count (key is to have twice as long for exhale than inhale).

pranayama (breathing)

belly breathing

- Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or lying down.
- Bring hands on belly.
- Breathe in through nose and draw air into belly – making belly puff out like a balloon.
- Exhale through nose – belly button draws in towards spine with exhale.

falling out breath

- Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or standing up.
- Breath in deep through nose.
- Open mouth and exhale - haaaaaa

pranayama (breathing)

alternate nostril breathing

- Start with right hand thumb and ring finger
 - Press right thumb on right nostril
 - Inhale (breathe in) through left nostril
 - Press ring finger on left nostril
 - Exhale (breathe out) through right nostril
- Move to left hand thumb and ring finger
 - Press left thumb on left nostril
 - Inhale (breathe in) through right nostril
 - Press ring finger on right nostril
 - Exhale (breathe out) through left nostril

Asanas (yoga poses)

When we are in a constant state of stress, our minds are tense, our bodies are tense and our sympathetic nervous system is heightened.

Specific yoga poses can induce the relaxation response in the body. Calming and restorative poses along with controlled breathing activate the parasympathetic nervous system, bringing the mind and body to a calm and relaxed state.

Child's pose (balasana)

Benefits:

Gently Stretches the hips, thighs and ankles. Calms the brain (nervous system). Lengthens and stretches spine. Relieves tension in back neck and shoulders. Relives stress and fatigue.

Instructions:

Kneel on floor

Touch big toes together

Sit back on heels

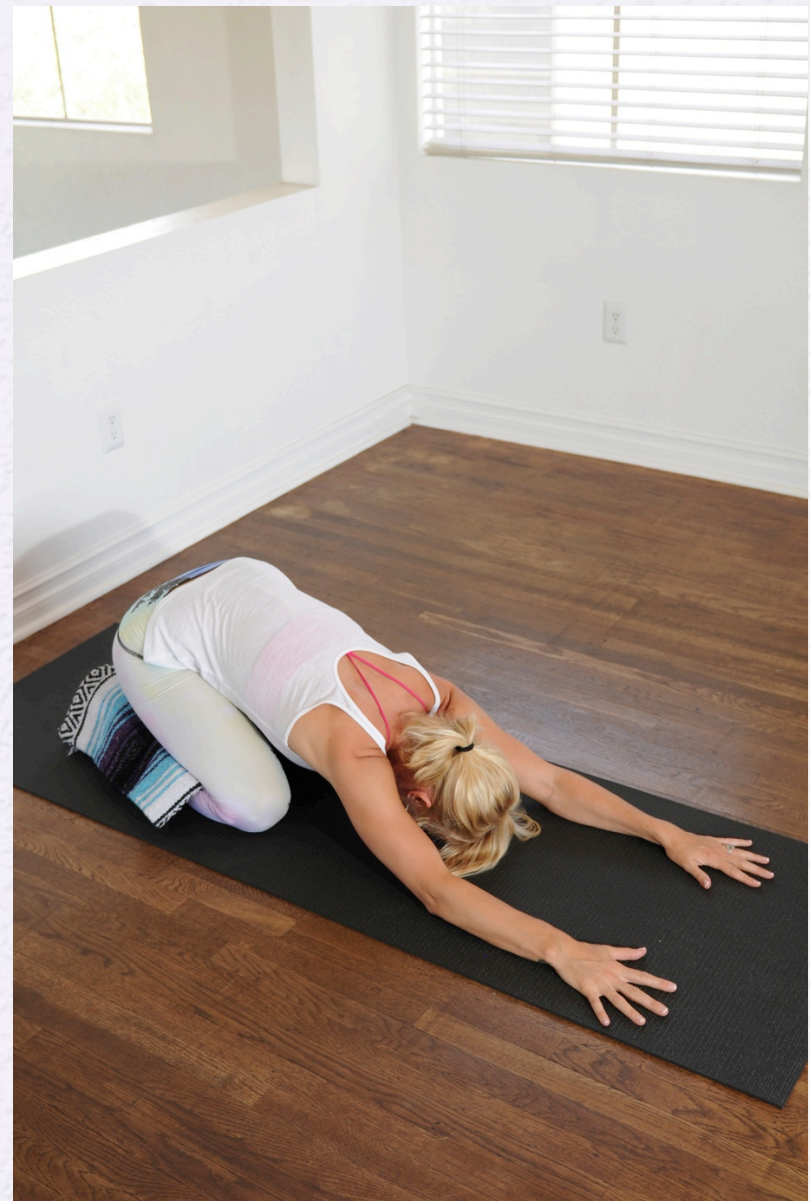
Spread knees wide

Exhale and lay torso between thighs

Rest forehead on mat

Stretch fingertips towards from on mat.

Breath: Ujjayi



Supta baddha konasana (supine bound angle)

Benefits:

Stimulates abdominal organs.
Stimulates heart and improves circulation. Stretches inner thighs, groins and knees. Helps relieve stress, mild depression, menstruation and menopause.

Instructions:

Lie on back on mat

Bring bottoms of feet together to touch and let knees spread wide

If the stretch feels too intense place blocks or rolled towels/blankets under knees.

Spread arms wide – palms facing up

Relax shoulders

Breath: Ujjayi or Abdominal breathing



Legs up the wall (Viparita Karani)

Benefits: Relieves tired or cramped legs and feet. Stretches hamstrings, front torso and back of neck.

Relieves mild backache. Improves circulation. Calms the mind. Helps with insomnia.

Instructions:

You will need one or 2 thickly folded blankets or a bolster

Bring support 5-6 inches away from wall

Bring right side of body against the wall – seated on bolster

Bring legs up against the wall

Sitting bones should dip down slightly in between bolster and wall (If stretch is too intense lower support).

Breath: Breath natural, slow inhales and exhales



Cat pose (Marjaryasana)

Benefits: Stretches spine. Tones abdominal muscles. Improves circulation. Strengthens wrists, shoulders and knees. Improves digestion. Relieves tension and stress.

Instructions:

Come onto hands and knees on mat – knees hips width apart, hands shoulder width apart

Inhale

Exhale - Press palms into mat, arch back, drop head and gaze back towards belly button

Inhale back to flat back

Repeat 4-5 times

Breath: Ujjayi



Down dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Benefits:

Calms nervous system and helps relieve stress. Stretches shoulders, calves, hamstrings and arms. Improves digestion. Relieves insomnia, back pain and fatigue. Strengthens arms and legs. Energizes the body.

Instructions:

Begin on hands and knees (tabletop) knees hips width apart, hands shoulder width apart

Walk hands slightly forward in front of shoulders. Spread fingers wide.

Tuck toes and lift hips up

Bend knees slightly or generously depending on tightness in back and hamstrings

Press palm into mat – lengthen arms.

Gaze back towards back of room

Breath: Ujjayi



Standing forward bend or rag doll(uttanasana)

Benefits:

Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression. Stretches hamstrings, calves and hips. Helps with digestion. Reduces fatigue and anxiety. Relieves headache and insomnia. Relieves tension in back and neck.

Instructions:

Stand with feet hips width apart

Bend forward

Bend knees depending on tension in low back and tightness in hamstrings

Bring fingers into crooks of elbows

Release head and neck

Draw shoulders away from ears

Breath: Ujjayi



Supine Twist (Supta Matsyendrasana)

Benefits:

Stretches the back muscles and spine. Stimulates the kidneys and abdominal organs. Helps with digestion. Relieves stress.

Instructions:

Lie on back with knees bent.

Hug right knee in towards chest and straighten left leg

Draw right knees over to the left (shift left hip to the right if needed)

Arms stretch out wide

Gaze to the right

Repeat with left leg

Breath: Normal, relaxed breathing



Savasana

Benefits:

Calms nervous system, Relives tension, stress and anxiety. Relaxes the body. Reduces headache, fatigue and insomnia.

Instructions:

Draw knees in towards chest

Wrap arms around knees

Imagine your body as a sponge that sops up stress and tension

Squeeze body into a tight ball –
Tense every muscle in body -
squeezing tension , stress and any
negativity out of your sponge

Release legs and arms

Let legs come out wide – toes
dropping out to side

Arms out wide – palms facing up

Breath: Let go of any control over
breath or body



asanas on the go or in the workplace to relieve tension in the body and increase relaxation

- seated forward fold
- rag doll
- down dog against the wall
- shoulders shrugs
- necks rolls
- seated twist
- palm on forehead
- ear stretches
- shoulder opener
- ghomukasana arms
- eagle arms
- neck stretches

Upper trapezius release



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