

## **The Yoga Corner**

### **“Restorative Yoga” By Karen Hambleton**

Yoga is noted for calming the sympathetic nervous system that can keep the body in a state of arousal, where stress hormones surge and your temperature rises heart rate and blood pressure spike. Restorative Yoga & Yoga reverses all this and, just as importantly, it quiets the mind, undoing the negative thought patterns. Restorative Yoga & Yoga when practiced regularly by nurturing physical postures will help you to heal the effects of chronic stress in as little as five minutes a day. The effects of stress have reached epidemic proportions in our lives, and stress related diseases have become a medical specialty.

Sometimes the effects of stress present themselves during milestone life events: marriage, Birth of a child, getting a new job, or death of a loved one. Other times it is the myriad of responsibilities of your jobs and families. Stress is often accompanied by one or more negative effects-impatience, frustration, irritation, anger, muscle tension, headache indigestion, or poor elimination. The more we experience stress it builds the effects compound. The mind alerts the body that danger is present. So, in response the adrenal gland, located above the kidneys secrete catecholamine hormones. These hormones act upon the autonomic nervous system, as the body prepares for fight or flight. The heart rate, blood pressure, mental alertness and muscle tension are increased. The body also shuts down systems that are not a priority in the immediacy of the moment, including digestion, elimination, growth repair, and reproduction. The body does not benefit from nutrition because the digestion and elimination systems are slowed down. Even sleep is disturbed by this agitated state. The conditions add stress of their own, and the cycle continues.

The antidote to stress is relaxation. To relax is to rest deeply. This rest is different from sleep. Deep states of sleep include periods of dreaming, which increase muscular tension, as well as other physiological signs of tension. Relaxation on the other hand is a state in which there is no movement no effort and the brain is quiet. A Restorative Yoga practice is about undoing not doing and is different from other practices as it allows nature to support and restore you. A Restorative practice can transform you. Common to all stress reduction techniques is about putting the body in a comfortable position with gentle attention directed toward the breath. You may ask yourself if these techniques work? Scientists have researched the effects of relaxation and report measurable benefits, including reduction in muscle tension and improved circulation. One of the foremost writers and researchers in the field of stress reduction today is Herbert Benson, M.D. Who understood the “relaxation response” to which he describes the physiological and mental responses that occur when one consciously relaxes. In the book “The Wellness Book”, he defines the relaxation response as “a physiological state characterized by a slower heart rate, metabolism, rate of breathing lower blood pressure and slower brain wave patterns.” According to David Spiegel M.D. “the mind and body are connected and must work together, and this should be a powerful asset in treating medical illness.” In psychoneuroimmunology is an interdisciplinary field that studies the interaction between psychological processes and our nervous and immune systems. This field understands that the health of the psyche is reflected in, and partly created by, the health of the body, and vice versa.

Dating back to the Indus Valley civilization of 2000 to 4000 B.C.E., yoga practices are designed to help the individual feel whole. B.K.S. Iyengar explored how these modified poses could help people recover from illness or injury. The Restorative Yoga has been directly inspired by him are such powerful tools to

reduce stress and restore health. By supporting the body with props, we alternately stimulate and relax the body to move toward balance. Some poses have an overall benefit. Others target an individual part like heart and lungs. All create specific physiological responses that are beneficial to health and can reduce the effects of stress related disease. A Restorative Yoga practice is especially beneficial from the times before, during, and after major life events: death of a loved one, change of job or residence, marriage, divorce major holidays, and vacations. You can practice the poses when ill or recovering from illness or injury.

Restorative Yoga sequences are designed to move the spine in all directions. The poses work with moving the spine into gentle back bends while others are forward bends. Additional poses gently twist the column both left and right. A well sequenced restorative practice also includes inverted poses, which reverses the effects of gravity. Just by resting our legs on a bolster or pillow the effects are quite dramatic. Because we sit and stand most of the day, blood and lymph fluid accumulate in the lower extremities. Just by changing the positions of the legs to gravity fluids are returned to the upper body, and heart functions is enhanced. Restorative Yoga alternately stimulates and soothes the organs so fresh blood returns to soak the organs. With these yoga movements comes the enhanced exchange of oxygen and waste products across the cell membrane. Restorative Yoga position balance two aspects of energy so that the student is neither overstimulated nor depleted. Restorative Yoga practice teaches the “art of being relaxed”.

**“Enjoy your Restorative Yoga it’s worth your patience in the practice and reap the rewards from the inside out!”**

***Om Shanti,  
Karen Hambleton***