



*Restorative
Yoga*

Exercise can work for many different types of bodies, many different stages in life, and for each person's many different moods. While for some a cross training or high intensity cardio class may seem like the way to go, for others a gentle Vinyasa yoga flow class may be optimal. For some people, their needs change daily. However, the restorative effects of yoga should never be overlooked, no matter what age or training method. During Restorative Yoga you focus on slowing down your yoga practice, going deeper in poses, and just feeling its restorative power. It does wonders for the body!

What is Restorative Yoga?

Restorative Yoga is a therapeutic style of yoga which utilizes props to make it easier for the body to get into certain poses, and thus, achieve physical, mental and emotional relaxation. It is a powerful tool to reduce stress and restore health. Practicing poses using props provides a completely supportive environment for total relaxation. The more your body is supported in the poses the deeper the sense of relaxation. Relaxation is a state in which there is no movement, no effort, and the brain is quiet. The use of props makes it easier for you to maintain balance while you are stimulating and relaxing your body. While some restorative yoga poses are beneficial to the entire body, others target specific parts of the body, such as the heart or the lungs. Typically, Restorative poses are sustained for ten minutes or for as long as you are comfortable.



What to Expect

Restorative classes are usually very relaxing and are a good complement to more active practices. Tree of Life will arrange for the necessary props to be available to you. The lights may be dimmed and if it is chilly, you may be covered with a blanket since you will not be warming up the body the way you would be in a regular class. After you are set up in a pose with all your props, you will hold the pose for an extended period. Although you are supported, you will definitely still feel the stretch. It's a relaxing style of practice that leaves you feeling open and refreshed.

Support Creates Release

The guiding principle of restorative yoga is that support creates release. Every pose is a variation on that theme, and the aim of each pose is the same: relaxation. The most obvious feature of a restorative yoga class is the variety of props: blankets, bolsters and blocks support the body to release muscular tension. Equally important, though less obvious, is Tree of Life's atmosphere that encourages students to let go of mental stress.

Why should I practice Restorative Yoga?

Students come to a restorative yoga class to let go of the stresses of everyday life—including the need to do things right and the constant pressure to improve or to achieve. At Tree of Life we understand that motivation, and can provide a yoga practice that goes well beyond a few relaxing stretches and gives students permission to truly let go.

In a chronically stressed state, quality of life and perhaps life itself is at risk. The body's capacity to heal itself can be compromised, inhibiting recovery from injury or illness, or it may create new illness or injury, including high blood pressure, ulcers, back pain, immune dysfunction and depression.

The antidote to stress is relaxation!

Restorative yoga focuses on relaxation, renewal, effortlessness and ease. Props are used to safely support the body in various postures which allows the body to move towards a state of balance. This type of yoga practice soothes your nervous system, helps you quiet your mind and invites you to release deeply held tension.

Restorative poses cultivate the habit of attention. The mind should always focus on the breath. When you notice your mind wandering bring it back to the breath. You can also focus on where and how you hold tension. Then use the breath as a tool to release the tension. Breathe to the area of tension and on the exhale release the gripping. During these periods of deep relaxation you will be healed and nurtured from within.



Origins of Restorative Yoga

Modern restorative yoga is derived from a yoga style that was invented by B.K.S. Iyengar, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest yoga masters in the world. Iyengar instructed his students to make use of props to perfect their poses, and his teachings became known as Iyengar Yoga, which provided the foundation for the development of restorative yoga. Later on, one of Iyengar's students, Judith Lasater, made restorative yoga a popular form of yoga around the world.

Judith Lasater says ~"The development of these poses is credited to B.K.S. Iyengar, of Pune, India. Author of the contemporary classic *Light on Yoga* and numerous other books, Iyengar has been teaching yoga for more than sixty years. Widely recognized as a worldwide authority, he is one of the most creative teachers of yoga today."



Iyengar's early teaching experience showed him how pain or injury can result from a student straining in a yoga pose. He experimented with "props," modifying poses until the student could practice without strain. He also explored how these modified poses could help people recover from illness or injury.

Benefits

Restorative Yoga focuses on relaxing the body in restful postures. Note that 'rest' is different than sleep. Rest provides the body an opportunity to renew and heal. Countless studies have proven the physical and emotional benefits of this.

Restorative yoga, as well as other forms of yoga, helps to trigger the Parasympathetic nervous system also known as the PNS. The PNS is responsible for balancing the body and bringing its response system back into equilibrium by lowering the heart rate, blood pressure and stimulating the immune system as well as keeping the endocrine system operating optimally. When this system gets out of balance, or when the Sympathetic nervous system, SNS gets over-stimulated, the PNS helps to bring all back in balance. Constant practice of restorative yoga will make your body less vulnerable to stress-related illnesses and help you achieve optimal health. Restorative yoga provides healing for the body and the mind. It is especially useful when you need to eliminate fatigue and stress that result from your daily activities. It can also help you recover from illness and injury or overcome emotional depression and anxiety that are caused by traumatic events such as divorce, loss of job and death of a beloved.

David Spiegel, M.D., author of *Living Beyond Limits*, reports, "In medicine, we are learning that physical problems, such as high blood pressure and heart disease, can be influenced by psychological interventions, such as relaxation training. Indeed, the Food and Drug Administration issued a report recommending these non-drug approaches as the treatment of choice for milder forms of hypertension. Mind and body are connected and must work together, and this should be a powerful asset in treating medical illness."

Poses

Many restorative yoga poses are similar to normal yoga poses, except that they are performed with the support of props. Before you start doing the poses, do a warm-up first, which can be the sun salutation or the gentle Vinyasa. Each restorative yoga pose has to be held for several minutes, and it can even be as long as 10 to 15 minutes.

Some of the commonly practiced poses include:

- Legs against Wall
- Child's Pose
- Reclining Bound Angle
- Supported Savasana for Relaxation

We will explore these and many more in depth in Restorative Yoga.

When to Practice

Restorative yoga postures can be practiced at any time of the day. Ideally, one would start their day with yin poses (Yin Yoga targets the connective tissues, such as the ligaments, bones, and even the joints of the body that normally are not exercised very much in a more active style of asana practice) and breath work. It is a great way to wake up the body and clear the mind before launching into the day. It is also beneficial to practice restorative postures at the end of the day, before bed. This can slow the body and mind down, and prepare the body for sleep. No matter what time of day you practice restorative yoga, you find you sleep better and have a higher energy level throughout your day.

Before you Begin

Please Note: Everyone's body is different and some people may be uncomfortable in all variations of these poses. It is most important to listen to your body and not push it beyond its limits. Remember to breathe into your lower belly, and to allow your body, joints and muscles to open into the posture.

When you are practicing restorative yoga, you will feel a sense of motionlessness and shapelessness, and this may result in some forms of emotional discomfort. Restorative yoga poses can make you feel vulnerable while you are practicing them, but you can keep yourself comfortable by putting on an eye pillow or placing your feet on the wall.

Props

If you want to perform restorative yoga well, you need to have a wide range of props. The main purpose of props is to provide support for your body when you are stretching or relaxing. As such, you have to make sure that you have props of the right sizes for specific poses. A prop that is half an inch larger or smaller can cause you to lose comfort and concentration when you are performing a pose.

The more your body is supported in poses the deeper the sense of relaxation. With props it is easier for the body to get into certain poses, and thus, surrender to the pose.

Essential props include (note, not all of these need to be used in every class):

- Yoga blocks
- Yoga strap
- Blankets
- Yoga bolster
- Balls
- Chairs
- Wall
- Sandbags
- Eye Pillow

