



# PHYSIO-YOGA PRACTICE AND RELAXATION

The body's natural relaxation response is a powerful antidote to stress. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, and yoga can help one activate this relaxation response. When practiced regularly, these activities lead to a reduction in the everyday stress levels and a boost in the feelings of joy and serenity.

Yoga to me is "Self discipline". Yoga is a way of right living. Yoga practices eliminate compassion fatigue and induce relaxation response in all stressful situations. Pranayam, the attention to breath is calming; it dissolves stress and anxiety.



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## The relaxation response

One cannot avoid all stress, but one can counteract its negative effects by learning how to evoke the relaxation response, a state of deep rest that is the polar opposite of the stress response.

The stress response floods our body with chemicals that prepare us for “fight or flight.” However, while the stress response is helpful in true emergencies where we must be alert, it wears our body down when constantly activated.

Many studies have documented that “The relaxation response” brings our system back into balance: deepening our breathing, reducing stress hormones, slowing down our heart rate and blood pressure, and relaxing our muscles.

In addition to its calming physical effects, research shows that the relaxation response also increases energy and focus, combats illness, relieves aches and pains, heightens problem-solving abilities, and boosts motivation and productivity. Best of all – with a little practice – anyone can reap these benefits.

### Starting a relaxation practice

A variety of relaxation techniques helps one achieve the relaxation response. Those whose stress-busting benefits have been widely studied include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, visualization and yoga.

Learning the basics of these relaxation techniques is not difficult. However, it takes practice to harness their stress-relieving power. Most stress experts recommend setting aside at least 15 to 20 minutes a day for relaxation practice. If one would like to get even more stress relief, aim for 30 minutes to an hour.

## Getting the most out of the yoga practice

### Set aside time in your daily schedule.

The best way to start and maintain a relaxation practice is by incorporating it into the daily routine. One may find that it is easier to stick with the yoga practice if one does it first thing in the morning, before other tasks and responsibilities get in the way.

### Do not practice when you are sleepy.

These techniques can relax you so much that they can make you very sleepy, especially if it is close to bedtime. You will get the most out of these techniques if you practice when you are fully awake and alert.

### An observant and noncritical attitude.

Do not worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you are doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, do not fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.

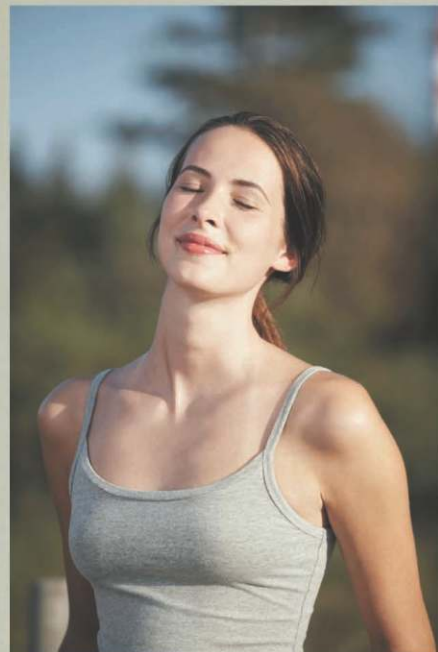
**Choose a yoga practice that appeals to you.** When choosing a relaxation technique, consider your specific needs, preferences, and fitness level. The right relaxation technique is the one that resonates with you and fits your lifestyle.

**Solitude or social stimulation for relaxation?** If you crave solitude, solo relaxation techniques such as meditation or progressive muscle relaxation will help you to quieten your mind and recharge your batteries. If you crave social interaction, a group session will give you the stimulation and support you are looking for. Practicing with others may also help you stay motivated.

## Deep breathing exercise & relaxation

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple, yet most effective, relaxation

technique. It is easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get the stress levels in check.



**Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as music. All one really needs is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.**

## Progressive muscle relaxation & relaxation response

Progressive muscle relaxation is another effective and widely used strategy for stress relief. It involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body.

With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension as well as complete relaxation feels like in different parts of the body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of relief from stress.



Mindfulness meditation takes effort to maintain our concentration and to bring it back to the present moment when our mind starts to drift off. However, with regular practice, mindfulness meditation actually changes the brain – strengthening the areas associated with joy and relaxation, and weakening those involved in negativity and stress.



## Mindfulness meditation for relaxation

Meditation that cultivates mindfulness is particularly effective at reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions. Mindfulness is the quality of being fully engaged in the present moment, without analyzing or otherwise “over-thinking” the experience. Rather than worrying about the future, mindfulness meditation switches the focus to what is happening right now.

For stress relief, try the following mindfulness meditation techniques:

- **Body scan** – Body scanning cultivates mindfulness by focusing your attention on various parts of your body. Like progressive muscle relaxation, you start with your feet and work your way up. However, instead of tensing and relaxing your muscles, you simply focus on the way

each part of your body feels without either labeling the sensations as “good” or “bad”.

- **Walking meditation** - You do not have to be seated or still to meditate. In walking meditation, mindfulness involves being focused on the physicality of each step — the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your breath while moving, and feeling the wind against your face.

## Guided imagery and relaxation

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that can help relieve stress. When used as a relaxation technique, guided imagery involves imagining a scene in which one feels at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety.

Choose whatever setting is most calming, whether a tropical beach, a favorite childhood spot, or a quiet pleasing environment. One can practice this visualization exercise on your own, with a therapist’s help, or using an audio recording.

- See the sun setting over the water
- Hear the birds singing
- Smell the pine trees
- Feel the cool water on your bare feet
- Taste the fresh, clean air

## Yoga and Relaxation response

Yoga is an excellent stress relief technique. It involves a series of both static and dynamic postures, combined with deep breathing. The physical and mental benefits of yoga provide a natural counterbalance to stress, and strengthen the relaxation response in the daily life schedule.



## Relaxation Yoga Postures: The Psycho-physical Postures

All yoga postures' practice must end in a relaxation pose.

Many of the Yoga asana have evolved from nature and the student is practicing to gain the grace and poise we see in animals and the environment. However, we will never attain that poise if we are using excessive muscular tension to try to achieve it.

Evidence furnished by the application of biomechanics to studies of ancient and modern primate structures indicates that man's erectly supported body posture could only have originated from a vertically suspended posture (arboreal).

Webster's New World Medical Dictionary defines "neutral posture" as the stance, which is attained "when the joints are not bent and the spine is aligned and not twisted." In this position, a person is able to completely and optimally attain balance and proportion of his or her body mass and framework, based on his or her physical limitations. Good posture optimizes breathing and affects the circulation of bodily fluids.

Constant postural abnormalities exert strain on the back muscles providing them little solace in the traditional supine pose. The primary aim of such asana is to relax the every bit of muscle and provide them a deep repose. Generally, all asana follow certain fixed time, but one can perform these asana any time.

These exercises seem very easy at first, but if followed rigorously, are quite difficult, for the tension in all the muscles of the body must be consciously released. These asana provide mental peace and one feels energetic after just few hours of practice.

Almost every Yoga book gives advice on how to improve one's posture. Yoga is a complete system. The Alexander Technique does not seek to add anything to Yoga, nor does it attempt to tell the Yoga practitioner how to perform an asana or any other practice. What the Alexander Technique does is to meet the Yoga practitioner on common ground. That commonality is the psycho-physical mechanism.



### CORPSE POSE (SHAVASANA)

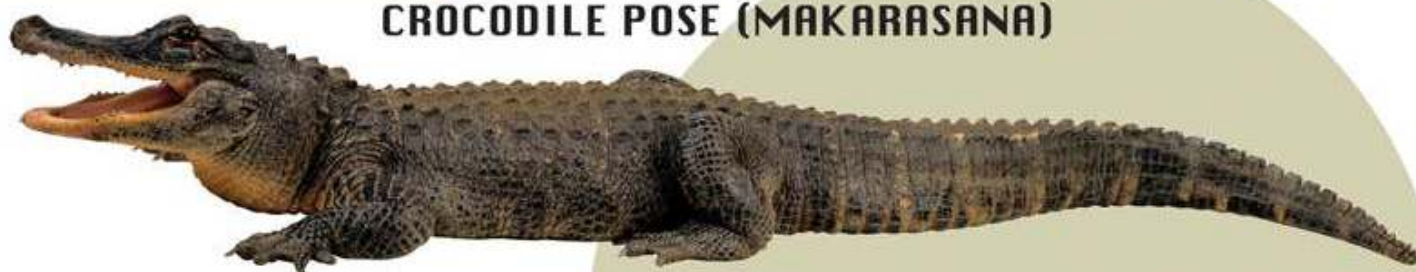
This relaxation posture can also be considered as the great "Energy Generator" of the mind and body. Regular practice of this asana on a more spiritual level, stimulates the practitioner to see the inner connections between the individual and his/her environment and with other people, people everywhere. In that way, it helps the person become more compassionate; it helps the person become kinder and gentler and, even, more ethical.

#### Steps to do Shavasana

- Best time- just before the sleep after a hard days' work.
- Lie flat on the back over a mat in clean and quiet place.
- Maintain some distance between your legs.
- Place your hands along side the waist with palm fingers curled up.
- Maintain the spinal chord and neck straight.
- Keep your eyes and lips closed with ease.
- Keep your body firm and get conscious towards breathing.
- Breathe easy and concentrate on your navel zone.
- Get yourself free from all the physical and mental afflictions.
- Begin mental counting, say 30.
- Breathe easy and repeat the mental count 30. Repeat again this number when you exhale out.
- Next time when you inhale then mentally count 29.
- Repeat this number when you exhale out.
- Complete this inverse counting without any miss.
- Suppose if you miss out then begin once again from the start.
- Do not make any change in your rhythm or style of breathing.
- You will certainly get relaxed and peaceful by the time your counting gets over.
- Now get in the Sukhasana pose and relax.



## CROCODILE POSE (MAKARASANA)



Makarasana is an Indian translation for Crocodile pose. This is the best relaxation posture to my knowledge for all those who return home after a mental and physical stressful day's work. This is also practiced by itself to achieve calmness of body and mind. Those who cannot lie on their back for some medical problem, and hence, are unable to practice Shavasana, can relax in this pose. Its regular practice provides mental peace to the persons of all ages. Here the effect is felt at two points - the neck and the lower back. This has marvelous and great facilitating effect on Diaphragmatic breathing research studies states. One can learn to practice this asana as below:

The Crocodiles are said to be 'The Great Survivors'. The crocodile's ability to survive since the dinosaur age is remarkable. While many animals have become extinct or have had to adapt significantly to cope with changing circumstances, the crocodile has remained relatively unchanged for millions of years. Two sources of wonder, then, are the resiliency of crocodiles over huge periods of time (and geological changes) and the ability of individual crocodiles to survive into adulthood despite numerous obstacles, including threats to its habitat and very determined predators.

**Main heroic quality of a crocodile is  
RESILIENCY and alternative is  
POWER.**



### Steps to do Makarasana

- Lie flat on the stomach on a soft but firm mattress.
- Relax the lower torso.
- Lift your head slightly and rest your forehead on the 'double triangle' formed with the folded elbows.
- Create one-foot distance between your feet. The heels should be opposite each other and the toes should point outward.
- Ensure that the feet edges are touching the ground.
- Relax the neck, arms, shoulders, hip joints and legs.
- Try to relax your whole body by bringing it in contact with the ground as much as possible.
- Lightly close the eyes and breathe normal.
- Remain conscious towards the body.
- You may realize some strain initially on the neck and back.
- Keep adjusting the elbows so that tension is evenly spread out between the neck and the lower back.
- Position your body in the best way.
- Breathe easy and close the eyes with ease.
- Breathing Pattern: Natural and rhythmic.

**Mood Change and Vitality** - Mental health and physical energy are difficult to quantify, but virtually everyone who participates in yoga over a period of time reports a positive effect on outlook and energy level. Yogic stretching and breathing exercises incorporated prior to this asana practise has been seen to result in an invigorating effect on both mental and physical energy and improved mood.

Let us all make a daily habit of practicing at least these two remarkable asana and generate energy for constructive and ethical practices in whatever work we do and simultaneously conserve energy too, to face and accept any challenges in life and live life as "The Great Survivor".