

Restorative Yoga

“Rest & Restore Your Body, Renew Your Spirit”

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What is Restorative Yoga

Let's face it: Some yoga poses are just delicious. And if yoga were a buffet, restorative postures would most definitely be at the dessert table. Restorative poses are soothing and well-supported and offer the opportunity to linger quietly for a few moments to savor the sweet stillness. In an ideal world every asana in our practice would feel restorative, but poses that fall into the restorative category have a unique ability to leave us feeling nourished, well rested, and restored.

Traditionally, yoga classes and home practices begin with active postures followed by a brief restorative posture or two. The development of restorative postures is largely credited to B.K.S. Iyengar, of Pune, India. Iyengar has been teaching yoga for more than sixty years and is widely recognized as a worldwide authority. Iyengar's early teaching experience revealed how pain or injury can result from a student straining in a yoga pose. To alleviate this, he experimented with "props," modifying each pose to each student's body such that the student could practice without strain.

Judith Lasater, Ph.D., P.T. and one of the foremost teachers of restorative yoga, often refers to restorative yoga poses as "active relaxation." By supporting the body with props, restorative yoga alternately stimulates and relaxes the body to help us move toward balance. Some postures have an overall benefit while others target an individual body part. However each pose creates a specific physiological response which is beneficial to our health and can reduce the effects of stress-related diseases.

Restorative postures are usually deeply supported with props including blankets, blocks, bolsters, straps, and chairs. Postures are normally held for several minutes. In general, restorative yoga poses are best used at times when you feel weak, fatigued, or stressed from daily activities. These poses are especially beneficial before, during, and after major life events: death of a loved one, change of job or residence, marriage, divorce, major holidays, and vacations. In addition, you can practice the poses when ill, or recovering from illness or injury.

The Purpose of Restorative Yoga

- To support the body with props providing active relaxation
- To alternately stimulate and relax the body to move toward balance
- To create specific physiological responses which are beneficial to health and reduce the effects of stress
- To create muscular release, not the sensation of a stretch

Mechanisms of Restorative Yoga

- Relieves the effects of stress through supported relaxation
- Moves the spine in all directions
- Provides an inversion which reduces the effects of gravity
- Alternately stimulates and soothes the organs (compression/release)
- Balances the energies of prana (upward energy) and Apana (downward energy)
- Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system; enhancing homeostasis

Use of Props

Props can be used for support to “prop up” or support the shape of a pose from below or to “anchor” or stabilize the shape of a pose preventing effort and movement.

- Blocks: to support a body part

- Precaution: determine when the block needs to be stable or slide on the floor
- Nonskid mats: can be rolled or folded to take the place of a blanket
- Pillow/folded towel: to use under the heels or support the neck
- Yoga Straps: Recommend 8-10 foot straps with a D ring for ease of use
 - Precaution: when locking straps, make sure there is adequate circulation. Discoloration of the skin (red or white) indicates loss of blood flow.
- Eye bags: small rectangular cloth bag made of silk or soft cotton, filled with uncooked rice, flax seeds or washable plastic beads
 - Precaution: carefully let the front of the eye bag fall toward the nose, not on the nose
- Eye Wrap: elastic bandage four inches wide, carefully wrapped around the head, starting at the base of the skull to provide slight compression
- Blankets: When used for a cover can be any type. When used as support, recommend firm cotton or wool blankets Standard Fold twin

Practice Folding Blankets:

- 1) Standard Fold 1 x 21 x 28: Fold open blanket in half 3x
 - 2) Single Fold 2.5 x 10 x 28 Standard Fold, fold in half lengthwise
 - 3) Double Fold 5 x 7.5 x 28 Standard Fold: two folds lengthwise
 - 4) Long Roll 5 x 6 x 28 Standard Fold, start at long folded edge and roll blanket
- Bolster: recommend it weigh about 7 lbs and be stuffed with dense cotton. 2 feet long with a diameter of 9 inches with a removable cotton cover
 - Folding Metal Chair: chair with an open back rest is ideal to allow legs to be placed through it
 - Wall: Access to a wall for supported poses
 - Weighted Sand Bags: 10 lbs

Principals of Restorative Yoga

- Sensation of the pose should not be a “wham”
- Sensation should be slowly building
- Sensation should not be collecting in one place
- In each pose, seek to add length or fill in the space OR talk length away and take props away

DEMO: Supine Butterfly/Supta Baddakonasana



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“Imagine the apex of the pose and a waterfall of energy moving in all directions.” ~ Leeann Carey

- Breath: should be easy and gentle, never forced or strained. It is recommend to use nose breathing
- Prep poses: understand which poses prepare for other poses

PREPARATORY POSE

Lateral Bends
 Standing
 Back bends
 Twists Back bends
 Forward Bends
 Savasana

POSE

Standing, poses, Forward bends and Backbends
 All
 Twists and Inversions
 Standing and inversions
 All

- Counterposes: understand which poses return the spine to a neutral position

Counter Balance (Neutral Spinal Position)	Pose
Lateral Bends	Forward Bends
Standing Forward Bends	Standing Lateral Bends
Backbends	Twists followed by forward bends
Inversions	Forward bends
Twists	Forward Bends
Forward Bends	Savasana

- Pose Duration

Pose

Lateral Bends
 Standing
 Backbends
 Inversions
 Twists
 Forward Bends
 Savasana

Duration in Minutes

1 Minute, Gradually increase to 3
 2 Minutes, Gradually increase to 4
 2 Minutes, Gradually increase to 10
 2 Minutes, Gradually increase to 15
 3 Minutes, Gradually increase to 5
 3 Minutes, Gradually increase to 10
 7 Minutes, Gradually increase to 20

- Adjustments in the poses should
 - Reduce sharp angles in the body
 - Go to the biggest joint first, for example the thigh instead of the knee
 - Monitor that the following does not occur
 - Falling backward or behind the head with neck hyper extension
 - Collapsing downward in the mid-thoracic spine in a forward bend
 - Laterally flexing the neck in a twist
 - Hyper extension in the cervical spine or lumbar spine in an inversion

Types of Restorative Poses

RESTORATIVE ACTIVE POSES

- Designed to awaken dull areas in the body to improve circulation and encourage healing
- Stimulates the internal organs as in a twist

Forward Folds:

Standing Forward Fold Pose/Uttanasana

Backbends:

Reclining Hero/Supta Virasana

Camel Pose/Ustrasana

Two Legged Inverted Staff Pose/Viparita Dandasana

Inversions:

Downward Facing Dog Variations 1 and 2

Head Balance Pose

Supine:

Supine Bound Angle Pose

RESTORATIVE INACTIVE POSES

- Designed to induce a state of deep relaxation and recuperation
- Savasana is the base of all RIP poses

Backbends:

Fish Pose (Matsyasana) Variation 1 and 2

Supported Bridge Pose

Inversions:

Elevated Legs Up the Wall

Forward Bends:

Seated Angle Pose

Head to Knee Pose

Seated Forward Fold

Prone:

Child's Pose (Downward Facing Hero Pose)

Spinal Twist (Revolved Squeeze Pose)

Supine:

Supine Bound Angle Pose

Lying Down Big Toe

Pigeon Pose (One Foot Easy Pose)

Belly Twisting Pose

Inversion:

Elevated Legs Up the Wall

Savasana

Sequencing for Restorative Yoga

Initiation: Start with calming breathing practices, setting an intention for the first few minutes. Spend the next 5 -10 minutes with gentle movement to warm the body and prepare for relaxation.

Sequence: Depending on your population and their needs. A general restorative class should be balanced with the spine moving in all directions. Beginning with shorter times in each pose and ending with longer periods. If your students have particular issues, you can focus on poses that address their individual needs.

Sample Sequences:

General Sequence ~ from Judith Lasater "Relax and Renew"

- Restorative Fish 1 minute
- Supine Bound Angle Pose 10- 15 minutes
- Supported Bridge Pose 15 minutes
- Elevated Legs Up the Wall 15 minutes
- Prone Spinal Twist 3 minutes
- Supported Seated Angle Pose 3 minutes
- Supported Seated Forward Fold Easy Seated Legs 3 minutes
- Basic Relaxation Pose with Legs Elevated 5 – 20 minutes

Woman's Restorative Sequence ~ from Patricia Walden "The Woman's Book of Yoga and Health"

- Reclining Bound Angle Pose 5 minutes
- Reclining Easy Seated Pose 5 minutes
- Reclining Big Toe Pose (Leg Up and Leg to Side) 1 minute each
- Downward Facing Dog 1 minute

- Child's Pose 3 minutes
- Head on Knee Pose 3 minutes
- Seated Forward Bend Pose 3-5 minutes
- Shoulder Stand Pose 3-5 minutes
- Plow Pose 3-5 minutes
- Supported Bridge Pose 5-10 minutes
- Supported Legs Up the Wall Pose
 - Cycle ~ Legs Straight Up 5 minutes
 - Legs Wide 3-5 minutes
 - Cross Legs 3-5 minutes
 - Flat on Floor Crossed Legs 5 minutes

Restorative Yoga for Athletes ~ Sequence adapted from BKS Iyengar "The Path to Holistic Health"

- Fish Pose Variation 1 5 minutes
- Reclining Bound Angle Pose 5 minutes
- Reclining Hero's Pose 3 minutes
- Lying Down Big Toe(Leg Up and Side) 1 minute each
- Child's Pose 3 minutes
- Head on Knee Pose 3 minutes each side
- Seated Forward Fold 5 minutes
- Lying Down Twist 3 minutes each side
- Cow Face Arm Stretch 1 minute each
- Downward Facing Dog 1 minute
- Standing Forward Fold 2 minutes
- Supported Bridge 5 minutes
- Elevated Legs Up the Wall 10 minutes
- Savasana 10-15 minutes

REFERENCES:

Yoga Therapy: Restorative Yoga Manual by Leeann Carey of Leeanncareyyoga.com

Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times by Judith Lasater PhD, PT Rodmell Press, Berkeley, CA 1995, 2011

The Woman's Book of Yoga and Health: A Lifelong Guide to Wellness by Linda Sparrowe and Patricia Walden Shambala Publications 2002

Yoga: The Path to Holistic Health Yoga: by BKS Iyengar Dorling Kindersley 2001

Restorative Yoga Asanas

Restorative Active Poses

FORWARD FOLDS

Standing Forward Fold Pose/ Uttanasana

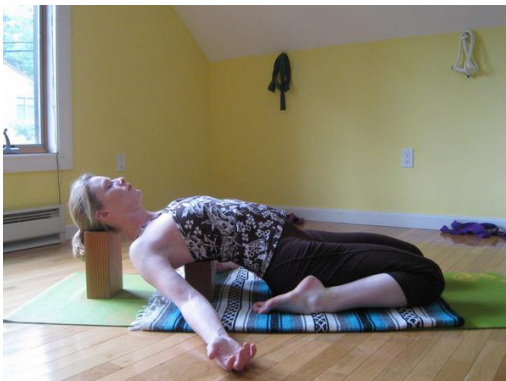
Props: Block/ Straps/Sandbag



BACKBENDS

Reclining Hero/Supta Virasana

Props: Bolster/Blankets/Strap (optional)





Camel Pose/Ustrasana

Props: Wall/ Bolsters/Blankets/Chair/Blocks



Option to also put a block between inner ankles to engage legs and pelvis more and get core stability

Also can push the bolsters in towards the student

Can also do more gentle camel sitting in Virasana in front of chair, leaning shoulder blades back onto edge of seat and place a block under the head.

Two Legged Inverted Staff Pose/ Viparita Dandasana

Props: Chair/Straps/Yoga Mat/Wall/Block



Can place a yoga mat vertically along the spine to support the head and neck or place blocks/bolsters higher to support head and neck

Can add a rolled yoga mat horizontally at edge of chair

If chair has a back slat, can hook a strap to it, reach arms overhead and pull.

Can place a strap around the thighs as well

INVERSIONS

Downward Facing Dog/Adho Muka Savasana

Props: Wall



Props: Block

Option to place heels on the wall



Blocks



Chair



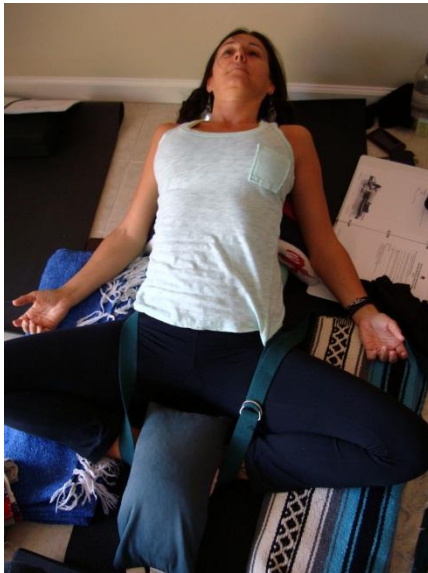
Head Balance Pose/Sirsasana

Props: Two Chairs/Blankets/Wall/Yoga Mats



Supine Bound Angle Pose/Supta Baddhakonasana

Bolster/Block/Strap/Sand Bag



Restorative Inactive Poses

BACKBENDS

Fish Pose/Matsyasana

Props: Blankets/Blocks/Strap



Supported Bridge Pose/SEtu Bandha Sarvangasana

Props: Bolsters/Blankets/Straps



Option to strap the legs up to 3 times

Option to put sand bags on top of the thighs

If student is feeling the pose in the low back, add blankets under the shoulders and move support up the scapula

INVERSION

Legs Up the Wall/Vipariti Karini

Props: Bolster/Blankets/Wall/Blocks



To get out of the pose, slowly bend knees and push feet into the wall to slide flat on to bolster to get out of the back bend, stay for 30 seconds, then slide off bolster onto the floor.

FORWARD BENDS

Seated Wide Legged Forward Fold/Upavista Konasana or Bound Angle/Baddakonasana



Bolsters/Blocks as needed

If you are in a big posterior tilt, come onto the back and use the wall (giving away the forward bend)

Can also use a chair to raise the floor.

Head to Knee Pose/Janu Sirsasana

Props: Blankets/Bolster



Seated Forward Fold/Paschimotannasana

Props: Blocks/Bolsters/Blankets/Strap



PRONE:

Child's Pose/Balāsana

Props: Bolster/blankets/blocks



Spinal Twist/Revolved Squeeze Pose

Props: Bolster/blanket



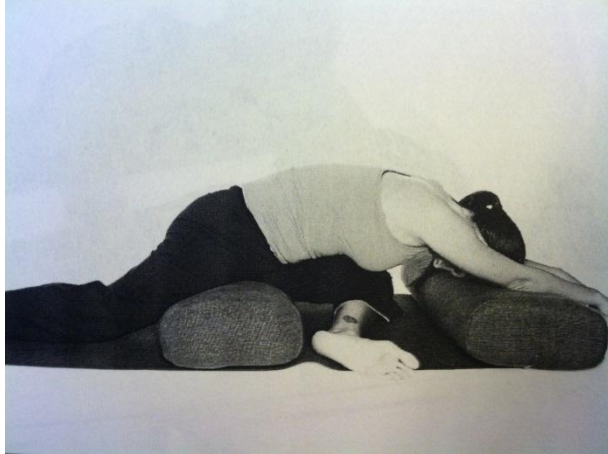
Lying Down Big Toe/Supta Padangustāsana

Props: Strap



Pigeon Pose/One Foot Easy Pose/Eka Raja Kapotasana

Props: Bolster/Blankets



Belly Twisting Pose: Jathara Paravartanasana

Props: Bolsters/ Blankets

