



BETH M. HOWARD

Fitness

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MIND • BODY • SPIRIT FOR WOMEN

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YOGA For

Stress is something we all deal with. At times, it comes as a series of small demands. At others, it wallops you in one shot. Life may get so stressful, you can't even catch your breath. And that creates another problem.

You may not be able to stop stress, but you can put it on hold by taking time to breathe. That's the premise behind restorative yoga, where the poses are simple and breathing is the only thing you have to think about. "Deprive yourself of proper breathing and you deprive yourself of one key way to release stress," explains Nancy Minges, restorative yoga instructor and fitness director of the Claremont Resort Spa and Tennis Club in Berkeley, California. Minges's clients swear by her methods, saying that a one-hour session can restore you faster and more effectively than an \$80 massage.

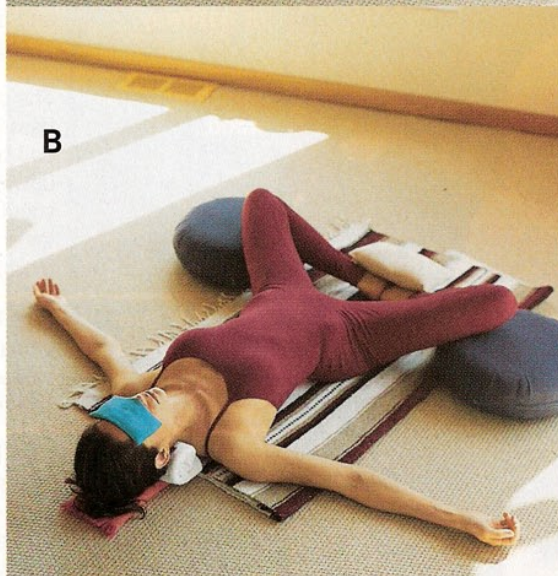
To achieve this inner calm, try any or all of the following five moves. And remember, the longer you hold each pose, the more relaxed you'll be afterward.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- One large and two medium-size cushions taken off your couch. Or try rolling up a few blankets or beach towels.
- Two bath towels.
- One eye pillow. If you don't own one, try a small bag of rice inside a sock.
- One weight bag or a large bag of rice.
- One quiet room (preferably with a light with a dimmer switch for atmosphere).

OPTIONAL:

- One cassette player. You may want a gentle reminder every few minutes, telling you to relax. Get a 60-minute tape, then record your own voice over soothing New Age music saying, "Let the rhythm of your breath become slow and long. Feel your rib cage expand, then relax. Let your eyes roll to the back of your head." Play the tape each time you perform these moves.



CHEST OPENING POSE

A) Fold a towel into a long, flat narrow roll. Sit on the floor and place the towel behind you (one end of the roll resting against your tailbone). Draw the soles of your feet together, heels about six inches away from your pubic bone. (You should not feel that much of a stretch.) Next, take two medium-size pillows and place one under each thigh for your legs to rest on. To keep your feet in place, put a weight bag on top of them.

B) Slowly lie back so your spine rests flat along the length of the towel. (If you feel any back pain, try the position with the towel folded into a less bulky roll.) Place another folded towel under your neck and rest an eye pillow over your eyes. Bring your arms straight out to the sides with your palms turned up. This is the starting position. Begin to concentrate on breathing as slowly and as deeply as possible. Hold this pose for 5–15 minutes.

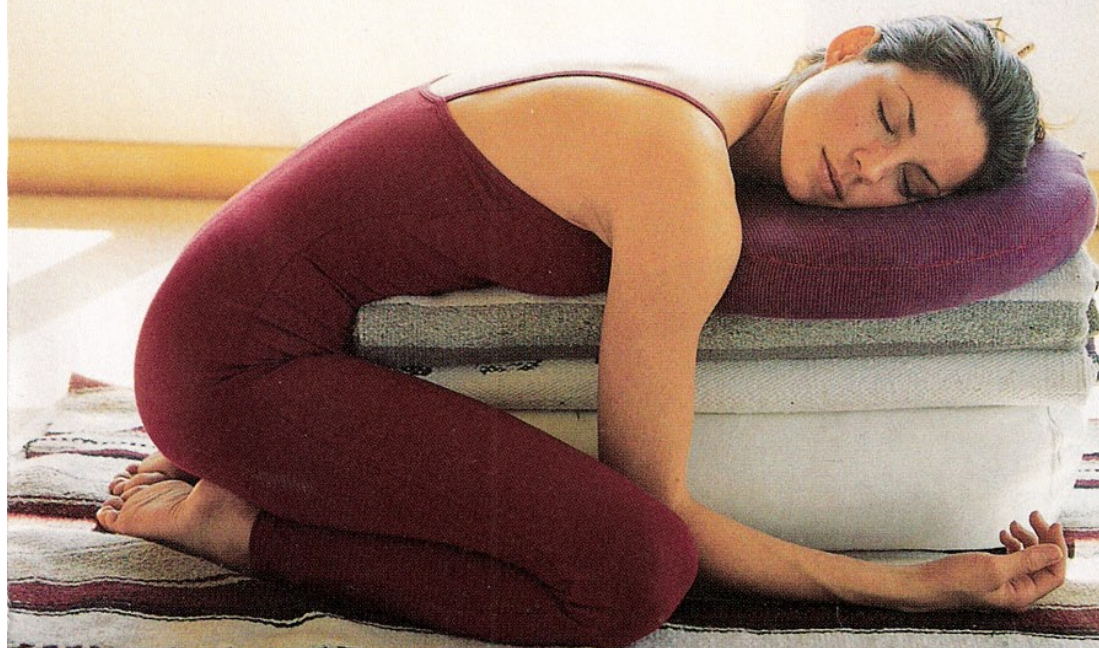
At the end of the pose, slowly bring your knees to your chest and gently roll to one side (letting the eye pillow and weight bag fall where they may). Rest for 20–30 seconds in this position, then place your palms on the floor and gently push up into a seated position.

Beginners

LOOKING TO LOSE THE WORLD AND DISCOVER
YOURSELF? LEAVE STRESS BEHIND IN MINUTES
WITH OUR GUIDE TO RESTORATIVE YOGA.

SUPPORTED CHILD'S POSE

Kneel with your butt resting on your heels and the tops of your feet flat on the floor. Spread your knees and place a large cushion (or several) between your legs. Lean forward and straddle the cushion (your elbows should be bent, forearms resting on the ground alongside you; hands are palms-up). Turn your head to one side and let your belly drop down as far as it can. This is the starting position. Now, close your eyes and slow your breathing. Relax for 3–8 minutes, then turn your head to the other side and repeat. (If you feel any knee or ankle pain, tuck a folded towel under either area.) Once finished, place your palms on the floor and slowly push yourself into a kneeling position.



A SESSION OF RESTORATIVE YOGA CAN **REJUVENATE** YOU FASTER THAN AN \$80 MASSAGE

UP THE WALL POSE

Lay a folded towel against a wall. Lie on your back and place your heels up on the wall. Slowly and gently wriggle yourself toward the wall, raising your hips to place your butt on top of the towel, touching the wall. Your legs should now be straight up against the wall, heels pointing toward the ceiling. Next, place a small towel under your neck to support your head and put an eye pillow over your eyes. Stretch your arms out to your sides (palms up). This is the starting position. Concentrate on slowing and deepening your breath, holding this pose for 5–15 minutes.

When the time is up, bend your knees and slowly bring them down to your chest. Roll to one side, rest for 20–30 seconds, then slowly lift up into a seated position.



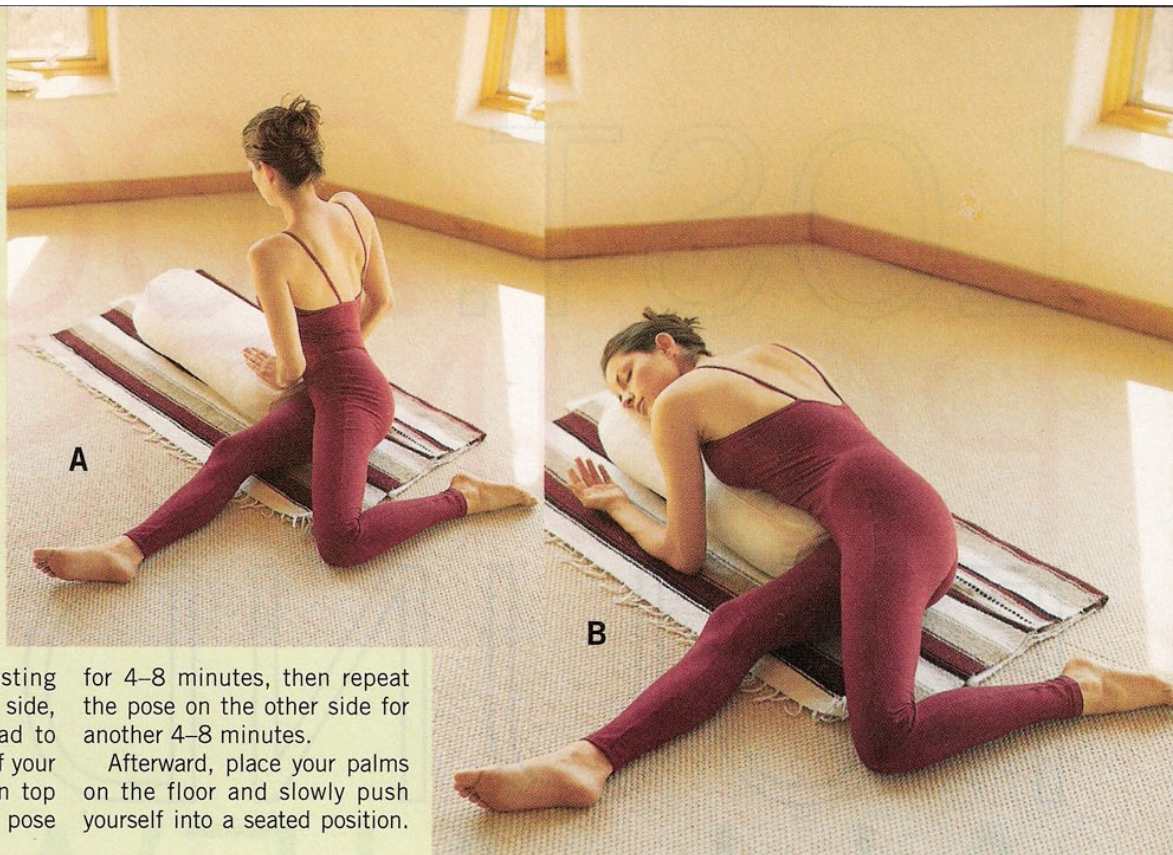
SUPPORTED TWIST POSE

A) Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Place one end of a large cushion on the floor next to your right hip. Keeping your right leg in position, bend your left leg back so the instep of your left foot lies flat. Keeping your back straight, slowly turn your upper body to the right and place your hands along the sides of the cushion.

B) Slowly lower your torso onto the cushion, resting your forearms along either side, palms up. Turn your head to the left so the right side of your face rests comfortably on top of the cushion. Hold this pose

for 4–8 minutes, then repeat the pose on the other side for another 4–8 minutes.

Afterward, place your palms on the floor and slowly push yourself into a seated position.



RELAXATION POSE

Sit on the floor with your legs straight. Tuck a large cushion under your knees and lie back. Next, tuck a towel under your neck and place an eye pillow over your eyes. Stretch your arms out to the

sides, palms facing up. Focus on slowing your breathing and deepening each breath as much as you can. Your breathing should feel natural, not strained. Imagine your bones dropping down to the

floor (notice how heavy you can make them feel just by thinking about it). If any outside thoughts should spring into your mind, focus on your breathing. Hold this pose for 5–15 minutes.

After that time, slowly roll over to one side, resting your head on your arm. Relax for 20–30 seconds, then place your palms on the floor and gently push yourself up to a seated position. □

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