Yoga for Stress Management and Relaxation

Shawnee Thornton Hardy
M.Ed., RYT -500,
Member of IAYT – International Association of Yoga Therapists
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The bodies stress response...

When you “perceive” a threat your sympathetic nervous system takes over and kicks into a “fight or flight” response. The heart rate becomes more rapid, muscles tense up, breathing moves into chest breathing and the blood flows away from the internal organs and towards the muscles of the limbs. Senses become sharper preparing the body to either fight or flee danger.

The stress response is the bodies way of protecting us. It can keep us alert and can save us by helping us respond quickly to dangerous situations.

In small doses stress can help you perform under pressure and can motivate you to do your best.
Modern life has become fast-paced with many pressures, expectations and stressors.

When we experience these stressors in our everyday life and don’t have a means of coping with the stress our bodies and nervous systems develop habitual stress responses.

When the body becomes over-stressed and the sympathetic nervous system is in over-drive, in a constant state of fight or flight, there can be negative effects both emotionally and physically.
Negative Effects from Stress on your body

- headaches
- muscle tension or pain
- fatigue
- digestive problems
- autoimmune conditions
- diabetes
- back and neck pain
- high blood pressure
- heart problems
- weakened immune system
- ulcers
# Negative Effects from Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>on your mood</th>
<th>on your behavior</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>over-eating or under-eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restlessness</td>
<td>angry outbursts</td>
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<tr>
<td>lack of motivation/focus</td>
<td>drug or alcohol abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>irritability or anger</td>
<td>conflict with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>sadness or depression</td>
<td>social withdrawal</td>
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</table>
Just Relax…

- relax-ation

the state of being free from tension and anxiety

When we are free from tension and in a relaxed state, we tap into our parasympathetic nervous system or our “relax and renew” system.

The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for bringing the body back to a state of equilibrium.
Parasympathetic Nervous System

The parasympathetic nervous system controls your rest, relax and digest response. This system is responsible for bringing the body to a state of calm and healing.

When the parasympathetic nervous system is dominant...

- breathing slows
- heart rate drops
- blood pressure lowers
- blood vessels relax
- digestion occurs
- all of the systems in the body function more optimally
Just Breathe

By controlling our breathing we can control our nervous systems response to stress.

Controlled breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and creates a state of calm in the mind and body.

Calming the breath calms the nervous system. A calm nervous system calms the mind.

Tense mind = tense body
Relaxed mind = relaxed body
Benefits of controlled breathing

Controlled breathing can...

- Lower blood pressure and heart rate
- Reduce lactic-acid buildup in muscles tissue
- Reduce levels of stress hormones in the body
- Balance levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood.
- Increase physical energy
- Increase immune system functioning
- Support healthy digestion
- Increase feeling of calm and well-being
Breathing for relaxation

- ujjayi breath
- 2-4 breath
- alternate nostril breathing
- falling out breath
- Belly (abdominal) breathing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ujjayi breath</th>
<th>2-4 breath</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or lying down.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seal lips</td>
<td>• Breath in through nose slowly for count of 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Breathe in through nose</td>
<td>• Breathe out through nose for count of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Restrict back of throat</td>
<td>• Decrease or increase count (key is to have twice as long for exhale than inhale).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Breathe out through nose creating audible sound of waves with breath.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>pranayama (breathing)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>belly breathing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or lying down.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Bring hands on belly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Breathe in through nose and draw air into belly – making belly puff out like a balloon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Exhale through nose – belly button draws in towards spine with exhale.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>falling out breath</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sit up tall in a cross legged position or on edge of chair or standing up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Breath in deep through nose.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Open mouth and exhale - haaaaaaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**pranayama (breathing)**

**alternate nostril breathing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Side</th>
<th>Action</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Start with right hand thumb and ring finger&lt;br&gt;Press right thumb on right nostril&lt;br&gt;Inhale (breathe in) through left nostril&lt;br&gt;Press ring finger on left nostril&lt;br&gt;Exhale (breathe out) through right nostril</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Move to left hand thumb and ring finger&lt;br&gt;Press left thumb on left nostril&lt;br&gt;Inhale (breathe in) through right nostril&lt;br&gt;Press ring finger on right nostril&lt;br&gt;Exhale (breathe out) through left nostril</td>
</tr>
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Asanas (yoga poses)

When we are in a constant state of stress, our minds are tense, our bodies are tense and our sympathetic nervous system is heightened.

Specific yoga poses can induce the relaxation response in the body. Calming and restorative poses along with controlled breathing activate the parasympathetic nervous system, bringing the mind and body to a calm and relaxed state.
asanas on the go or in the workplace to relieve tension in the body and increase relaxation

- seated forward fold
- rag doll
- down dog against the wall
- shoulder shrugs
- seated twist
- seated backbend
- palms clasped arm stretch
- palm on forehead
- wrist release
- ear stretches
- desk shoulder opener
- gomukhasana arms
- eagle arms
- neck/levator scapulae release
Upper trapezius release
Child’s pose (balasana)

Benefits:
Gently Stretches the hips, thighs and ankles. Calms the brain (nervous system). Lengthens and stretches spine. Relieves tension in back neck and shoulders. Relieves stress and fatigue.

Instructions:
Kneel on floor
Touch big toes together
Sit back on heels
Spread knees wide
Exhale and lay torso between thighs
Rest forehead on mat
Stretch fingertips towards from on mat.

Breath: Ujjayi
Supta baddha konasana (supine bound angle)

**Benefits:**

**Instructions:**
Lie on back on mat
Bring bottoms of feet together to touch and let knees spread wide
If the stretch feels too intense place blocks or rolled towels/blankets under knees.
Spread arms wide – palms facing up
Relax shoulders

**Breath:** Ujjayi or Abdominal breathing
Legs up the wall (Viparita Karani)

**Benefits:** Relieves tired or cramped legs and feet. Stretches hamstrings, front torso and back of neck. Relieves mild backache. Improves circulation. Calms the mind. Helps with insomnia.

**Instructions:**
You will need one or 2 thickly folded blankets or a bolster
- Bring support 5-6 inches away from wall
- Bring right side of body against the wall – seated on bolster
- Bring legs up against the wall
- Sitting bones should dip down slightly in between bolster and wall (If stretch is too intense lower support).

**Breath:** Breath natural, slow inhales and exhales
Cat pose  
(Marjaryasana)


**Instructions:**
Come onto hands and knees on mat – knees hips width apart, hands shoulder width apart

Inhale

Exhale - Press palms into mat, arch back, drop head and gaze back towards belly button

Inhale back to flat back

Repeat 4-5 times

**Breath:** Ujjayi
Down dog
(Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Benefits:

Instructions:
Begin on hands and knees (tabletop) knees hips width apart, hands shoulder width apart
Walk hands slightly forward in front of shoulders. Spread fingers wide.
Tuck toes and lift hips up
Bend knees slightly or generously depending on tightness in back and hamstrings
Press palm into mat – lengthen arms.
Gaze back towards back of room

Breath: Ujjayi
Standing forward bend or rag doll (uttanasana)

Benefits:

Instructions:
Stand with feet hips width apart
Bend forward
Bend knees depending on tension in low back and tightness in hamstrings
Bring fingers into crooks of elbows
Release head and neck
Draw shoulders away from ears

Breath: Ujjayi
Supine Twist  
(Supta Matsyendrasana)

**Benefits:**
Stretches the back muscles and spine. Stimulates the kidneys and abdominal organs. Helps with digestion. Relieves stress.

**Instructions:**
Lyse on back with knees bent.
Hug right knee in towards chest and straighten left leg.
Draw right knees over to the left (shift left hip to the right if needed)
Arms stretch out wide
Gaze to the right
Repeat with left leg

**Breath:** Normal, relaxed breathing
Savasana

Benefits:
Calms nervous system, Relieves tension, stress and anxiety.
Relaxes the body. Reduces headache, fatigue and insomnia.

Instructions:
Draw knees in towards chest
Wrap arms around knees
Imagine your body as a sponge that sops up stress and tension
Squeeze body into a tight ball – Tense every muscle in body - squeezing tension, stress and any negativity out of your sponge
Release legs and arms
Let legs come out wide – toes dropping out to side
Arms out wide – palms facing up
Breath: Let go of any control over breath or body
Contact Me

Shawnee Thornton Hardy
yogabyshawnee@gmail.com
www.yogabyshawnee.com
619-997-9492