



An Introduction to Yin Yoga

With 3 Step-By-Step Sequences



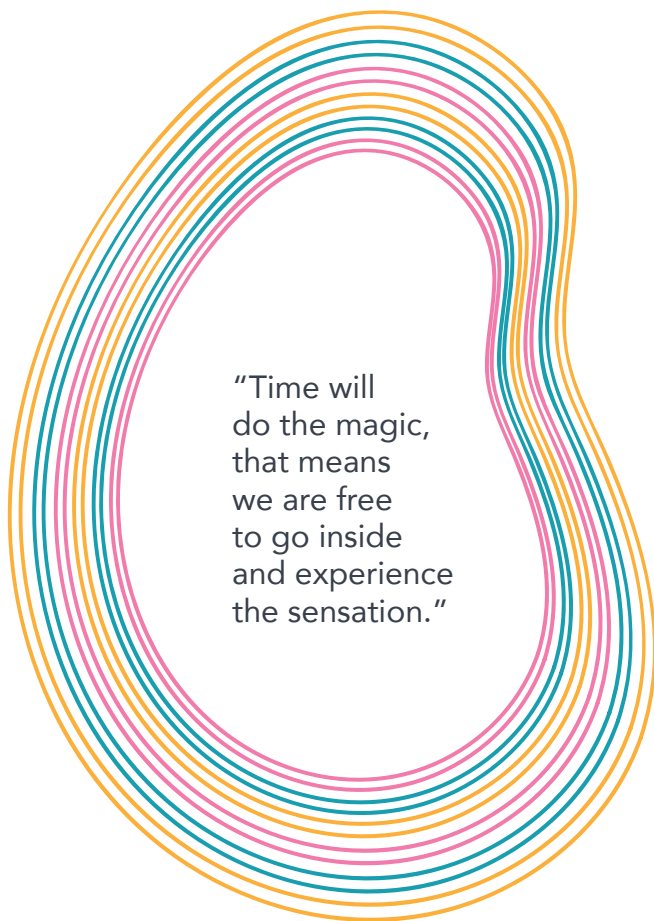
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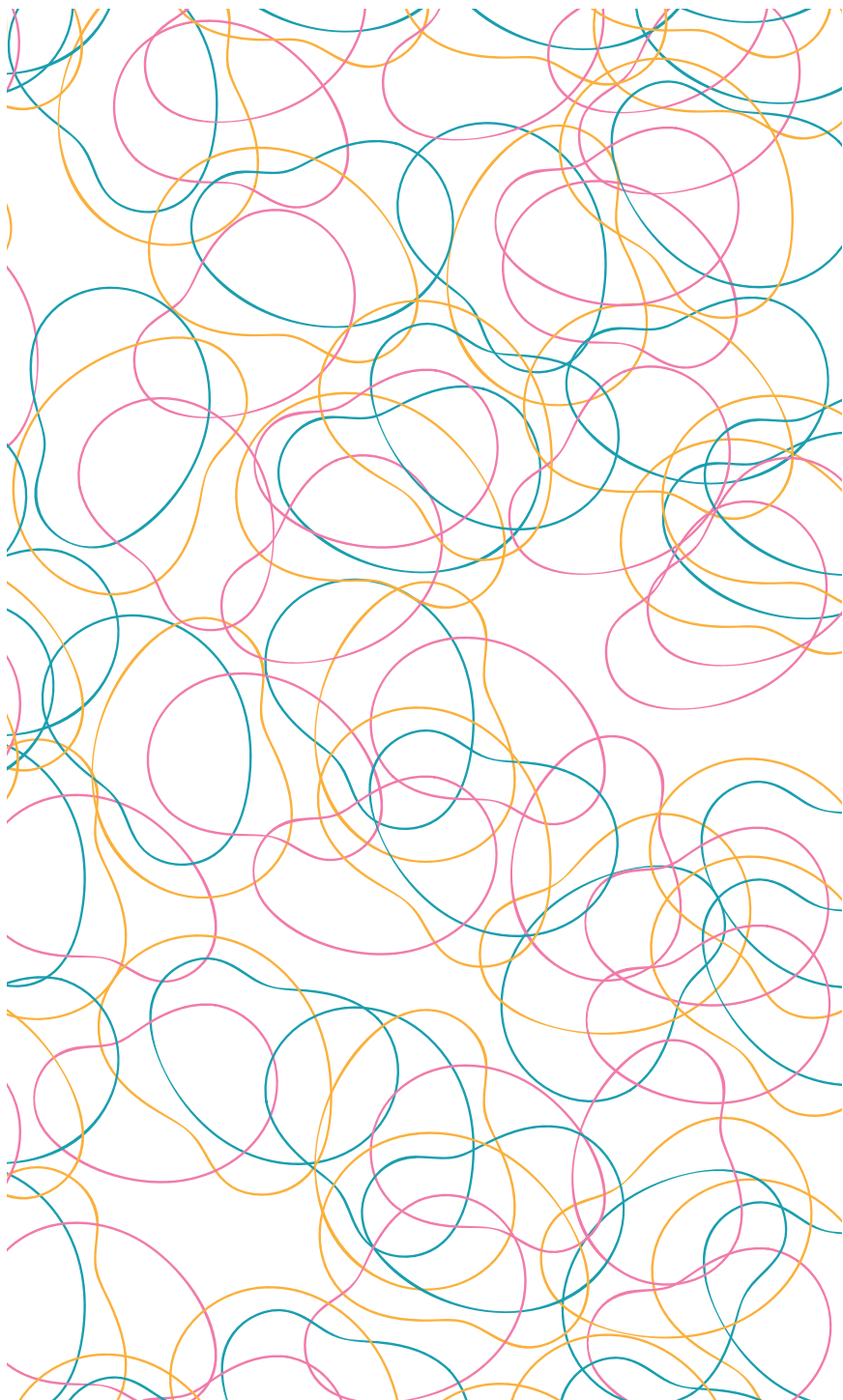


"Time will
do the magic,
that means
we are free
to go inside
and experience
the sensation."

—Bernie Clark



INTRODUCTION



About Yin Yoga

While more active “yang” styles of yoga target the muscles, yin targets and affects the connective tissues, which include our fascia, ligaments, joints, cartilage, and bones. This makes yin yoga a great complement to more vigorous practices. Yin yoga sequences are typically slow-paced with long holds and they usually contain fewer poses than hatha or vinyasa sequences. This is to enable you to explore sensation and to better get to know your body, allowing you to figure out how “deeply” to go (or not go) in each pose.

This book is designed to answer common questions about yin yoga, and it includes go-to yin sequences for elevating your mood when you feel irritated, getting grounded when you feel stressed, and for opening your heart.

Equipment

Many yin yoga poses require few or no props (though you can always add props in to better customize a pose to fit your needs and goals). We suggest using a yoga mat for comfort, and some of the pose variations described in this book incorporate common props:

A Yin Yoga Sequence to Lift Your Mood has a meditation at the beginning and you can use a block, yoga mat, and blanket for extra support if you like (these props are optional).

A Grounding Yin Sequence suggests having one to three blocks, one or two bolsters, and a blanket or two on hand to assist you in some of the poses.

A Heart-Chakra-Focused Yin Yoga Sequence requires two blocks, a bolster, and a blanket.

Things to Keep in Mind

Yoga is not a replacement for medical care. Always consult your doctor or other healthcare professionals to determine whether or not a particular type of exercise is right for you.

Interested in learning more about yin and other styles of yoga or taking on-demand classes? Visit yogainternational.com to go deeper!

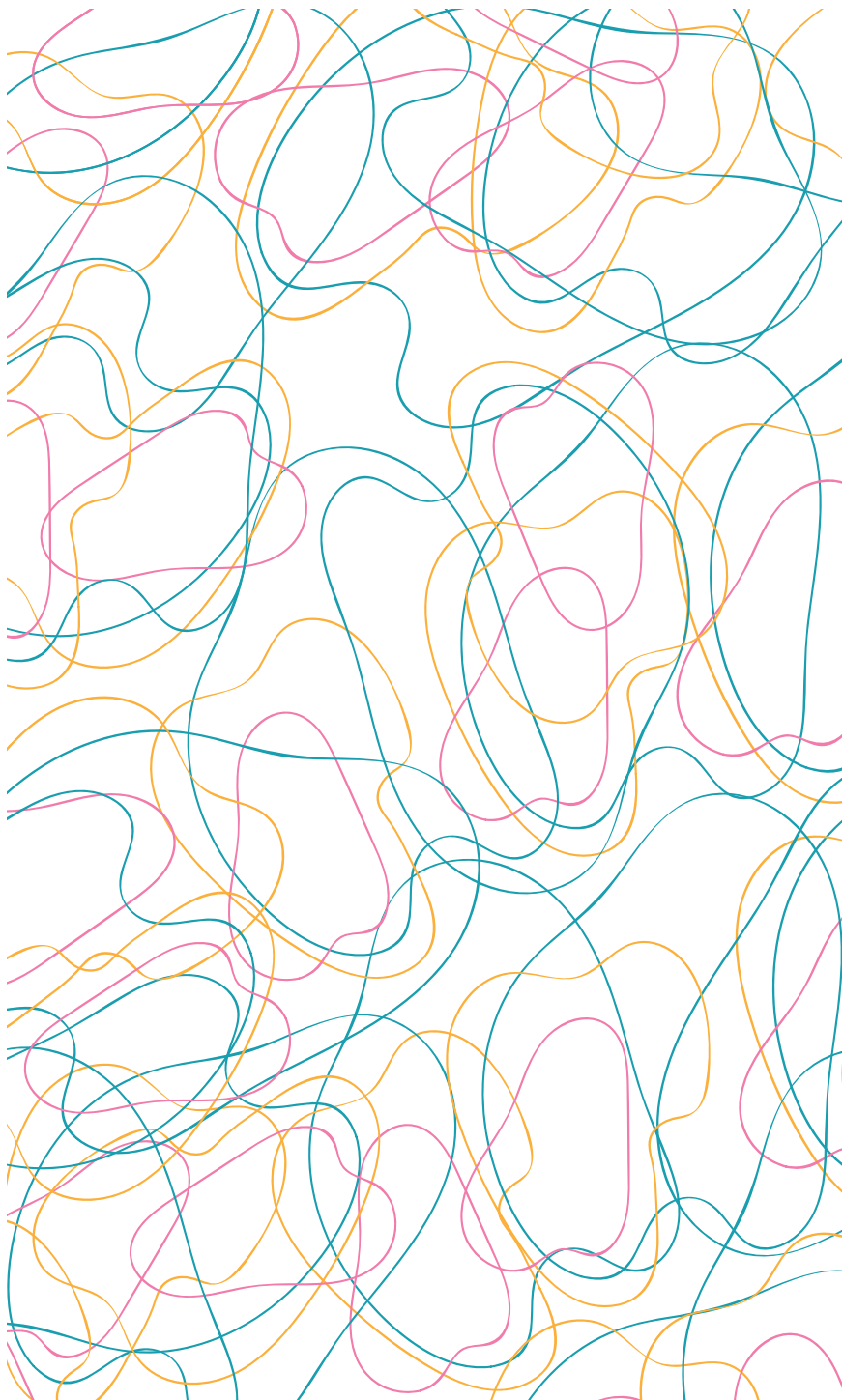


“By slowly loading various types of connective tissues with weight and maintaining long static holds, yin yoga aims to train muscular fascia to become more flexible and ligaments that support joints to become stronger.”

—Nishita Morris

5 COMMON
QUESTIONS
ABOUT YIN
YOGA

by Nishita Morris



What are the general benefits of yin yoga?

From a physical standpoint, yin postures are all about release. Postures and breathwork typically focus on manipulating the fascia—the deep connective tissues that fit like a sleeve around muscle groups and individual muscles.

Connective tissues such as tendons (which connect muscles to bones and help with skeletal movement) and ligaments (which connect bones to each other and help with overall stability) are also a focus of yin yoga. Since these tissues work hard to support and stabilize muscles and joints, they inherently resist changes from dynamic physical exertion. However, connective tissues lose elasticity if they are underused (which can happen if you have a mostly sedentary lifestyle) or as a natural byproduct of aging. This can present physically as stiffness, achy joints, or limited joint mobility.

By slowly loading various types of connective tissues with weight and maintaining long static holds, yin yoga aims to train muscular fascia to become more flexible and ligaments that support joints to become stronger. This creates

space for our muscles to lengthen more in yang practices and our joints to safely enjoy an increased range of mobility during our daily movements.

And a regular yin practice might make it physically easier for us to sit comfortably for long periods of time—all the better for meditation!

What should I think about while I hold a pose?

It's true that during a yin practice you may find yourself with a bit more "mental time" to manage than in, say, a "one-breath-one-movement" vinyasa class.

Deciding how to handle your mind during this time is part of the effort that goes into a yin session. Using this time to allow yourself to be with your thoughts and emotions can allow you to better connect with and understand yourself, a fundamental component of a full yoga practice.

If you regularly meditate or want to begin a meditation practice, yin yoga may be an ideal opportunity to do just that. Holding a pose presents one of the few opportunities many of us have to simply just "be"—not forced to think about anything, do any-

thing, or even move. Take advantage of that! Or become present to the various sensations and feelings that arise over the many minutes you hold a posture.

For example, you might notice areas of your body that feel stagnant or tight, or that feel spacious and open. Are there patterns in your daily movements that contribute to this? As time passes while you hold a particular posture, you may begin to notice that areas that felt “sticky” or “stuck” in the beginning have softened. This may be a very gradual experience that becomes more noticeable with a consistent yin practice.

You might also notice any mental discomfort or comfort you have with the yin practice. Is there a reason behind the discomfort or comfort that you can identify?

Or maybe you have a personal or professional goal that you have been working toward. Holding a yin posture may be a good time to singularly focus your mental energy on your goal, away from the distractions that bombard you throughout the day.

Should I keep my eyes closed?

If you are new to yin, closing your eyes may allow you to settle more

deeply into your body and mind. Since there is more stillness in a yin class than in a yang class, both external and internal distractions are definitely more prone to arise.

Closing your eyes can help eliminate visual distractions that lead to monkey-mind chatter (*Why does my neighbor look more relaxed than me? Where’s the mat spray? What’s the teacher going to be doing while we’re all just sitting here for five minutes?*).

However, if keeping your eyes open for the duration of the practice allows you to feel more mentally, emotionally, or physically comfortable, then certainly feel free to do so.

Does alignment matter?

The concept of alignment in yin yoga is different from the concept of alignment in yang yoga.

In yang yoga, alignment serves to keep you from overstretching, to direct strengthening and lengthening to specific areas of the body, and to avoid straining the ligaments of the joints. In a faster-paced yang class, addressing these concerns helps to avoid stressing or injuring the body.

Since yin yoga relies on gravity to support postures and targets

some of the areas that yang alignment rules hope to protect (such as your ligaments), the rules are somewhat different.

For example, you may be instructed to relax your upper body completely, allowing the spine to round, in postures that you're accustomed to maintaining a long spine in while hinging from the hips, like forward folds (say, baddha konasana, "bound angle pose").

Additionally, some familiar postures are referred to by different names. Baddha konasana, for example, is called "butterfly" in yin. This distinction aims to prevent muscular engagement preconceptions that students may bring with them from their yang practice.



Also, yin yoga emphasizes that every practitioner comes with their own history of injuries, trauma, skeletal composition, and joint insertion, and that these factors strongly influence how the

practitioner accesses a posture. "Correct" alignment is therefore likely to vary by practitioner. If you feel sensation (not pain!) in the area being targeted, that's an indication that your alignment in the posture is probably correct for your body.

Revisiting our baddha konasana/butterfly example, bone structure and muscular flexibility often dictate how much mobility an individual has in this posture. Depending on the shape of your femoral head and how it sits in its hip socket, external rotation may be more or less challenging for you. Rather than worrying about how close your knees are to the floor, or how close your heels are to your groin, notice the sensations that you feel along the adductors in the inner thighs and in the outer glutes. If it feels like a nice stretch, you're probably in the right place for your body.

Additionally, if you have tighter hamstrings and want to target the connective tissue along the backs of your legs, practicing butterfly with your heels farther away from your groin may be more beneficial for

your needs than for someone who would rather target the adductors (and thus would bring the heels closer to their body).

So when I feel discomfort, is that progress? Or should I be worried?

If you've ever worked with the idea of "finding your edge" in your yoga practice, you'll become quite intimate with the concept during a yin session.

Knowing that you have a longer period of time to find your fullest expression of a pose, there's no reason to rush through your "edges." When you reach your first edge, you can hang out there and explore the sensations you're feeling and the thoughts you're having, similarly to how you might in a mindfulness practice.

If you are feeling a strong stretching sensation across the span of the area that the pose is targeting (your side body in *bananasana*, "banana pose," for example), but your breath is easy, you are probably in a place of "comfortable discomfort." This is a good place to be as you move through your

edges (and in yin classes, you may experience and move through several edges in a posture as you settle deeper and deeper into it);



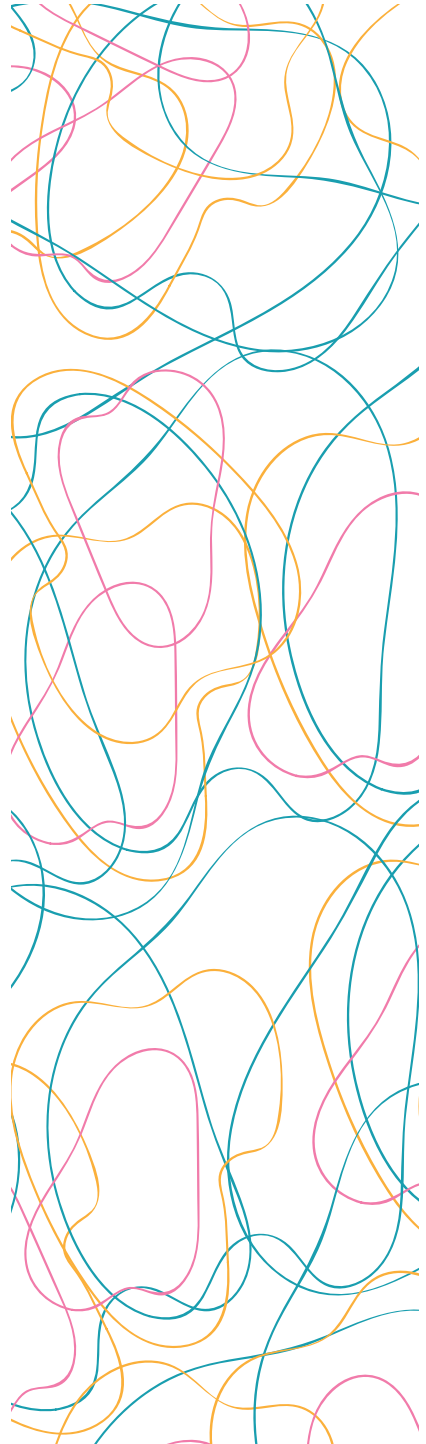
a good mental practice is to sit with any thoughts or sensations that arise in the stillness.

Discomfort that presents as sharp pain in concentrated areas or causes uneven, strained breathing should alert you to ease back.

Certainly, you should inform your instructor of any injuries you may have. A well-versed yin teacher should be able to offer an alternate posture or suggest prop placement that safely allows you to target the stretch and release you're aiming for. Props are commonly used in yin classes to ensure that everyone is able to access postures in the most beneficial way.

In a world that is increasingly more go-go-go (i.e., more yang), yin classes can provide much-needed balance and the

respite of stillness that many practitioners look for in yoga. Try more than one class if you are just starting out. The difference from yang-style yoga can be an adjustment, and it might take a couple of sessions before you notice how yin serves you. And you just may find that the ancient Taoists were right after all—that the forces of yin and yang are perfect complements.





"The flip side of anger is kindness. If we can recognize that we are not our anger—that we are just identifying in that moment with the state of anger—then we can co-exist with our anger, and kindness can emerge."

—Janice Quirt

A YIN YOGA
SEQUENCE
TO LIFT YOUR
MOOD

by Janice Quirt



We've all had days when we've been irritable, angry, or just in a bad mood. Maybe we snap at our kids or our partner, and feel remorse—only to snap at them again the very next minute. Or maybe we feel anger and frustration deep inside, but have no way of expressing it, so it continues to boil away in our very core.

Most of us already know that yoga can help lift our mood. With yin yoga, however, we can tailor our yoga practice to target certain emotions by embracing a meridian-based approach to practice—focusing on the organs and their associated emotions, as well as on clearing the energetic pathways to allow chi (vital energy) to flow through these areas more smoothly. Proponents of this approach say that it can benefit us both physically and mentally.

In the practice below, we'll be addressing the liver meridian, associated with both anger and kindness. Traditional Chinese Medicine (the philosophy in which yin yoga is rooted) holds that when chi is blocked along the liver meridian, anger, irritability, and frustration can arise—emotions you might experience in a traffic jam or upon encountering

a messy kitchen after having spent hours cleaning it up.

The flip side of anger is kindness. If we can recognize that we are not our anger—that we are just identifying in that moment with the state of anger—then we can co-exist with our anger, and kindness can emerge. The irritability becomes like a storm passing through, and we realize (thanks to that mindfulness) that we don't have to react to it.

Keep this in mind as you proceed with the following yin yoga sequence. It may help you in coping with any anger and irritability that arises, and to access the inverse emotion of kindness.

ONE-HOUR YIN YOGA SEQUENCE



Meditation (Five minutes)

Come into seiza (the Japanese term for a quiet sitting pose equivalent to hero pose), and breathe and meditate for about five minutes. You may wish to place a folded blanket underneath your knees, shins, and feet for cushioning. A block, bolster, or folded blanket under your hips and/or a rolled blanket or sticky mat behind your knees might also provide some comfort and support.

Consider an internal mantra sequenced to your breath: As you breathe in: "I am now aware," and as you breathe out: "Letting go of emotions that do not serve me."



Toe Squat (Two minutes)

From seiza, tuck your toes under (all of them, even the baby toes), resting your weight on the balls of your feet. Do your best to bring your feet and legs together. You can facilitate the pose with any of the props you used in seiza. If it still feels too intense, lift up into a high kneeling position until you can ease back into the pose. And if you are in pain, come out! Whoever coined the phrase "no pain, no gain" was not a yinster.

Toe squat opens the feet, including the toes, and strengthens the ankles. This pose is a good counter to the compressive force of shoes that bind our feet and toes together, and in addition to

opening the liver meridian by compressing the front of the ankle, it provides a wonderful stimulus for all the meridians of the lower body.



Ankle Stretch (One minute)

Come out of toe squat by shifting your weight forward and untucking your toes. You may keep a blanket or sticky mat under your knees, but remove any other props. Then, while keeping the weight grounded down through the tops of the

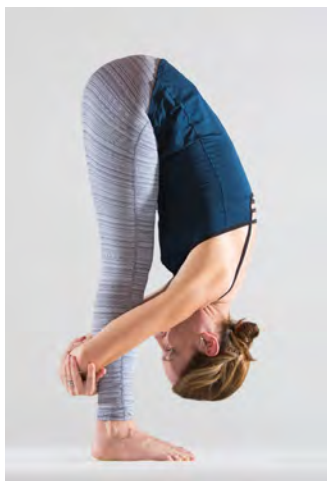
feet and ankles, lean back slightly, fingertips on the floor behind you, and lift your heart up toward the ceiling for a very gentle backbend. Your knees will likely rise off the floor.

To come out, bring your hands to the floor in front of you, and tuck your toes under. Lifting your hips and knees, step forward about 12 inches, first with one foot and then the other. Root your feet into the floor and rise up to standing.

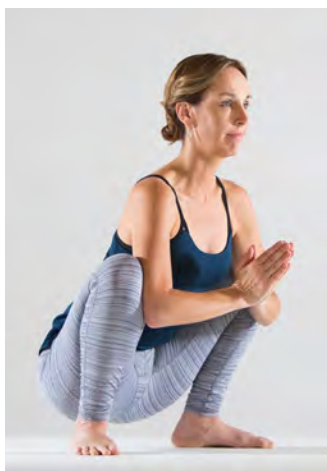


Dangling (Three minutes)

Stand with feet hip-width apart and knees soft. Fold forward, rounding your back at the end of the fold, and clasp your elbows with opposite hands (or rest your elbows on your thighs if that feels more appropriate). Keep your legs bent to avoid too much muscle involvement. This pose stimulates the urinary bladder and liver meridians.



If you aren't feeling any sensation in your low back or hamstrings, try reaching behind your legs to clasp your wrists or forearms.



Squat (Two minutes)

From dangling, bend your knees a bit more, and heel-toe your feet out until they're mat-width apart, with the toes pointing out at 45 degrees. Then drop your hips down into malasana (garland pose)—a natural counterpose for dangling, and one that's also great for stimulating the liver meridian.

Bring your palms together into prayer position, pressing your

elbows into the inside of your knees while your knees press back. Lift your heart and your gaze. If your heels don't touch the floor, place a blanket underneath them.

Repeat Dangling (Three minutes) and Squat (Two minutes)

To come out, place your hands on the floor in front of you, and lift your hips. Heel-toe your feet back together until they're hip-width apart, and then dangle once again—this time attempting to straighten your legs a bit more. Hold for three minutes, and then take malasana again for two minutes.

When you come out of malasana the second time, sit back, extend your legs out in front of you; place your hands on the floor behind you, lean into them, and shake out your legs one at a time. Then move into child's pose for one minute.

Tadpole (Two minutes) and Frog (Three minutes)

Begin in child's pose, with arms extended out in front of you. Bring your knees out wide, but keep your buttocks reaching toward your heels. Hold here in tadpole pose for two minutes.



Then lift your hips, and come forward until your hips are about in line with your knees; allow your pelvis to sink toward the floor.



Stay here in half frog, or see if you can turn your feet out and separate your heels until your shins are parallel for full frog with ankles flexed.



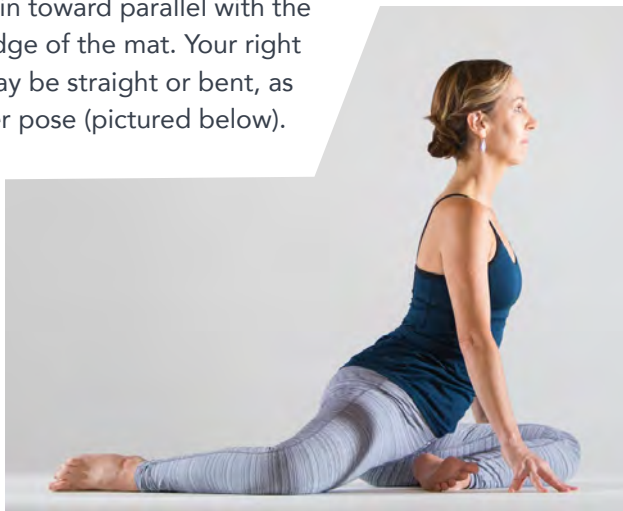
Whether you're in full frog or half frog, hold for three minutes. To come out, move into child's pose for one minute.

Sleeping Swan (Three minutes, plus one-minute counterpose on each side)

From child's pose, come onto your hands and knees. Move your left knee toward your left wrist, and inch your right foot back until your right leg is extended into swan (aka pigeon).



Allow your pelvis to sink down (if it is higher on one side and uncomfortable, tuck a blanket or bolster under the higher hip for support, or tuck it under the lower hip to level the pelvis). Your left knee should be happy—if it is not, bring your left foot closer to your left hip. Once your knee is content, work your left shin toward parallel with the top edge of the mat. Your right leg may be straight or bent, as in deer pose (pictured below).



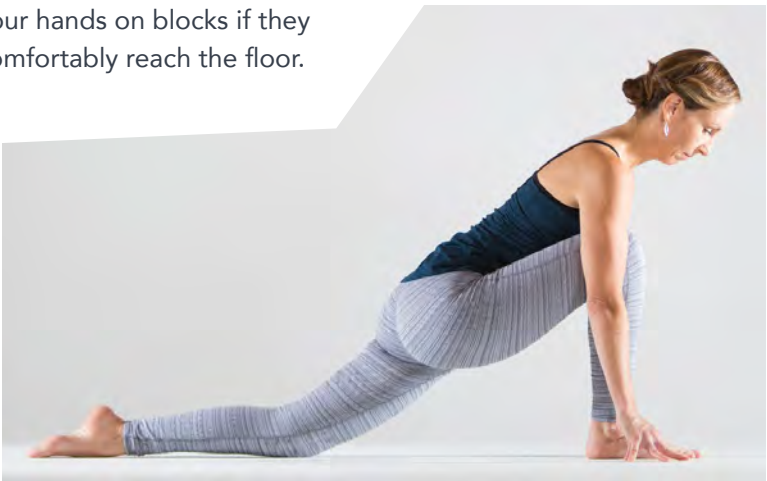
If your front shin is parallel with the top edge of your mat, flex your foot. If your front shin is on a diagonal, keep your foot pointed and your ankle neutral. Keep your hips releasing down toward the floor, and then fold forward, supporting yourself on your hands or forearms.



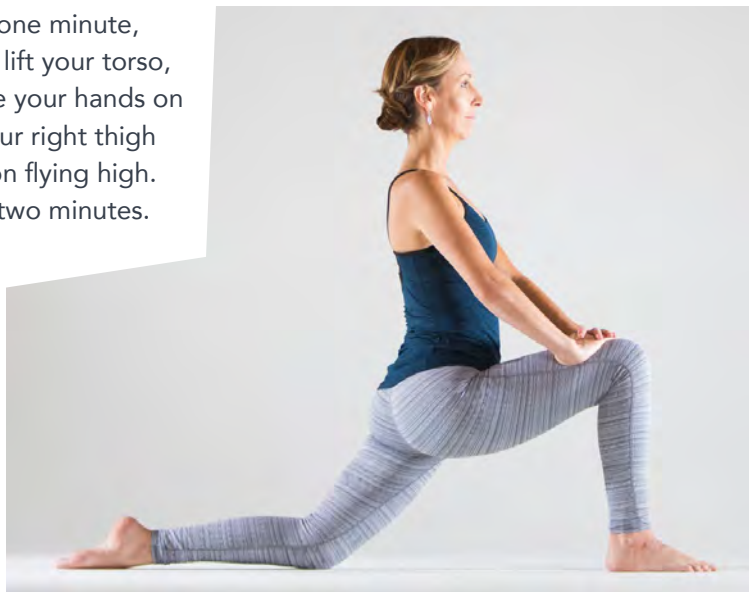
You can also release your torso completely over your front shin or a bolster. Stay here for three minutes. Then tuck your back toes under, and lift into downward dog for one minute. Repeat on the other side.

Dragon Cycle (One/two/two/one minutes, plus one-minute of counterposing on each side)

From down dog, step your right foot forward between both hands, and drop your left knee down into a low lunge, or baby dragon. Keep your weight above your left kneecap (not directly on it), or place a blanket under it to alleviate pressure. You can place your hands on blocks if they don't comfortably reach the floor.



Hold for one minute,
and then lift your torso,
and place your hands on
top of your right thigh
for dragon flying high.
Hold for two minutes.



Move into dragon flying low by bringing both hands to the floor
inside your right foot. Walk your right foot out to the right a few inches
(perhaps turning it out 45 degrees if that feels more appropriate for
your body). Rest here, or come down onto your forearms (either on
the floor or on blocks). Work on releasing your hips down and forward.

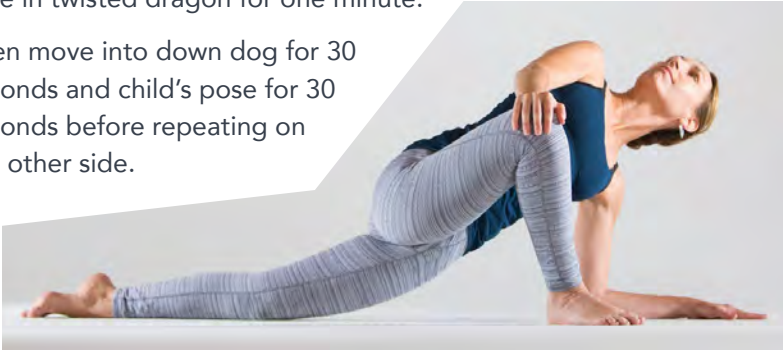


Stay here, or practice
winged dragon, rolling onto
the outer edge of your right
foot and allowing your knee
to fall open to the side.
Hold either variation for
two minutes.



Next, with your entire right foot planted on the floor, place your right hand on top of or inside your right knee, and gently push it out to the side, keeping your left hand or forearm in place on the floor or block. Rotate your torso so that your heart is shining toward the sky. Hold here in twisted dragon for one minute.

Then move into down dog for 30 seconds and child's pose for 30 seconds before repeating on the other side.



The dragon cycle deeply stimulates the liver meridian. It may be because of this that people can become quite grumpy in dragon. This can be a good thing, because emotions are brought to the forefront as chi is unblocked along these pathways, allowing us to learn how to be with our anger without being dominated by it. That said, be prepared for a few groans when moving into the dragon series!

One Knee Bent Reclining Twist (Four minutes on each side)

From child's pose, roll onto your back. Squeeze your right knee into your chest, and extend your left leg. Draw your right knee across your body and lower it toward the left side, laying your left hand on the outside of your right knee for gentle weighting. Ground your right shoulder into the mat, and relax into the twist. After four minutes, draw both knees into your chest to release your sacrum and lumbar spine, and then repeat on the other side, and finish by drawing both knees into your chest.



Savasana (Five minutes)

Melt into savasana for five minutes. If thoughts intrude, simply note that the mind is wandering. Return the focus to your breath and the internal mantra: As you breathe in: "I am now aware," and as you breathe out: "Letting go of emotions that do not serve me."

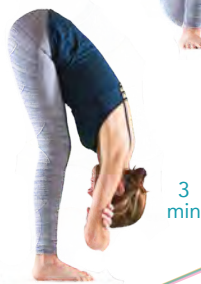
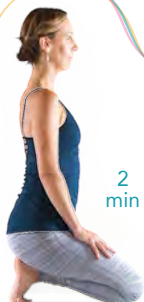


It can be enormously empowering to be able to co-exist with a strong emotion like anger, rather than letting it engulf us. In practicing this sequence, remind yourself that while awareness of anger is helpful, we do not need to react to it. We can simply let it pass by without doing emotional damage.

So enjoy those mighty dragon poses!



A YIN YOGA SEQUENCE TO LIFT YOUR MOOD

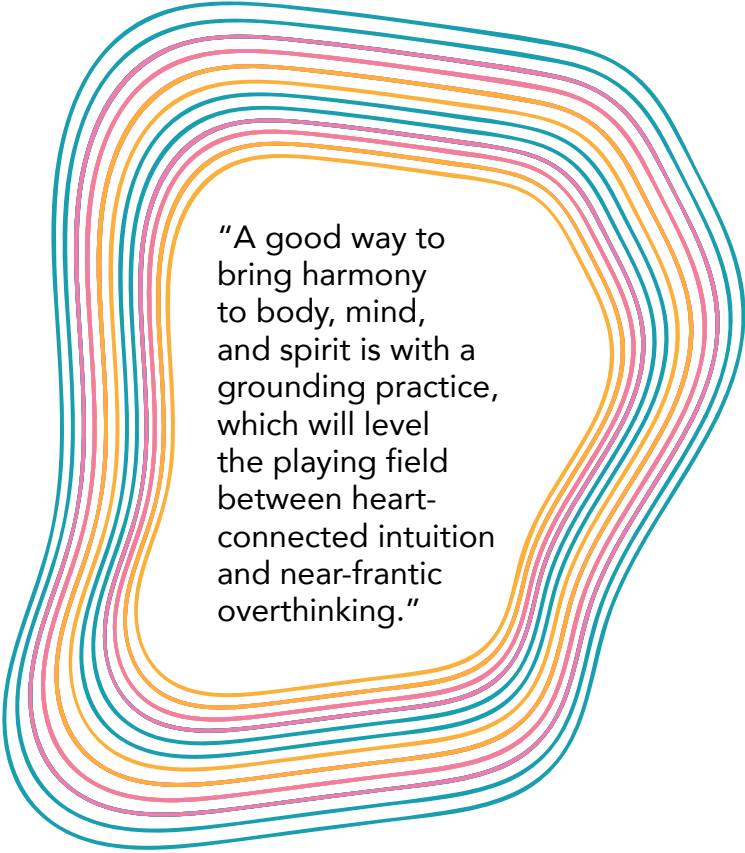


Dragon cycle



Do dragon cycle on left side,
ending w/ 30-sec down dog.



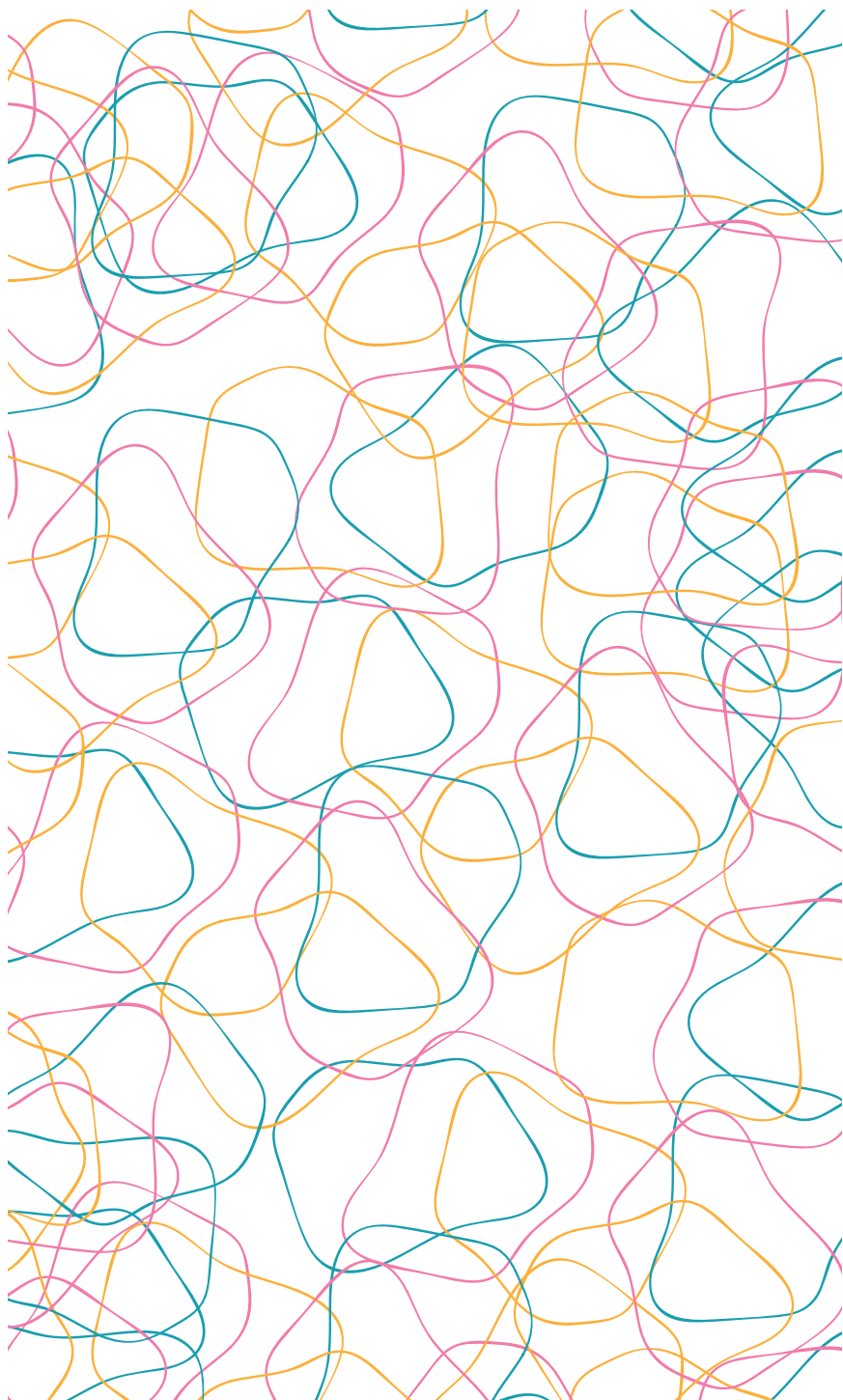


"A good way to bring harmony to body, mind, and spirit is with a grounding practice, which will level the playing field between heart-connected intuition and near-frantic overthinking."

—Janice Quirt

A GROUNDING
YIN PRACTICE

by Janice Quirt



It often seems as though our minds are racing with thoughts. We may feel scattered, pulled in many directions, our thoughts swirling out of control. This feeling is especially prevalent in today's culture, as we are constantly bombarded by news, messages, advertisements, and updates. A good way to bring harmony to body, mind, and spirit is with a grounding practice, which will level the playing field between heart-connected intuition and near-frantic overthinking. In a grounding practice, you can focus on finding and nourishing your true center in the *hara*—the earth center in the body, which is located in the low belly, according to the Japanese meridian system. Because long holds facilitate grounding, yin is a wonderful choice when that is your intention.

This practice is designed to promote grounding and resilience to stress, increase energy and vitality, and replenish stores of patience. It takes about an hour, and you'll need one to three blocks, one or two large bolsters, and a blanket or two.

Opening Meditation: (5 minutes)

An article I read about tea

rituals around the world inspires this meditation. As an avid tea drinker, I was intrigued to learn that traditionally, in many parts of China, teacups weren't filled right to the brim. Rather, tea was poured until the cups were about 70 percent full. The other 30 percent was space for emotions.

This immediately struck a chord with me because it reminded me of a yin practice. In yin, we don't go to the most extreme level of stretch or sensation in a pose, but only far enough to be conscious of the experience—to perhaps 70 percent of our capacity. And then we have the remaining 30 percent of our capacity as space in which emotions can arise during our practice.

For this meditation, sit in a comfortable seat and notice your sitting bones grounding into the earth. Let your hips and legs relax and be heavy and at ease. Close or soften your eyes and start to become aware of sensation in your body. Notice your belly rising and falling with your breath. Then imagine that you have just brewed a cup of your favorite tea. As you take a deep breath in, smell the aroma—what kind of tea did you choose? What flavor notes can you pick out? As you exhale, imagine that you are

gently blowing on the tea to cool it off. As you inhale again, appreciate all the different scents of the tea and the way the warm cup feels in your hands. As you exhale, imagine that your breath creates ripples in the surface of the tea. Continue to breathe in and out, visualizing the warmth and comfort of that cup of tea. Remember: The cup is only 70 percent full; the rest of the space is there to receive your emotions. After five minutes, open your eyes.



Child's Pose with Bent Arms: (5 minutes)

From your seated position, move onto all fours. Take your knees as wide as is comfortable and release your hips toward your heels. Bend your arms and take hold of opposite elbows with your hands, bringing your forearms to the ground. Rest your forehead on your forearms or on a block. Stay for three minutes.

You can remain here, or take the pose further: Reach both arms straight out in front of you and then bend your elbows, keeping



them on the mat or placing them on blocks, and bring your hands to your upper back. Regardless of how far down your back your fingertips reach (or don't), don't force it. Make it your intention for energy to flow from your fingertips to your hips (pictured on next page).



Elbows
on blocks

Rest your forehead on the floor or on a block. Stay for an additional two minutes. Let your sitting bones sink closer and closer to your heels, gently giving in to the pull of the earth's gravity.

To come out, extend your arms, then walk your hands back until they're under your shoulders, bring your knees hip-width apart, and come back onto all fours.

Melting Heart with One Arm Extended and One Arm Bent: (5 minutes total)

From all fours, walk your hands out in front of you as far as you can and allow your heart to melt toward the mat, keeping your hips stacked over your knees. With your right arm extended, bend your left elbow and place your left hand on top of your right arm just above the elbow. Rest your forehead on your left forearm or on a block. You can turn your head to the left if it feels okay for your neck.

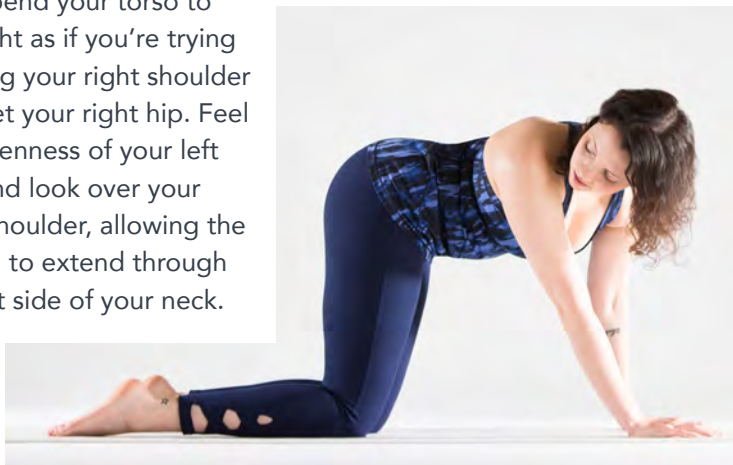


Feel your heart center melting, drawn toward the mat by the grounding forces of the earth. Stay for two and a half minutes, then switch sides. After holding for two and a half minutes on the second side, extend your right arm and bring both hands back under your shoulders, returning to all fours.

Cow-Cat with Lateral Bends: (3 minutes)

From all fours, inhale to release any tension from your belly, letting it be soft, as you lift your tailbone and heart away from each other and turn your gaze forward. Exhale to draw your navel toward your spine, rounding your back and gazing toward your legs or belly. Repeat cow and cat for a total of five breaths, and then return to a neutral spine.

Then bend your torso to the right as if you're trying to bring your right shoulder to meet your right hip. Feel the openness of your left side and look over your right shoulder, allowing the stretch to extend through the left side of your neck.



Switch sides. Repeat four more times on each side for a total of five on each side. After the final stretch, move into stillness on all fours and notice the grounding down of your hands and knees. Feel the aftereffects of the movement in your body: Where do you feel the blood and energy moving? Where do you feel the most anchored? How does stillness feel after movement?

Sphinx: (6 minutes)

Walk your hands forward and come onto your belly. Choose the variation of sphinx pose that provides you with a slight feeling of compression in your low back, but nothing too intense.

Option 1: Elbows out to the sides, hands stacked, forehead resting on folded hands.



Option 2: Elbows under shoulders, forearms parallel to each other, neck in line with spine or head released.



Option 3: Like option 2 but with bent knees, heels dropped toward the hips.



Option 4: Seal pose. From option 2, turn your hands out so your fingertips point toward the top corners of the mat. Straighten your arms.



Whichever variation you choose, imagine that you are on a windswept, rocky island. You unroll a thick, cushiony mat on the surface and come into your sphinx. The rock has been thoroughly warmed by the sun, and you can feel the heat radiate up through the mat to your body. The warmth is soothing and makes your muscles and tissues feel as if they were melting into the earth. Imagine how stable and solid that

rocky surface feels, and notice some of its details. Can you pick out the different contours of the island, veins of color running through the rock, the various shades of green represented by moss, lichen, and plants growing at the water's edge?

Feel fully supported by the earth beneath you. Notice how it feels to breathe deep into your belly, pushing against the earth and guiding your breath to expand your back ribs.

Stay for five minutes and then come into option 1, if you are not already there, for another minute. Then bring your hands under your shoulders and push up to sit on your heels.

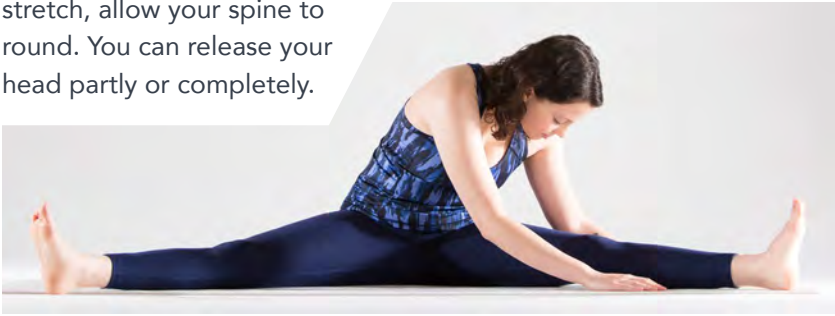
Dragonfly: (12 minutes)

Drop your hips to one side, extend your legs out in front of you, and then open them into a V wide enough that you feel a slight stretch along your inner thighs. Reach the crown of your head to the sky and your sitting bones into the earth. Allow your pelvis to tilt forward and down, and walk your hands forward until you have reached your 70 percent. At that point, allow your spine to round. You can drop your head if it is comfortable to do so. Allow your knees and ankles to be soft. Start to direct your breath deep into your belly—the hara, or earth center, of your body. Feel supported by the ground. Imagine your vitality and resilience being rejuvenated.



Practice acceptance of where you are in the pose and also in your life, thoughts, and emotions. Consciously release any holding in your hips or legs. Stay for four minutes and then reach through the crown of your head and walk your hands back toward your body to return to vertical.

From there, turn your heart to face your left knee and fold over your left leg, with one hand on either side of it. When you experience a stretch, allow your spine to round. You can release your head partly or completely.



Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so, and refocus your breath into your low belly. Consider visualizing a scene from nature that you find particularly calming—maybe a lake, ocean, mountain range, or forest. Imagine breathing energy in with each inhale and storing energy in your center with each exhale.

After four minutes, reach out through the crown of your head to lengthen your spine and lift back up to vertical. Turn your heart to face your right knee, framing your right leg with your hands, and fold until you experience sensation. Practice acceptance again as you breathe here for four minutes.

To come out, reach through the crown of your head to lengthen your spine and come back to vertical, facing forward. Slide your hands under your knees to help bend them so you can come

into an easy sitting position.

Reclined Butterfly on Inclined Bolster: (10 minutes)

Build a bolster ramp: Place a bolster toward the back of your mat and then place a block on its low or medium setting under and about a third of the way down from the top of the bolster.

Recline so that the bolster ramp supports your spine and the back of your head. Bring the soles of your feet together, with your heels one to one and a half feet away from your hips, and let your knees fall open to the sides. If you'd like, you can place additional blocks under your upper thighs or knees, or use a bolster to support your thighs and lower legs. The goal is not to cushion the legs so much that there is no sensation; rather, you want to feel some stretch, but not too intense—remember, 70 percent.



Allow gravity to gently work on your legs, drawing your knees, thighs, and calves ever closer to the ground. Release any gripping of the muscles to allow this pose to achieve the goal of yin, which is to go past the muscles to the connective tissue. Imagine inhaling nourishing vitality and softening more and more with each exhale. Allow your upper body to be completely supported by the bolster. Your hands and forearms can rest on your belly or on the floor. Allow your lower body to feel completely supported as well.

Stay for 10 minutes, and then draw your knees in toward each other, placing the soles of your feet back on the mat. Then take each foot to the edge of the mat and move your knees from side to side in windshield wiper pose. To come out of the pose, turn to lie on one side and use your hands to press the floor away and ease yourself up. Remove the bolster ramp.

Knees to Chest: (3 minutes)

Lie down on your back and hug your knees into your chest. Allow the muscles of your legs and hips to relax. Rock from side to side or back and forth, depending on what feels good to you. Feel the ground supporting and grounding you. After two minutes of movement, rest with your knees



hugged into your chest in stillness for one minute, and then fully extend your legs on the floor and your arms alongside you in preparation for savasana.

Savasana

Take the feeling of grounding that you've cultivated into your savasana. Let your entire body feel heavy, joints loose, muscles languid.



If you like, for even more grounding, you can place a folded blanket on top of your lower belly and pelvis. Stay for 10 minutes or longer.

Maybe after savasana you can brew and drink that cup of tea, extending the mindfulness meditation into your life off the mat and further filling yourself with vitality.

A GROUNDING YIN SEQUENCE



3 min



2 min



2.5 min
each side

Do 5 rounds cat/cow, then...



Lateral
cow-cat 5x



5 min



1 min



4 min
each side



10
min

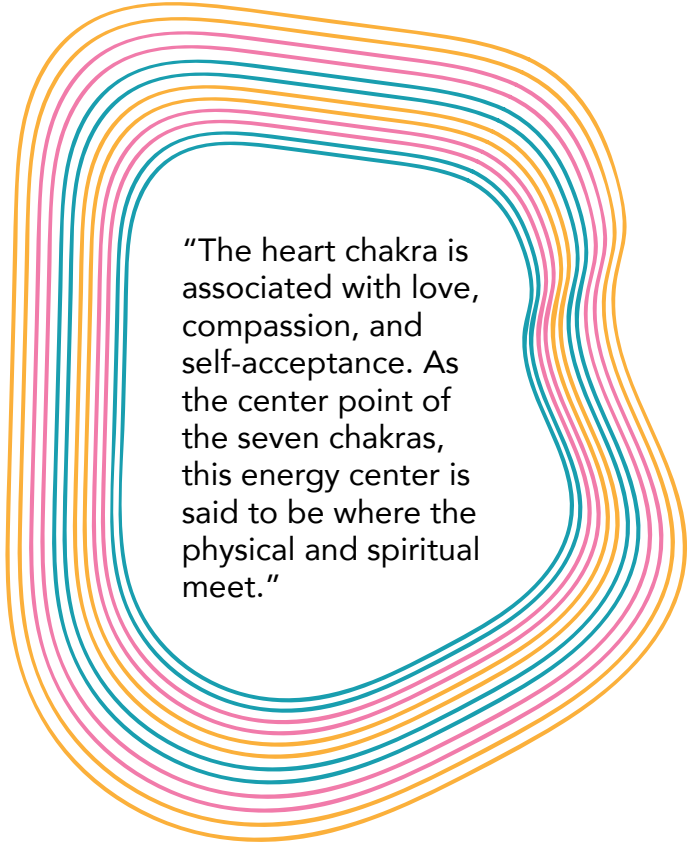


3
min



10
min



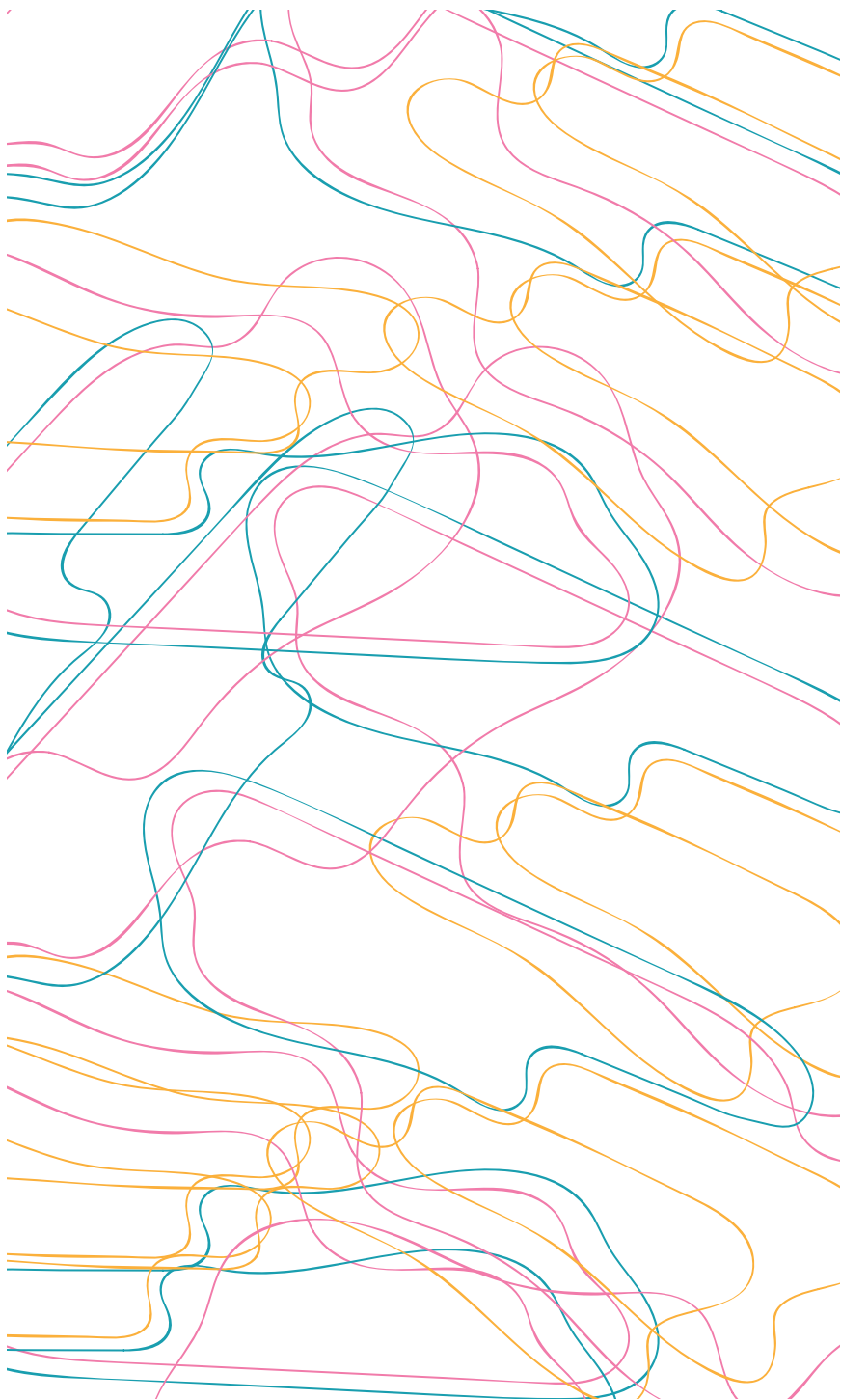


"The heart chakra is associated with love, compassion, and self-acceptance. As the center point of the seven chakras, this energy center is said to be where the physical and spiritual meet."

—Leah Sugerman

A HEART-CHAKRA-
FOCUSED YIN YOGA
SEQUENCE

by Leah Sugerman



The heart chakra, or *anahata chakra*, is one of the seven major chakras—energy centers that run up the central axis of the body. Chakras are not physical structures, but their locations are typically given in reference to corresponding areas of the body, from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. The heart chakra is fourth from the base of the spine, as well as fourth from the crown of the head, making it central to the seven major chakras. Its location is said to correspond to the chest cavity where the heart itself resides.

The heart chakra is associated with love, compassion, and self-acceptance. As the center point of the seven chakras, this energy center is said to be where the physical and spiritual meet. In Sanskrit, the word *anahata* means “unstruck,” and when this chakra is properly “aligned,” past hurts are said to no longer harm us. When balanced, we are filled with love, compassion, and self-acceptance. When imbalanced, we can be angry, jealous, sad, and untrusting.

The following is a gentle 60-minute yin yoga sequence designed to draw awareness to this chakra. Ideally, by drawing attention there, this practice will

allow you to become aware of the energy that flows through this space so that you can connect with your own heart chakra.

You will need two to three blocks, a bolster, and a blanket or a towel.

Loving-Kindness Meditation and Green Color Visualization

Find a comfortable seat—whatever that may be for you. Elongate your spine and close your eyes. Relax your body: Allow your legs to become heavy, soften your shoulders away from your ears, and release any tension you may be holding in your jaw. Tune in to your breath and deepen it.

Visualize the color green, which is the color of *anahata chakra*. This can be done by picturing something that is iconically green (grass or an apple, for example), or simply by seeing the color itself in your mind’s eye.

Bring your attention to your heart center. Think of someone you love deeply. Send all your loving-kindness to this one person. Repeat the mantra, “May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain,” as if speaking to this person. Next, think of someone

toward whom you have neutral feelings. Focus on them, sending all of your loving-kindness to this person while repeating the same mantra, focusing on them. Then, think of someone with whom you struggle. Repeat the mantra and send that person all of your loving-kindness. Then think of yourself. Repeat the mantra and send all of your loving-kindness to yourself. Finally, think of all living beings. Repeat the mantra as you send loving-kindness to all beings everywhere.

Sit with these feelings for a few moments.

Anahatasana (Melting Heart Pose) Over Blocks

Make your way from your seat onto hands and knees. Align your shoulders over your wrists and your hips over your knees. Then, place your hands on blocks on their medium setting (with the blocks lengthwise and parallel to the sides of your mat). Release



your elbows onto the blocks and walk them forward until they're at the very front edge of the blocks. Bring your palms to touch in a prayer position.

Keep your hips aligned over your knees. You'll need to walk your knees back as you soften your chest toward the floor. Deepen the bend of your elbows and draw your thumbs toward the nape of your neck, pointing your fingers toward the back of your mat. Rest your forehead on



another block, a blanket, or the floor. Soften the space between your shoulder blades and surrender into this release. Keep your awareness on your heart center as you hold this position for three minutes.

Heart Meridian Subscapularis Release

From this variation of anahatasana, bring your prayer hands back overhead, walk your elbows back, and press your forearms firmly into the blocks. Engage your core to draw yourself back up to hands and knees. Move all but one block off to the side.

Place the one block in the top quarter of your mat on its medium setting, this time horizontal and parallel to the short edge of your mat. Place a blanket or towel over the block. Make your way onto your left side, with your right leg stacked

over the left and knees slightly bent. Place your left elbow on your mat just past the block. Place your right hand or fingertips on the floor in front of your heart, and soften the left side of your upper rib cage onto the block. Rest your head in your left hand.

Mindfully move over the block, pressing different areas below your armpit into the block. Stop when you find a “sweet spot” that feels like a (potentially intense!) release. This is a trigger point of the subscapularis muscle of the rotator cuff. Resting your body weight over the block can facilitate a myofascial release of this muscle. Soften into this space and surrender your weight into the block.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, this “sweet spot” is said to be a point on the meridian, or pathway, to the heart organ. Relax here for five minutes, breathing into all the sensations



and emotions that arise. Then, using your right hand, gently press the floor away from you so that you lift off the block, roll over, and repeat on the right side.

Note: This posture is contraindicated for any injuries to the subscapularis. Err on the side of caution and avoid this one if you've experienced any injuries to any part of the rotator cuff, as it may be a bit too close for comfort.

Balasana (Child's Pose)

Move your block to the side of your mat and relax into a wide-legged child's pose for two minutes, softening the space behind your heart center.



Supported Saddle

Draw your knees toward each other and slowly roll up to sit on your heels. Scoot forward to the top quarter of your mat. Place two blocks behind you—one block closer to you on its lowest height, and the other farther away from you on its tallest or medium height. Position your bolster lengthwise on top of your blocks so that the end of the bolster touches your sacrum as you kneel in front of it. You may need to play around with the placement of your blocks in order to find the best support system for your bolster.

Lift your seat off your heels, bring your big toes together, and take your knees mat-width apart. Release your seat back to your heels and elongate your spine. Lean back and place your hands on the mat, slowly walking them back as you lay your spine onto the bolster. You can rest your hands by your sides, open your arms into a T, or stretch them overhead (taking hold of the opposite elbows with your hands). Choose whichever variation feels best for you and remain in the pose for five minutes.

If need be, you can decrease the intensity by raising the height of your blocks, creating the degree of slope that works best for you.



Supported *Matsyasana* (Fish Pose)

From saddle, use your hands to press the floor away from you, and come to rest on your sit bones with legs extended. Move your bolster off to the side. Place both blocks on their medium or lowest setting horizontal to the short edge of your mat—one at the very back edge of your mat, and the other about a foot and a half away from the back of the mat.

Bend your knees, and place your feet flat on the floor about hip-distance apart. Let your knees fall in toward each other, creating an internal rotation of your femur (thigh) bones (to allow for more space in your sacrum and lower back).

Lengthen your spine and place your hands behind you. Slowly walk your hands toward the back

of your mat, allowing the first block to support your back just below the tips of your shoulder blades, and the second block to support the back of your skull. Make sure that your thoracic spine (not your lower back) is supported by the first block, sending your heart center toward the sky, and that the back of your head (not your neck) is supported by the second block. You may need to re-adjust the spacing of your blocks to allow this to happen.

Again, you have options for your arms. You can rest your hands by your sides, open your arms into a T, or stretch them overhead (clasping opposite elbows with your hands). You can leave your legs as they are or stretch them out. Choose whichever variations feel best for you and breathe deeply here for five minutes.

If you need to decrease the intensity, you can lower the height of your blocks or place a rolled-up blanket (instead of a block) under your heart.



Supported Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose)

Release your arms by your sides (if they're not already there).
Press into your forearms to lift your head and chest off the blocks.
Move the blocks off to the side and lower your back onto the floor.

If you've straightened your legs, bend them again and place your feet hip-distance apart on the floor. Make sure you have a block within reach. Elongate your neck and press your sitting bones ever so slightly into the floor to create a gentle curve in your lower back. Press down evenly into your shoulders and your feet and lift your hips off the floor. Place your block (on any setting you'd like) directly under your sacrum (i.e., the fused triangular bones between your lower back and tailbone). Allow the weight of your pelvis to rest on the block, and soften into your heart center as it very subtly lifts skyward.



You can stay as you are or straighten your legs to find more stretch in your hip flexors. However, if this causes pressure or pain in your lower back, keep your knees bent. Wherever you choose to be, hold for five minutes (pictured on next page).



Windshield Wipers

If your legs are straight, bend your knees and place your feet onto the floor. Press equally into your shoulders and your feet to lift your hips off your block and move the block off to the side. Slowly lower your spine to the floor one vertebra at a time—releasing first your upper, then middle, and then lower back and pelvis to the mat.



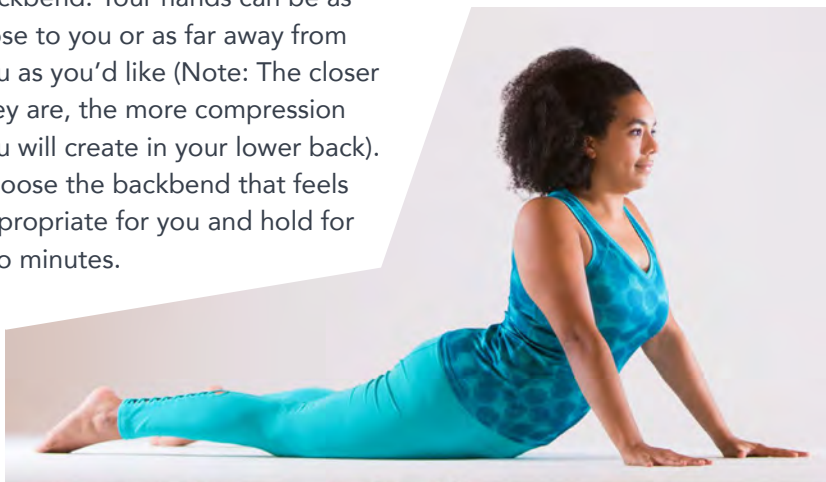
As a counterpose to the previous backbends, walk your feet apart as wide as your mat. Release your knees to one side and then to the other, moving your legs for one minute as if they are windshield wipers. You can move as slowly or as quickly as you'd like.

Sphinx/Seal

Release your legs to one side and roll over onto your belly. Walk your feet mat-width apart and point your toes straight behind you. Place your forearms on the mat with your elbows either under your shoulders or slightly forward of them. Broaden your chest and draw your shoulder blades toward each other. Reach your heart center forward. Relax your lower body completely.



You can either stay as you are in sphinx pose, or walk your hands out about as wide as your mat and externally rotate your arms very slightly so that your fingers point toward the corners of your mat. Lift your forearms and press your hands into the floor to create a deeper backbend. Your hands can be as close to you or as far away from you as you'd like (Note: The closer they are, the more compression you will create in your lower back). Choose the backbend that feels appropriate for you and hold for two minutes.



Snail

Release back onto your belly and roll over onto your back. Pause here for a minute in savasana, allowing your spinal column to decompress.

If you have tight hamstrings, you may wish to move to a wall, lying down with your head about one to two feet away from the wall. Then, bring your legs together and release your arms by your sides with palms down. Activate your core to lift your hips and swing your legs up and overhead. Allow your back to round as you release your feet either onto

the floor or to the wall behind you. You can support your lower back with your hands or keep your arms extended on the ground. If your feet are on the wall, you may wish to walk them down slowly to find a deeper forward fold.

Breathe here for three minutes. This is a counterpose for all the heart openers you've done—allowing your heart to metaphorically rest in an inversion, in which your head is below your heart.



Happy Baby

Slowly come out of snail. Bend your knees and hug them into your chest, holding onto the pinky-toe side of each foot with your hands. If your feet are out of reach, you can clasp your ankles or hold onto the backs of your thighs. Open your knees wide and draw them toward your armpits. Keeping your knees deeply bent, flex your feet so that the soles of your feet face the sky, gently tugging on them with your hands. Lengthen your entire spine, reaching your sitting bones toward the floor.

If it feels good, you can gently sway your hips from side to side. Hold here for three minutes.



Savasana

Release and extend your legs, taking them as wide as your mat. Allow your legs to relax and rotate outward naturally. Release your arms by your sides with your palms facing up as a symbol of surrender. Relax the weight of your body into the mat. Close your eyes and relax your mind as you release into final resting pose for 10 minutes.



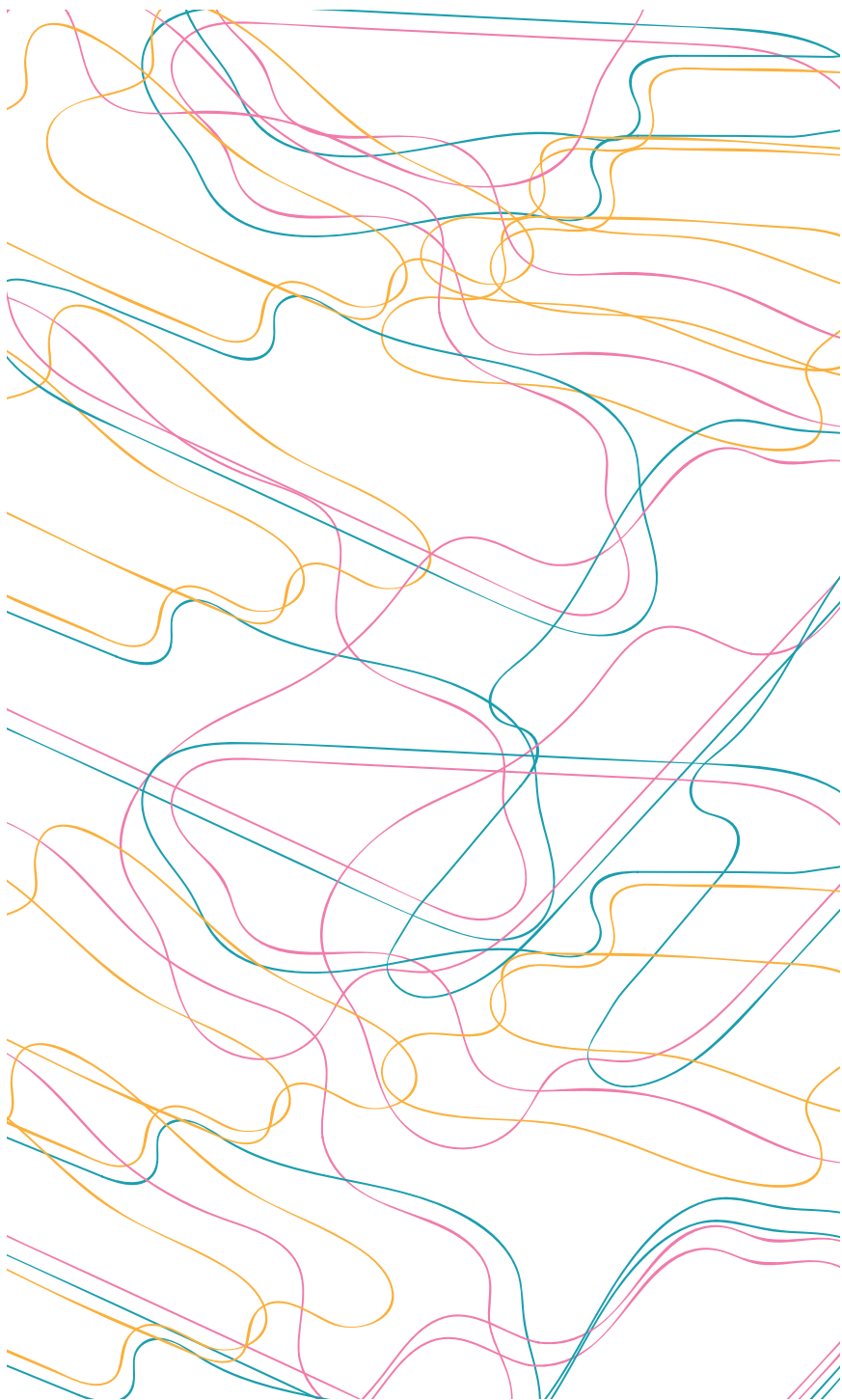
Lotus Mudra

To come out of savasana, begin to deepen your breath, wiggle your fingers and toes, and hug your knees into your chest. Roll over to one side and use your hands to gently press the floor away as you come up to a comfortable seated position (perhaps returning to the position you took at the beginning of your practice).



Notice any changes (physical, emotional, or both) that may have taken place in the past hour. Bring your palms to meet at your heart and leave the base of your palms, your thumbs, and your pinky fingers pressing together as you fan the rest of your fingers out and away from each other, creating the shape of a lotus flower with your hands. Visualize a glowing ball of green light filling this energetic seal with love.

Acknowledge the time you've spent honoring yourself during this practice. Breathe into this space of love and self-acceptance as you take a deep inhale with humility. Exhale as you bow forward with deep gratitude.



A HEART-CHAKRA-FOCUSED YIN YOGA SEQUENCE



1 min windshield
wipers



2
min



3
min



3
min



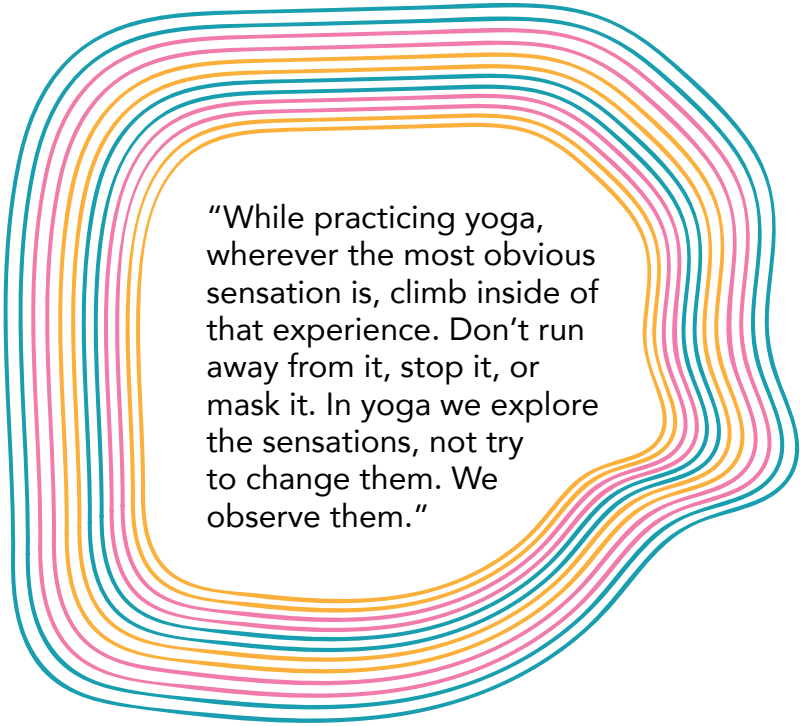
10
min



7-DAY YOGA JOURNAL

Date	How I felt before yoga

... and after yoga



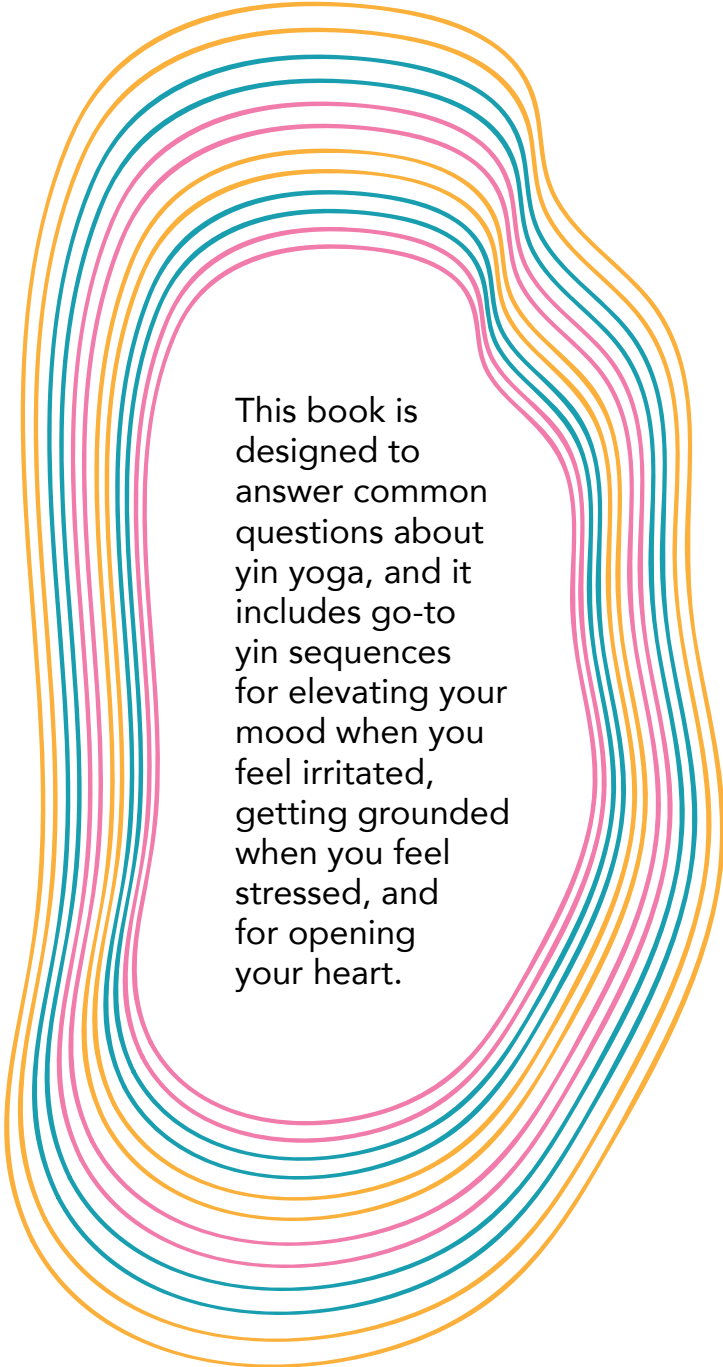
“While practicing yoga, wherever the most obvious sensation is, climb inside of that experience. Don’t run away from it, stop it, or mask it. In yoga we explore the sensations, not try to change them. We observe them.”

—Bernie Clark



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This book is
designed to
answer common
questions about
yin yoga, and it
includes go-to
yin sequences
for elevating your
mood when you
feel irritated,
getting grounded
when you feel
stressed, and
for opening
your heart.