



Restorative Yoga 101

For this workshop you will need:

- 1 large bolster (or 2 pillows)
- 2 blocks
- 1 yoga blanket
- A wall



What is Restorative Yoga?

Restorative Yoga

Restorative yoga helps people achieve relaxation, stress-relief, and mental and physical healing through stillness.

Restorative yoga activates the body's natural healing processes through an extended state of peace and calm.

“Restorative yoga explores the capacity of individual students to relax deeply, to understand their bodies and minds more intimately, and to open their hearts more fully to love.” ~ Paja Sue Flamm

Is restorative yoga easy?

- Restorative looks easy—after all, you're just laying there!
- But while it is simple in the body, it can be incredibly complicated in the mind.
- Restorative yoga is often paired with yoga nidra and meditation because it encourages the mind to mimic the body's relaxed state.

Restorative vs. Yin Yoga...What's the Difference?

Many people combine yin and restorative yoga and use them interchangeably. Both yin and restorative teachers will tell you this is not accurate.

They are both slow, gentle and healing. Yin and restorative work well together, though the poses are different and have different names.

- Yin yoga works on the connective tissue and therefore requires you to feel more sensation.
- Yin Yoga asks you to find your edge; remain still within discomfort (never pain).
- In restorative, you are completely relaxed and there is no effort.
- If it isn't completely effortless and relaxing, you'll need to readjust.
- Restorative is more suitable for injury healing than yin, but it isn't only for injury healing

Restorative yoga is primarily concerned with undoing the effects of stress on the body, whether mental or physical.



Stress and the Physical Body

An external trigger activates the adrenal glands to release hormones.

These act upon the autonomic nervous system to increase heart rate, blood pressure, alertness and muscle tension, and can cause headaches and fatigue.

Bodily functions that aren't essential in the moment get shut down: digestion, growth, repair, reproduction, and elimination.

This helped a person escape from stress, which was usually resolved quickly...

- Today we experience stress constantly; the autonomic nervous system is overstimulated and other functions are limited (cue digestive distress, insomnia, food intolerances, etc)
- Long term effects can lead to heart disease, inflammation, weakened immunity, changes to hormones and metabolism, insomnia, and a decreased ability for the body to repair itself.

Stress and Mental Health

Scientists found that the earliest response to stress happens in the brain within seconds of perceiving a stressor.

This causes the release of stress hormones, which particularly affect areas of the brain key for memory and regulating emotions. Repeated stress changes how well these systems are able to control the stress response.

Chronic stress can influence a person's memory and ability to regulate emotion, which can have lasting effects on their personal life and relationships with others.

- Long-term stress can affect both nerve cells (grey matter) and the connections between them (white matter). It is possible these changes, along with other factors, can **increase the likelihood of developing mental illness.**
- Chronic stress keeps the immune system activated. Researchers are discovering the link between depression and weakened immunity.
- A chronic state of stress compromises the body's capacity to heal itself, creating a cycle of dis-ease.

“...if stressors are too strong and too persistent in individuals who are biologically vulnerable because of age, genetic, or constitutional factors, stressors may lead to disease. This is particularly the case if the person has few psychosocial resources and **poor coping skills.**”

~ The Annual Review of Clinical Psychology



Restorative Yoga and Stress

Restorative yoga encourages rest, but is different from sleep. Relaxation helps the brain get quiet so the mind and body can heal, but it is not quite the same as sleep.

You do not want your students to fall asleep. Rather, coax them to the beautiful edge between waking and sleeping.

Restorative yoga helps relieve chronic stress in multiple ways:

1. Using props provides total support for the body
2. Restorative sequences move the spine in all 6 directions (extension, flexion, lateral bend [2], twists [2])
3. Includes inversions, which improves heart function and reduces inflammation
4. Stimulates and soothes the organs simultaneously
5. Restorative yoga balances energy (prana; upward, and apana; downward)

Restorative Yoga Props

Props are essential because they encourage deep relaxation and help the body and mind fully rest without pain or discomfort.

Essentials:

- 2 Yoga blankets
- 1 large bolster
- 2 Blocks

Nice to Haves:

- Small bolster
 - Strap
 - Eye pillow
 - Sand bags
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Setting Up Props

Set up the class for the very first pose

Create a sequence that requires minimal adjustment between poses (i.e. fish pose to child's pose)

Fold and roll blankets properly

Make it as easy and comfortable as possible

Always show the full setup and pose first

Keep an eye on students as they transition:
are all the curves of their body supported?

Use verbal cues when possible, use physical adjustments when necessary

Offer the option to adjust in order to find full comfort if they still seem uneasy

Be Creative and Resourceful!



Restorative Yoga Postures



Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle)



- 1 Bolster
- 1 Blanket
- 2 Blocks

Gentle hip opener

Gentle heart and upper body opener
Releases shoulder, chest and upper
back tension

Activates heart chakra sacral chakra

~Spinal extension/backbend

Gentle Supported Twist



- 1 Bolster
- 1 Blanket
- 2 Blocks

Gentle digestive stimulation

Spinal twist

Grounding, root chakra activation

Relieves upper back tension from
computer work/technology

~Spinal twist (2 movements of the
spine; both sides)

Supported Fish Pose (Matsyasana)



- 1 Bolster / rolled up blanket
- 1 folded blanket

Deep heart opener
Improves circulation
Total body tension release
Doesn't encourage sleep

~Spinal extension/backbend

Supported Child's Pose (Balasana)



- 1 Bolster
- 1-2 Blankets
- 2 Blocks

Helps low back

Opens hips

Gentle neck/upper back opener

Grounding, calming, soothing

Root chakra activating

~ Spinal flexion/forward fold

Lateral Bend



- 1 bolster
- 1 blanket
- 1 block

Side opener

Release stuck energy

Open back, shoulders

Stimulate heart and lungs

~lateral bend (2 movements of the spine; both sides)

Legs up the wall



- 1 rolled blanket
- 1 bolster/folded blanket
- 1 strap (optional)

(can also do on bolster)

Reduce inflammation

Lessen swelling in legs/feet

Lymphatic drainage

Balance whole body

Extreme relaxation

~Inversion

Tips for Teaching Restorative Yoga



Relaxation Elements



1. Binaural beats, healing hz music, music for sleep, nature sounds
2. Essential oils, diffuser, candles
3. Eye pillows with lavender/herbs
4. Quiet, clean room, create a distraction and clutter-free space
5. Free/clear wall if needed
6. Clean/disinfected props
7. Speak slowly and clearly!
8. Strike a balance in of quiet and speaking

Restorative yoga is...

an amazing healing yoga style to add to your toolkit. Restorative yoga postures can be put in a yin/yang class, or at the end of a power class for ultimate healing. Get creative with the postures, find what feels good, and adapt to the props you have.

Sources

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