

# Yoga for Pain Care Handout

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## Posture Awareness & Relaxation

Poor patterns of posture can exacerbate pain, stress, and negative mood states. Conversely, good postural habits can generate greater relaxation, strength, openness, and confidence. Posture is something we can be aware of and make adjustments to anytime throughout the day.

### **Practice**

- How are you holding your body? Are you tensing, clenching, contracting, or collapsing anywhere? What are your habits of posture throughout the day (eg. sitting at your desk, walking, eating, driving, talking on the phone, etc.)?
- Are there any adjustments you can make to create more length, balance, openness, and ease?
- Possible adjustments:
  - Lengthen the spine
  - Shoulders back and down (over hips)
  - Ears over shoulders
  - Chin parallel to floor
  - Unclench the jaw
  - Soften the eyes and brow
  - Chest open
  - Sternum slightly lifted
  - Hips over ankles (if standing)
  - Slight tuck in tailbone
  - Weight balanced evenly through both sides/feet
- Think *“dignified and at ease”* or *“strong back, soft front”*
- Get into the habit of checking in with your posture, making adjustments, and relaxing throughout your day.

## **Breathing Practices**

### **Conscious Breathing**

*Practice for improving mindfulness and mind-body connection.*

- Allow the body to relax and soften.
- Bring awareness to the sensations of breathing. In the nostrils, the throat, the chest, the abdomen, and wherever you feel the breath in your body.
- Feel the sensations of the breath moving in and out, expanding and contracting.
- Just observe the breath as it is, not trying to change it.
- Notice the pace at which you are breathing. Is it fast, slow, or normal?
- Notice the depth at which you are breathing. Is it shallow, deep, or normal?
- When attention wanders, patiently guide it back to the breath.

### **Diaphragmatic Breathing**

*Foundation of optimal breathing and all other breathing techniques.*

- Find a comfortable position. Most people find it easiest to start while lying on the ground, on your back. You can bend your knees and place your feet hip distance on the ground. Once you feel comfortable with the technique, you may try moving into a seated position for the breathing exercise.
- Place one hand on your belly, and one hand on your chest.
- Gently close your lips and breathe through your nose. Nasal breathing provides optimal oxygenation and parasympathetic nervous system response.
- Focus on the breath moving into your nose and filling up your belly. The hand over your belly will rise and fall, while the hand over your chest should hardly move.
- Ideally, practice for a minimum of 10 rounds and maximum of 10 minutes.

### **1:1 Ratio Breathing (Even Exhale/Inhale)**

*Practice for improving focus and inner balance.*

- Follow steps for Diaphragmatic Breathing
- Begin a silent, rhythmic count of 3-5 on inhale, 3-5 on exhale depending on what is comfortable (no straining)
- Ideally, practice for a minimum of 10 rounds and maximum of 10 minutes.

### **2:1 Ratio Breathing (The Longer Exhale)**

*Practice for improving focus and relaxation.*

- Follow steps for Diaphragmatic Breathing
- Begin a silent, rhythmic count of 3-5 on inhale, 3-5 on exhale depending on what is comfortable (no straining).
- Now begin to shorten the inhale and lengthen the exhale, aiming eventually for an exhale that is twice as long as the inhale. For example, 3-4 count in/6-8 count out.

- As you exhale more completely, feel the belly retracting back towards the spine, gently pushing the remaining air out.
- Ideally, practice for a minimum of 10 rounds and maximum of 10 minutes.

### **Ocean Breath (aka Ujjayi)**

*Practice for increasing the relaxation response and heart rate variability (another marker of resilience) among many other potential benefits.*

Follow these steps:

- Seal your lips and start to breathe in and out through your nose.
- Take an inhalation through your nose that is slightly deeper than normal. Exhale slowly through your nose while constricting the muscles in the back of your throat. It should make a sound like ocean waves.

If you're having trouble getting the right sound for your breath, try this:

- With your mouth open, try exhaling the sound "HAAAAH"—it's similar to the sound you make when you're trying to fog up a mirror. Get comfortable with this sound to get the hang of the practice.
- Close your mouth and attempt a similar sound, feeling the outflow of air through your nasal passages.
- Continue focusing on Ocean Breaths on the exhale and listening to the sound.
- When you are comfortable with Ocean Breath on the exhale, you can begin to incorporate it also on the inhale.

NOTE: If your goal is deep relaxation or sleep, just stick with Ocean Breath on the exhale. But if you want to relax while also sustaining your energy, incorporate it on the inhale too.

### **Alternate Nostril Breath (aka Nadi Shodana)**

*Practice to balance and cleanse the mind.*

- In a comfortable seated position, make Deer Seal (Mrigi Mudra) with your right hand by bending your index and middle finger to your palm, leaving your ring and pinky finger extended.
- Press your right thumb to your right nostril and exhale through your left nostril. Then inhale through your left nostril. Release your right thumb and take your ring finger to your left *nostril*, exhale through your right nostril. Inhale through your right nostril.
- Continue in this rhythm, Exhale-Inhale/Switch/Exhale-Inhale/Switch...
- Continue for 1–3 minutes or until you feel centered and calm.

### **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

- In this relaxation technique, you focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group.
- One method is to start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. You can also start with your head and neck and work down to your toes.

- Tense as you inhale slowly and fully through the nose, hold for five seconds, release as you exhale slowly and fully through the nose or mouth, and rest that part of the body for 30 seconds.
- After moving through the whole body, notice if any areas still feel tight and if so, you may repeat the tension/release in that part.

### **Compassionate Body Scan Meditation**

- Lie in a comfortable position on your back and bring kind, curious attention to your body.
- Begin at your feet and slowly scan up through the body. You can be as detailed as you like, perhaps doing one side at a time or both sides together.
- The intention is to feel, welcome, and bring a caring attitude to whatever sensations you notice - whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- If helpful, you may silently say soothing, kind, appreciative messages to the various parts of your body, cultivating a healing relationship between the mind and body.

### **Tips: Yoga for Pain Care**

#### **Type of teacher certification and years of experience**

- Look for a *Yoga Therapist* certified through the International Association of Yoga Therapy (IAYT).
- And/or look for a teacher who has at least 5-10 years of teaching experience.

#### **Type of classes**

- Look for classes designated as Yoga Therapy or Restorative Yoga, which cater more to those with injuries, chronic pain, and chronic illness.
- Gentle, beginner classes may also be good. Important to only do what feels right.

#### **“Good” vs. “Bad” Pain**

- Learn to discern between "good" and "bad" pain when practicing yoga.

#### **Regular Practice**

- Practice at least weekly or twice weekly for 60-90 minutes each (in general).

### **Recommendations for Providers**

#### **Personal Practice!**

- We can't teach what we don't know

#### **Provide Resources for Patients**











- Handout with yoga/meditation/mind-body resources (apps, books, videos, classes)

#### **Teach Basic Techniques**

(once you are proficient in them yourself)

- Posture/breath/body awareness/relaxation
- Diaphragmatic breathing/ratio breathing
- Mindful movement/chair yoga stretches
- Mindfulness/acceptance/self-compassion with pain

## Beginner Yoga Poses

Mountain Pose 	Extended Mountain 	Supported Side Mountain 	Forward Bend 	Half Lift 	Rag Doll 
Chair Pose 	Tree Pose 	Warrior I 	Warrior II 	Warrior III 	Triangle Pose 
Wide-Leg Half Forward Bend 	Wide-Leg Forward Bend 	Table Pose 	Cat Pose 	Cow Pose 	Half Balancing Table 
Balancing Table 	Table Twist 	Child's Pose 	Downward Dog 	High Lunge 	Low Lunge 
Cobra Pose 	Sphinx Pose 	Upward Dog 	Plank Pose 	Dolphin Plank 	Supported Side Plank 
Seated Forward Bend 	Head to Knee 	Seated Twist 	Modified Pigeon 	Knee to Chest 	Hamstring Stretch 
Knees to Chest 	Bridge Pose 	Reclining Pigeon 	Reclining Twist 	Legs Up the Wall 	Relaxation Pose 
<u>Sun Salutation A</u> Mountain Pose 	Extended Mountain-inhale 	Forward Bend, exhale 	Low Lunge, right foot back, inhale 	Plank, hold breath in 	Knees-Chest-Chin, exhale 
Cobra, inhale 	Downward Dog, exhale 	Low Lunge, right foot forward, inhale 	Forward Bend, exhale 	Extended Mountain-inhale 	Mountain Pose 
<u>Six Directions of the Spine</u> Cow 	Cat 	Side Stretch, right 	Side Stretch, left 	Twist, right 	Twist, left 

## **Yoga-Related Resources**

*The identification of specific products, programs, or organizations does not constitute endorsement or implied endorsement on the part of the author, DoD, or any component agency.*

### **Books**

- ***Yoga for Pain Relief*** by McGonigal
- ***Yoga for Wellness: Healing With The Timeless Teachings of Viniyoga*** by Kraftsow
- ***Yoga as Medicine*** by McCall
- ***The iRest Program for Healing PTSD*** by Miller
- ***The Healing Power of the Breath*** by Gerbarg & Brown
- ***The Relaxation Revolution*** by Benson & Proctor
- ***Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*** by Kabat-Zinn
- ***The Mindfulness Solution*** by Siegel
- ***Radical Acceptance*** by Brach
- ***Self-Compassion*** by Neff

### **Video**

- **Viniyoga** (a type of yoga therapy) DVD's for various issues, such as anxiety or low back pain. <https://www.viniyoga.com/store/>
- **Yoga with Adriene** (YouTube channel) This YouTube channel contains a wide variety of videos that are accessible to all levels of experience. The videos are sorted into different playlists (e.g. yoga for back pain, yoga for healing, yoga for the morning, breath practices) <https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene>

### **Free Phone Apps**

- **Breathe2Relax**: Guidance and support for diaphragmatic breathing
- **Yoga Studio**: Pose options with instructions and more
- **Insight Timer**: guided mindfulness, meditation, relaxation, healing, music
- **Headspace**: guided mindfulness meditation
- **Relax Melodies**: Healing sounds and music

### **Websites for Further Information, Research and Guided Practice**

- **International Association of Yoga Therapists**
- **Yoga Journal**
- **The iRest Institute** (yoga nidra meditation)
- **Greater Good in Action** (UC-Berkeley)
- **Sounds True**: Hub for mind-body-spirit wellness books, audio, video

## **Yoga-Related Wellness Organizations with Veteran Focus**

- **Warriors At Ease (offers retreats)**

Warriors at Ease teachers are sharing yoga and meditation on military installations and in active duty communities across the globe. Contact them if your command is interested in integrating mind-body fitness into a training program or family support group. They will make every effort to connect you to a trained Warriors at Ease teacher serving your area. They also train service members, spouses, and military health care providers to bring this work directly to the active duty community in the most effective manner. Scholarships are available. <http://warriorsatease.org/resources-for-veterans/>

- **Yoga for Vets**

This website is for war or conflict veterans that served, or are currently serving, in the United States Military. It maintains a World-wide Directory of Studios, Gyms, Teachers, VA Medical Centers and Veteran Services Centers that offer at least *four free classes* to war veterans. <http://www.yogaforvets.org/>

- **Veterans Yoga Project (offers retreats)**

They provide individuals the opportunity to experiment with breathing, meditation, mindful movement, guided rest and gratitude by offering an online practice library. Some teachers who complete their Mindful Resilience Training for Trauma Recovery offer free classes all over the country for Veterans, Military and their support networks (families, friends and care-givers). VYP also holds healing retreats designed specifically for Veterans with PTSD and their families. <https://www.veteransyogaproject.org/veterans-1>

- **The Give Back Yoga Foundation**

The Give Back Yoga Foundation offers a selection of sponsored materials to veterans or active duty service members at no charge. Simply fill out a form on their website and they will ship your order to your physical address, or deliver a download link to your e-mail. <http://givebackyoga.org/resources-for-veterans/>

- **Connected Warriors, Inc.**

Connected Warriors, Inc.' goal is to support, improve and facilitate the well-being of Veterans, Service members and their Families in communities nationwide and overseas by providing evidence based Trauma-Conscious yoga therapy programs at no charge. Classes are currently offered in over 20 states. <http://connectedwarriors.org/>

- **Exalted Warrior Foundation (offers retreats)**

The Exalted Warrior Foundation facilitates an adaptive yoga instruction program that is designed for wounded warriors in the active military, veteran hospital facilities, and veterans within communities around the country. Offers yoga retreats. <http://www.exaltedwarrior.com/>