



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## YOGA THERAPY HEALTH BENEFITS OF RESTORATIVE YOGA

The holiday season will soon be here and preparing for Christmas is often a time of stress. Many students of yoga don't find the time for their normal practice during this holiday season but maybe you can find time for some restorative yoga. This type of yoga allows you to recover fully from all the stresses and strains of life by relaxing muscles, lowering your heart rate, and allowing your nervous system to stop constantly reacting. Restorative yoga postures not only make you feel more relaxed but also more focused and effective.

For many people minimizing effort can feel counterintuitive, especially if you are used to a much more active practice. There are, however, real benefits to what may seem like doing very little. Sometimes we just need to rest and give ourselves some recovery time.

**Restorative postures**, which are often supported by blocks, blankets and bolsters, are designed to maximize comfort and will allow you to fully let go, which is why they are typically held longer—about 5 to 20 minutes. They are also arranged with the head below or near the same level as the heart, which helps to quiet the brain and heart.

**Restorative yoga** has long been shown to decrease the stress hormone cortisol, which, in elevated levels, is associated with weight gain, high blood pressure, and heart disease. It also helps to fight depression and fatigue and promotes better sleep. Restorative yoga is in fact better than sleep for releasing tense muscles and relieving joint pain.

**B.K.S. Iyengar** was the first to systematically develop restorative sequences, which he designed to help people struggling with injury, illness and overwork.

The hardest part of practising restorative yoga is to allow your mind to become quiet. When you're still, it's hard to shut off your mind and that's where the real work is. If you can achieve this quietness you will find deep relaxation and true well-being.

### Restorative Sequence

You can practice the restorative sequence, as shown on page 2, as often as you can during the holiday season. Start out with a few minutes of gentle movement. A little stretching will warm the muscles and create space in the body to prepare it for relaxation. Movement will also give your body a chance to shed its restlessness before settling into a place of stillness. Find a quiet, dark space, set up your props (if you don't have traditional blocks and bolsters, use books and pillows), and settle into postures that will help you rest, digest, and ultimately recharge. Restorative yoga is a receptive practice, so you'll feel open afterward, interacting with yourself and others in a more loving way.

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## RESTORATIVE SEQUENCE OF POSTURES TO HELP YOU RELAX

### SIDDHASANA

- Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position. If your knees are higher than your hips, prop yourself up on a blanket or two.
- Rest your palms on your knees, lengthen your spine and close your eyes.
- Focus on the length of your inhalations and exhalations. Feel the expansion and contraction of your ribs as you breathe in and out. Sit and breathe for at least 2 minutes.



### BALASANA (supported child's posture)

- Position a bolster or pillow on an incline – place a block or an extra cushion at the top end.
- Sit with your knees on either side of the low end of the bolster, resting on your heels. If you have tight feet, place a rolled-up blanket under the tops of your feet.
- Fold forward and rest your entire belly on the bolster, so you can fully relax. Use blankets under your forearms for support. Turn your head to one side, and then after a few minutes, turn your head to the other side.
- Stay in this posture for at least 5 minutes.



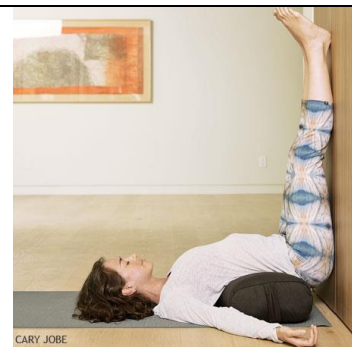
### SUPPORTED BELLY DOWN TWIST

- Place the bolster as in the previous posture.
- Bring your right hip next to the bolster, knees bent.
- Lower your right arm to the floor next to the bolster and place your left hand on the floor along the other side of the bolster and turn your belly toward the bolster.
- Let the bolster support you. Stay for at least 3 minutes before repeating on the other side.



### VIPARITA KARANI (legs up the wall)

- Place a bolster near the wall but with a space as shown in the picture.
- Sit sideways on the bolster with your hip on the wall.
- Swing your legs up the wall with your lower back resting on the bolster.
- Adjust your position until your tailbone drops over the edge of the bolster.
- Find a comfortable position for your arms and settle into the posture and breathe slowly and deeply.
- Stay in this posture for at least 10 minutes.



### LEGS ON A CHAIR POSTURE

- If you don't have bolsters, you can practice this posture with your back resting on the mat and your legs resting on a folded blanket on the chair.
- Support your head with a blanket if it feels good.
- Place your calves onto the seat of the chair and relax your arms alongside you.
- Breathe slowly and deeply and stay for at least 10 minutes.

