



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## **Yoga protects the brain from depression**

Practising yoga really does relax your mind as well as your body more than other types of exercise, a new study claims.

Researchers have found that three sessions of yoga a week can help fight off depression as it boosts levels of a chemical in the brain which is essential for a sound and relaxed mind.

Scientists found that the levels of the amino acid GABA are much higher in those that practice yoga than those who do the equivalent of a similarly strenuous exercise such as walking.

The chemical, GABA, is essential to the function of brain and central nervous system and helps promote a state of calm within the body. Low GABA levels are associated with depression and other widespread anxiety disorders.

### **Reducing Stress and Anxiety**

You can often feel too exhausted after a long day to do anything substantial but still feeling too hyped up and jittery to really relax. One of the goals of yoga is unification of body and mind but when your body is tired and your mind is wired, you don't experience that unification. Yoga practices are specifically designed to bring the two into balance.

The first step is to rest the body. Even if your job is not physically tiring, your body is tired at the end of the day because the mind uses a lot of glucose, which leaves you feeling depleted.

Doing a short series of restorative postures that combines forward bends to calm the nervous system and simple twists to revitalize the body and move stagnant blood will rebalance your energy.

Once your body starts to relax you can bring your mind into balance with it by doing a simple breath-awareness practice. Start by exhaling completely, with long and steady breaths. Then take deep inhalations filling your lungs from bottom to top.

To unwind just before going to sleep give your self a simple foot massage. Using essential oil like lavender or a moisturising cream, massage your feet for a few minutes. This brings the energy down in the body, helping you feel grounded before bed.

If you don't get enough sleep, you start the day feeling depleted and end it feeling even more so. Foot massages and deep breathing will help you get a good night's sleep.

# Posture of the Month

## UTTANASANA – Intense forward stretch

This is both a calming and recuperative asana, which rests and energises the heart and lungs.

### Technique

1. Stand in Tadasana, hands on hips. Separate your legs to a distance of 30cm (1ft). Keep your feet parallel to each other, with your toes pointing forward. Pull up your kneecaps.
2. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints, not from the waist. As you descend draw the front torso out of the groins and open the space between the pubis and top sternum. As in all the forward bends, the emphasis is on lengthening the front torso as you move more fully into the position.
3. If possible, with your knees straight, bring your palms or fingertips to the floor slightly in front of or beside your feet, or bring your palms to the backs of your ankles. If this isn't possible, cross your forearms and hold your elbows. Press the heels firmly into the floor and lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling. Turn the top thighs slightly inward.
4. With each inhalation in the pose, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the upper back, between the shoulder blades.
5. Don't roll the spine to come up. Instead bring your hands back onto your hips and reaffirm the length of the front torso. Then press your tailbone down and into the pelvis and come up on an inhalation with a long front torso.

### Contraindications and Cautions

**Back injury:** do this posture with bent knees, or place your hands on the wall, keeping your legs perpendicular to your torso, and your arms parallel to the floor.

### Variations with Props

- ❖ Rest the crown of your head on blocks and place your hands on blocks beside your feet.
- ❖ Rest the crown of your head on blocks and hold your ankles with your hands.
- ❖ Rest the crown of your head on blocks. Place your palms flat on the floor, at the side of your feet. The thumb of each hand should touch the little toe of each foot. Distribute your body weight equally on the toes and heels of both your feet.

### Benefits of this posture

- ❖ Reduces depression
- ❖ Cures insomnia and relieves fatigue
- ❖ Increases blood flow to the brain, soothing the brain cells
- ❖ Regulates blood pressure
- ❖ Relieves migraine and stress-related headaches
- ❖ Relieves stomach ache by neutralising acidity
- ❖ Strengthens and stretches the hamstring muscles
- ❖ Increases the flexibility of the hip joint
- ❖ Strengthens the knee joint and its surrounding tissue and muscles
- ❖ Tones the abdominal organs



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