

**Restorative Poses**  
**Yoga Spirit Academy**  
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**Introduction**

Restorative yoga is a form of active relaxation. Regular yoga poses supported by props bring the body and mind into deep relaxation. It also passively stretches tight muscles, rehabilitates injured muscles and joints, and can be used to heal and prevent back pain, frozen shoulder, migraines, anxiety and depression, and many other physical/emotional issues. There are two principles to keep in mind when practicing or teaching restorative yoga poses. First, keep adjusting the props until the student can give in completely to the pose without holding tension in any muscles or joints. Second, work up to holding the pose for the maximum amount of time in order to enjoy the full benefits of the practice. Here are some restorative yoga poses to get you started.

**Supta Baddha Konasana (reclining bound angle)**

Props: bolster or two firm bed pillows, yoga blanket, yoga strap and optional eye pillow

Place a bolster in the center of your mat so that when you lean back over it it supports the entire length of your spine and your head. If you do not have a bolster, stack two firm bed pillows in the center of your mat. Fold a blanket into a square and place it at the top of the bolster where your head will rest. Sit so that your sacrum is pressed against the lower edge of the bolster. Bring the soles of your feet together and open your knees to the sides. Wrap the strap around your sacrum and loop the end around your toes, belting the strap so it is snug but not overly tight. Lean back over the bolster and rest your head on the folded blanket. Place the eye pillow over your eyes. Hold the pose for 5 minutes, gradually increasing to 15 minutes. To come out of the pose, reach down to release the strap first, then lift your knees and roll off the bolster onto your side. Wait several breaths before sitting up.

*Benefits:* opens the chest, abdomen and groins; relaxes the neck and shoulders; relaxes the nervous system

**Salamba Setu Bandhasana (supported bridge pose)**

Props: bolster or 2 or more yoga blankets, and optional eye pillow

Use a bolster or fold your blankets lengthwise and stack them in the center of your mat. Lie down lengthwise on the bolster or blankets so they support the length of your spine. Slide off the end until your head, neck and shoulders are resting on the mat. There will be a sharp bend in your neck. Adjust the height of the blankets to make this pose more comfortable. Rest your arms on the floor to the sides with your palms turned up. Place the eye pillow over your eyes. Hold for 5 minutes, gradually increasing to 15 minutes.

*Benefits:* opens the chest; stretches the neck; frees the breath; increases circulation to the upper body

### **Salamba Jathara Parivarthanasana (supported spinal twist)**

Props: bolster or blankets, optional hand towel and eye pillow

Place the bolster horizontally on your mat or stack the blankets on top of each other lengthwise. Sit down on the right end of the bolster so that the length of the bolster is to the left of your body. Bend your knees and move your buttocks slightly forward on the bolster without falling off. Using your arms to guide you, lie back on the floor so that your hips are elevated. Open your arms to the side in a “T” position. With an exhalation, roll your knees to the left, allowing the bolster to support the left hip and knees. Place the eye pillow over your eyes. If your knees separate, place a small towel or blanket in between your knees. If your right shoulder feels overstretched, bend your right elbow and rest your right fingertips on your ribs. If your right side and back feel overstretched, remove one blanket. To increase the stretch, straighten your legs at a 45 degree angle and/or add a blanket. Adjust the props until you feel comfortable and relaxed. Hold for 5 minutes, gradually increasing your time to 10 minutes. To switch to the other side, bring your knees up to the center, place your feet on the floor, and scoot your body to the left side of the mat. Repeat the pose by bringing your knees to the right, holding for the same amount of time as the other side. To come out of the pose, bring your knees up to center. Place your feet on the floor and move the entire body off the bolster. Roll over to your side, rest for a few breaths, then sit up.

*Benefits:* stretches low back, the muscles along the side of the body, and the intercostal muscles (between the ribs); enhances breathing

### **Supported forward bends: Paschimottanasana (seated forward bend)**

Props: chair and blankets

Sit facing the seat of the chair with your legs extended under the chair. You may wish to sit on a blanket to elevate your hips. Cross your arms, lean forward, and place your arms and head on the seat of the chair. Hold for 5-10 minutes. An alternative way to practice is to stack a bolster and/or several blankets on your outstretched legs. Cross your arms, lean forward, and rest your arms and head on the supports.

*Benefits:* stretches low back, calms the mind

### **Upavistha Konasana (open angle)**

Props: chair and blankets

Practice the same pose as above except that your legs are open to the sides of the chair in an open angle.

*Benefits:* relaxes inner thighs, pelvic floor, lower abdomen, and uterus

### **Balasana (child’s pose)**

Props: bolster or blankets

Place the bolster and blankets in the center of your mat. Kneel at one end of the support, separating your knees so that the bolster and blankets can be wedged in between them. Sit back on your heels. Place your hands on either side of the support and gently lower your torso onto the pillow and blankets, turning your head to one side and resting your arms on either side of the support. Your head should remain on the support, so if you have a long torso you may need to set up an additional bolster and blankets end to end. The torso should remain parallel to the floor, so add and subtract blankets accordingly. If this position is stressful on your lower legs, you can place a small towel or blanket between your buttocks and heels. Hold for up to 5 minutes with your head turned to one side, then turn your head to the other side for an equal amount of time. To come out of the pose, press your hands firmly into the floor and lift up your torso to sit back on your heels.

*Benefits:* relieves menstrual cramps and low back pain

### **Elevated Viparita Karani (legs up the wall pose)**

Props: 2 yoga blankets and optional eye pillow

Take your yoga blankets and eye pillow to the wall. Fold your blankets lengthwise and place them parallel to the wall. Sit sideways on one edge of the blanket with knees bent and your shoulder 4-6 inches from the wall. Using your arms to guide you, make a quarter turn with your body so you can lie down on the floor with your knees bent and the soles of your feet against the wall. Extend your legs up the wall. Adjust yourself on the blankets so your back and neck are relaxed and your legs can comfortably straighten. Moving the buttocks away from the wall decreases the stretch on the back of the legs while moving closer to the wall increases the stretch. Once you are comfortable, place the eye pillow over your eyes, reach your arms on the floor toward the wall, and turn your palms up. Hold for 5 minutes, gradually increasing to 15 minutes. To come out of the pose, bend your knees, and roll over to your right side. Rest here for several breaths before pressing up to a seated position.

*Benefits:* Opens the chest to facilitate breathing; opens the chest; relieves pressure on the feet and legs; helps to lower blood pressure

### **Essential resource on restorative yoga**

Judith Lasater, *Relax & Renew*, Rodmell Press, 1995