

RESTORATIVE YOGA

SHORT DESCRIPTION

Restorative Yoga is a gentle, therapeutic practice that uses props to fully support the body in passive poses held for extended periods, allowing for complete relaxation, nervous system regulation, and deep rest that promotes healing, stress reduction, and restoration of physical and mental energy.

OVERVIEW

STYLE | Extremely gentle, passive, and nurturing; focused on stillness and support

STRUCTURE | 4–6 supported postures per class, held for 5–20 minutes each with full prop support

BREATH | Natural, effortless breathing; breath awareness deepens the relaxation response

FLOW | Very minimal movement; transitions are slow, mindful, and integrated

PACE | Ultra-slow; the focus is on complete surrender and ease in every moment

FOCUS | Deep rest, parasympathetic activation, healing from stress or trauma, replenishing energy

TEACHER ROLE | Grounded space-holder; ensures comfort, provides emotional and physical support, offers gentle cues

VIBE | Calming, meditative, and cocoon-like; often described as “being held” by the practice

DESCRIPTION

Restorative Yoga: The Art of Deep Rest and Nervous System Healing

Restorative Yoga is a sacred pause — a practice of conscious rest that invites the body and mind into a state of deep, supported stillness. Using props such as bolsters, blankets, blocks, straps, and eye pillows, the body is carefully positioned and held in passive postures for extended periods of time — often 10–20 minutes each.

Unlike Yin Yoga, which targets the fascia and connective tissues through stretch and tension, Restorative Yoga uses no muscular effort at all. Every aspect of the body is supported, allowing the practitioner to completely let go. In this space of stillness, the parasympathetic nervous system (rest-and-digest mode) is activated, and the body’s natural capacity for healing is amplified.

It is not uncommon for practitioners to feel emotions arise, drift into sleep-like states, or experience profound clarity and peace. Restorative Yoga is both radically gentle and deeply transformative.

Origins of Restorative Yoga

Restorative Yoga has its roots in Iyengar Yoga, where teacher B.K.S. Iyengar developed the use of props to support healing and precision. The practice was further refined and popularized by Judith Hanson Lasater, who emphasized the importance of rest, surrender, and the body's ability to heal when fully supported.

Restorative Yoga emerged in response to the high demands of modern life, offering a counterbalance to overstimulation, stress, and depletion. Today, it is widely practiced in therapeutic settings, trauma-informed spaces, and yoga studios around the world.

Style and Structure

Style

Restorative Yoga is quiet, non-effortful, and deeply internal. Poses are held in complete stillness, with no stretching or activation. Every part of the body is fully supported so that muscles can relax, breath can deepen, and the mind can quiet.

It is the yin of yin, and a practice of radical non-doing.

Structure

A typical Restorative class includes:

- Opening grounding practice (often breath, intention, or a short meditation)
- 4–6 postures, each supported with bolsters, blankets, and props
- Gentle breath awareness or guided relaxation
- Long savasana or yoga nidra-inspired closing

Common poses include:

- Supported Child's Pose
- Reclining Bound Angle (Supta Baddha Konasana)
- Legs Up the Wall (Viparita Karani)
- Supported Twist
- Reclined Heart Opener

Breath and Flow

Breath

Breath in Restorative Yoga is:

- Natural, soft, and unforced
- Often deepens over time as the nervous system settles
- Used to guide awareness and relaxation rather than to energize or direct movement
- May be accompanied by counting, visualization, or gentle cues

Breath is not a tool for effort — it is a portal to rest.

Flow

Flow is experienced as a slow unfolding of inner states — from tension to ease, from doing to being.

There is no choreography or dynamic sequence. Movement between poses is intentional, quiet, and mindful.

The entire class is designed to feel like one extended exhale.

Pace, Focus, and Teacher Role

Pace

Restorative Yoga is the slowest of all yoga practices. Poses may be held:

- For 5–10 minutes in beginner-friendly classes
- Up to 20–30 minutes in advanced or therapeutic settings

There is ample time between shapes for integration, adjustment, or simple stillness.

Focus

The core focus is:

- Activating the parasympathetic nervous system
- Providing safe, supported space for rest and emotional release
- Facilitating healing from injury, trauma, fatigue, or stress
- Cultivating inner presence, awareness, and trust

This is not about flexibility or progress — it's about allowing what's already within you to surface and settle.

Teacher Role

Restorative teachers are:

- Space holders, not directors
- Trained to observe subtle cues of discomfort, effort, or emotional activation
- Masters of prop placement and energetic presence
- Often incorporate poetry, soft music, or silence
- Attuned to trauma sensitivity and individual needs

The best Restorative teachers are both seen and unseen — present without intruding.

Vibe and Community

- The vibe in a Restorative class is:
- Quiet, dimly lit, and sacred
- Warm, welcoming, and inclusive
- Emotionally safe and deeply relaxing
- Like a retreat into yourself, where nothing is expected but everything is welcome

Community tends to be gentle-hearted and grounded in mutual care and slowness.

Benefits of Restorative Yoga

Physical Benefits

- Deep release of chronic tension and fatigue
- Improved immune function and digestion
- Regulation of blood pressure and heart rate
- Recovery support for injury or illness
- Better sleep quality and hormonal balance

Mental and Emotional Benefits

- Nervous system regulation and trauma integration
- Reduction of anxiety, burnout, and overwhelm
- Enhanced emotional resilience and self-compassion
- Space to grieve, process, or simply be

Energetic and Spiritual Benefits

- Reconnection with intuition and inner wisdom
- Realignment with natural cycles and rhythms
- Strengthened energetic boundaries
- Healing through non-doing and deep receiving

Who Is Restorative Yoga For?

Ideal for:

- Those recovering from injury, illness, or burnout
- Anyone navigating grief, stress, or emotional fatigue
- Individuals with anxiety, insomnia, or trauma history
- Students craving deep rest and inward connection
- Yoga teachers and healers needing replenishment

Less suited for:

- Those seeking active, physically intense movement (though it is the perfect balance to that)
- Individuals who struggle with stillness — though that may signal it's exactly what's needed, lovingly introduced

CONCLUSION

Restorative Yoga is a sanctuary of stillness, a sacred invitation to rest, restore, and reconnect. In a world that rarely allows pause, this practice becomes revolutionary — a radical act of trust, surrender, and healing.

It asks nothing of you but your willingness to be held — by props, by breath, by presence. And in return, it offers you everything.

This is rest as medicine.

And every exhale becomes a homecoming.