

Why practice restorative yoga?

Why is it we are so weary, anxious and stressed in today's world? Over centuries our bodies have changed little, but our lifestyle has changed enormously. We have an ancient body subjected to a modern world - moving fast on freeways and on the information superhighway. Minute by minute our senses are overloaded with information. Our lives are packed tightly with tasks to complete, goals to achieve and relationships to resolve. Even if we find time to "smell the flowers, listen to leaves rustle" it is often difficult to enjoy these moments as the mind flits ahead at what we think has to be done in the future, or what we think should have been done in the past. The practice of restorative yoga teaches us to quieten the senses, still the fluctuations of the mind and withdraw from the external to listen, observe and become aware of our internal environment. What occurs when this happens will be different for each person, but essentially we have to become empty to again become full.

Why is it so essential for us to relax? Stress is a physiological response to what your body/mind perceives as life threatening. For our ancestors that meant defending or running. The body response to these threatening situations is known as "the fight or flight response". Adrenaline is released into the body - our heart rate and blood pressure increase, mental alertness increases, also muscle tension. Other internal systems slow down (for example - digestion, elimination, growth, repair and reproduction) and blood is pumped to the extremities. This is beneficial in the short term, but when we are unable to resolve stress as directly as ancient man the body remains in the fight/flight response (that is we are still stressed and releasing adrenaline into the body). Subsequently our health becomes affected - for example the body may not be quite as quick to ward off infection and recover from illness swiftly, or nutrients may not be digested as efficiently, or perhaps vague complaints of just not feeling 100% - adrenaline has us running at top speed and the cycle continues. Deep relaxation is the antidote to stress.

Restorative yoga is quite different to sleep. There is no movement (in sleep we toss and turn, mind is active) and we are supported in the asanas by the props so that the body is opened, stimulated and relaxed sequentially. Asanas create specific and numerous physiological responses which are beneficial to health. When tired, stressed or ill we are unable to hold the postures for long periods to gain the maximum physiological response. All asanas are restorative, but not all can be held for long periods without the assistance of props, even when well. There are a number of specific asanas that can be practiced sequentially to restore the body and bring the mind to a state of repose. These sequences are best learned and practiced under the guidance of an Iyengar yoga instructor. Two simple and extremely effective restorative postures have been outlined below. Next time you feel life is getting on top of you, your energy is depleted, you feel stressed or anxious try one of these asanas and enjoy the results.

These postures should only be attempted after being taught to you by a qualified Iyengar instructor and have been assessed as being suitable for any existing health problems.

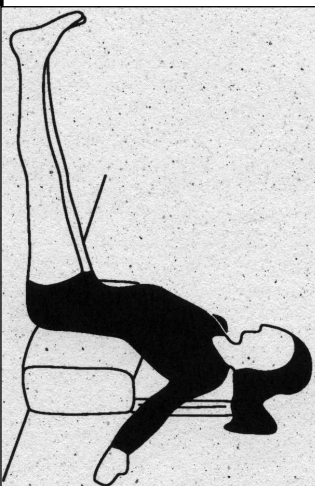
VIPARITA KARANI

Viparita = reversed, upside down. *Karani* = doing, a particular type of practice

Place a bolster slightly away from the wall. Sit on one end of the bolster, swing back and take the legs up the wall.

Adjust the bolster so that the lower back is supported. There should be no feelings of discomfort or strain.

The pelvis and torso are supported in a gentle backbend, while the wall supports the legs. This asana relieves the legs and back and with the help of gravity this creates a gentle cascade effect for the fluids in the legs. This is extremely beneficial for people who get tired and swollen legs. The abdomen becomes soft and the organs in the abdomen relaxed. The gentle opening of the chest is beneficial to the heart and lungs. *Viparata Karani* soothes and quietens the mind and nervous system. As one rests in *Viparita Karani* quietness pervades the whole being.



Do not practice during menstruation.

SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA

Supta = supine, lying down. *Baddha* = bound. *Kona* = angle

Sit on the floor and place your bolster lengthways behind you with the end of the bolster close to your lower back. Bring the soles of the feet together and let the knees drop out and down towards the floor. Make a big loop with your strap. Take the loop over the head and down the body, placing the strap at the base of the sacrum and under the feet (as illustrated). Adjust the strap to fit and quietly lie back over the bolster. Support the head as necessary with a folded blanket. For the purpose of relaxing the arms should rest by the side of the body.

This asana gently opens the front of the spine and makes space not only lengthways, but also widthways in the abdomen. All tension is released from the abdominal organs and the solar plexus. This is a wonderful posture for all kinds of menstrual problems. Turn the eyes to the centre of the chest and breathe gently and quietly. This posture is excellent at the end of the day after you have been sitting or working forward and closing the front of the body.

