

2021

# Mindful Yoga your way to emotional health!



## What is Mindful yoga

Yoga is an integrated system which uses the body, breath and mind to encourage a sense of wellbeing. It originated in India and has been practised for 2000 years. Mindful Yoga is holistic in that it incorporates ethics, movement, breathing and meditation into a single practice.

At Flinders, counsellor Maureen (who is also a qualified yoga teacher) runs regular mindful yoga classes. They take place from 12.00pm to 1.00pm on Tuesdays during term times at the OASIS centre (J7 on the campus map - <https://www.flinders.edu.au/content/dam/documents/campus/maps/campus-map.pdf>).

## What is the connection between mindful yoga and emotional health

Despite how long yoga and mindfulness meditation have been practised (thousands of years), western medicine and science are really only just starting to catch up in terms of documenting the mental health and emotional benefits.

The research in this space is still young, but very promising:

“Yoga appears to be superior to no treatment and progressive relaxation for both depression and anxiety, and may benefit mood and anxiety symptoms associated with medical illness. It shows good safety and tolerability in short-term treatment.” -

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201808000555>

“In conclusion, yoga might be an effective and safe intervention for individuals with elevated levels of anxiety.” - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/da.22762>

“Findings show that the evidence regarding yoga as an intervention for the effects of trauma as well as the mental health symptoms and illnesses often associated with trauma is encouraging but preliminary” - <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524838015620834>

“Our results indicate that yoga is a viable antihypertensive lifestyle therapy that produces the greatest BP benefits when breathing techniques and meditation/mental relaxation are included.” - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S002561961830939X>

“Results indicate that yoga interventions improve multiple physical function and HRQoL outcomes in this population compared to both control conditions.” - <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-019-0789-2>

“Despite methodological drawbacks of the included studies, yoga could be considered an ancillary treatment option for patients with depressive disorders and individuals with elevated levels of depression.” - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/da.22166>

“In conclusion, yoga might be an effective and safe intervention for individuals with elevated levels of anxiety.” - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/da.22762>

“Overall the 25 randomised control studies discussed provide preliminary evidence to suggest that yoga practice leads to better regulation of the sympathetic nervous system and hypothalamic-

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pituitary-adrenal system, as well as a decrease in depressive and anxious symptoms in a range of populations." - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S002239561500206X>

"There is growing research evidence supporting the use of yoga as an adjunct or combination therapy for the management of stress, anxiety and depression. Mindfulness has been indicated as a potential mechanism of change but needs further research." - <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JMHTEP-01-2016-0002/full/html>

"The findings of this systematic review suggest that yoga might be a feasible and safe adjunctive treatment for people with IBS." - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S154235651630088X>

"Findings of the 17 studies showed that meditative movement has beneficial effects for various populations on a range of sleep measures. Improvement in sleep quality was reported in the majority of studies and was often accompanied by improvements in quality of life, physical performance, and depression." - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1087079215001604>

"Yoga showed greater reductions in depressive symptoms than waitlist, treatment as usual an attention control. Greater reduction in depressive symptoms were associated with higher frequency of yoga sessions per week." - <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/early/2020/04/05/bjsports-2019-101242.full.pdf>

And that is just a handful of reviews from the last few years.

## The purpose of this guide

Over the past 12 months, Maureen has been developing brief Mindful Yoga sequences for different emotional situations. This guide collects all of them into a single handout.

Currently there are 3 sequences in this guide.

Yoga to Energise

Yoga for Restful Sleep

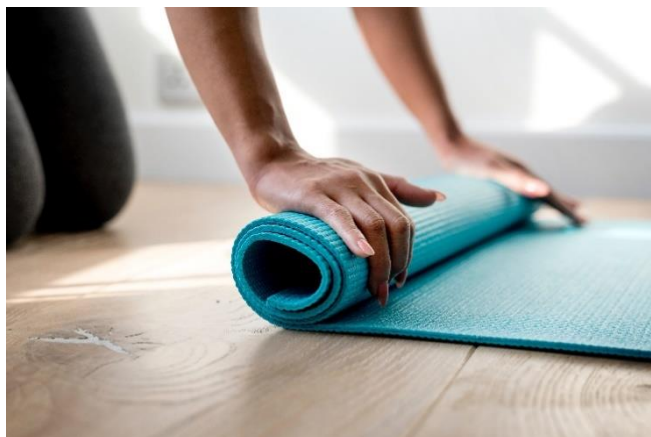
Yoga for Calm

As more sequences are created, we'll pull them into this guide. The ultimate goal is a full mind-body guide to **managing your emotional life**.

## Where to learn more

If Mindful Yoga interests you, consider attending a Mindful Yoga Class at OASIS on Tuesdays during term time from 12.00pm to 1.00pm - <https://blogs.flinders.edu.au/student-health-and-well-being/2017/09/05/mindful-yoga-sessions-at-oasis-at-flinders/>. No bookings are required, mats and other equipment provided.

## YOGA TO ENERGISE



### How does yoga help create energy?

When we have low energy we often struggle to exercise. By using a slow mindful approach to yoga practice, we can cultivate greater awareness of our bodies, which helps assist our ability to regulate our mood and improves our resilience to stress.

As your stress levels go down, your energy levels usually increase. There is a range of research which demonstrates the value of yoga for stress management.

Slow mindful yoga can improve our heart rate variability which is a measure of how well we respond to stress. Studies have also shown an increase in the neuro transmitter GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) which also helps promote a calm state in the body.

Mindful yoga which encourages slow, smooth and even breathing can also increase our vagal tone, which can assist us to feel safe in our bodies to help better understand what we need and can get in touch with our own values and priorities, increasing our motivation to engage with the world.

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-9431/why-yoga-heart-rate-are-so-important-a-cardiologist-explains.html>

<http://theconversation.com/how-yoga-makes-us-happy-according-to-science-77840>


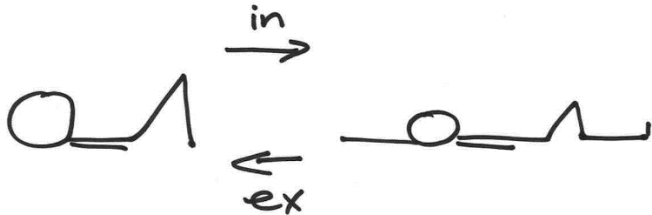
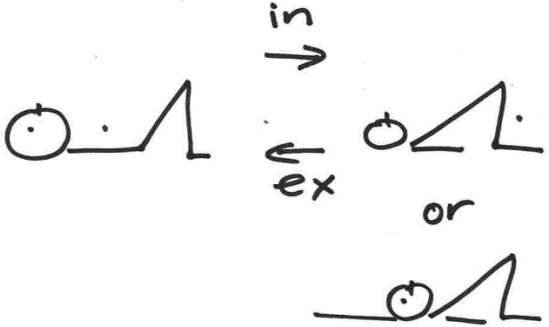
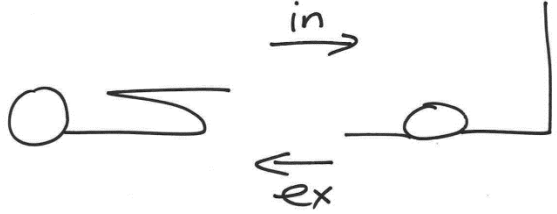
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/7956508/Yoga-protects-the-brain-from-depression.html>

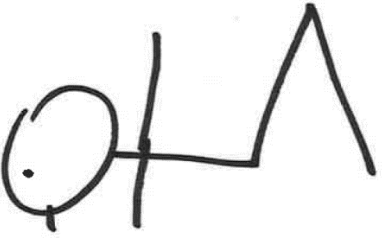

<https://bebrainfit.com/yoga-depression-anxiety/>

### Tips for using yoga to energise

- Meet yourself where you are at, compassionately and kindly.
- Start small.
- It can be useful to start with lying down poses and gradually work towards standing.
- Being creative with how you move your limbs can be helpful (e.g. cross lateral and counter lateral movements).
- Find ways to breathe more freely.
- Do something every day, no matter how small.

## Yoga to Energise – Sample Practice Sequence

	<p><b>1. Constructive rest position</b> Lie on the floor with your knees bent and the soles of your feet on the floor. Place your hands where they are most comfortable. Allow yourself some time to notice your mood, energy and breath. Generate a baseline for your practice.</p>
	<p><b>2. Arm and leg reaches</b> From this position, allow the arms to rise up on an inhale breath and return on an exhale breath. Repeat. Allow the spine to arch gently as you inhale and roll down as you exhale.</p> <p>After a few rounds, try one arm and the opposite leg. Repeat and swap limbs. Always use the inhale to reach the limbs and the exhale to return. Try different combinations, both arms, both legs, the left side, the right side etc.</p>
	<p><b>3. Bridge Pose</b> From the Constructive Rest position, snuggle the feet closer to your buttocks with your arms next to your body. As you press into your feet, allow yourself to start to come up with an inhale breath. It doesn't matter how far. Roll back down with an exhale. Continue. You may like to explore using the arms, perhaps one arm at a time, or both arms together.</p>
	<p><b>4. Apanasana</b> Hug your knees over your chest. Allow your legs to move with the breath. Allow the breath to move in to the belly and gently push your legs away as you inhale and squeeze your legs gently inwards on an exhale. Find a comfortable smooth rhythm. If you like, you can expand your arm and leg movements.</p>

	<p><b>5. Lying twist</b></p> <p>From Constructive Rest, anchor your arms at your side and feel your shoulder blades connect to the floor. Inhale, and then let an exhale breath move your legs to one side. Your head could stay in the middle or fall to the opposite side. Inhale to centre and repeat to the other side. Continue for a few rounds. If comfortable, you are welcome to stay for a few breaths on each side, breathing into the side of the body.</p>
	<p><b>6. Constructive rest</b></p> <p>End the sequence by returning to Constructive Rest and noticing the body, energy, mood, thoughts etc. What is the same and what is different to the start of the practice? You can stop here or go on to another sequence.</p>



## YOGA FOR RESTFUL SLEEP



### Why is sleep important

Sleep is truly one of life's wonders. It assists our physical healing, our emotional regulation and our memory. But sometimes it can be hard to get to sleep, or often we wake up at night and struggle to return to sleep. Often the stress of not sleeping then adds to the original stress that may have woken us in the first place.

We know that "enough" sleep helps to regulate the amygdala which assist with our emotional regulation. Too little sleep also impacts on the striatum of the brain which is connected to impulsivity and reward seeking. This means we can be prone to making impulsive choices when sleep deprived and therefore can experience emotional mood swings. It can also be difficult to concentrate and use our memory effectively.

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters/benefits-of-sleep>

### How does yoga help promote sleep?

Yoga can help promote restful sleep in two ways. It can help calm an overactive mind, and it can help promote physical relaxation in the body which will encourage sleep. This handout focuses on the latter. You may also want to look at the '[Yoga for calm](#)' handout for further ideas.

One of the paradoxes of getting the body to relax, is we often need to tighten into already tight muscles first. This helps reset the muscles and can promote an ability to settle into bed with ease and comfort.

## Tips for using yoga for restful sleep

- Meet yourself where you are at, compassionately and kindly.
- Focus on your exhale breath. Try and progressively increase the length of your exhale so it is longer than your inhale.
- Allow the belly to be free to move when you breathe
- All movements should be done slowly and mindfully. The smoother you can do the movements the better.
- Keep it really simple. Just legs up the wall focusing on your belly will help. It might help to practice these movements when you are not tired, so they become available to you in those tired moments when sleep is elusive.

### Yoga for Restful Sleep - sample practice sequence

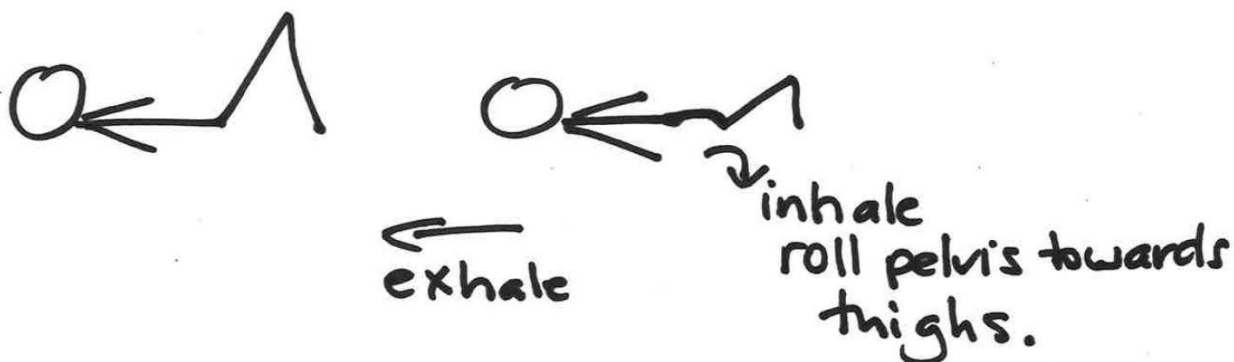
#### Constructive rest position (belly breath awareness)

Lie on the floor with your knees bent and the soles of your feet on the floor. Place your hands on your belly if this is comfortable to do so. Allow your body to develop a smooth rhythmic breath. Allow your belly to lift with an inhale and fall with the exhale. Focus on feeling the gentle movement under your hands rather than forcing.



#### Pelvic rolls – tense and release through back of body

Keep your body exactly where it is, and transition from breath awareness to moving gently with the rhythm of the breath. As you inhale allow your pelvis to roll forward towards your thighs. Your lower back will arch off the floor. Deliberately tense into the back area of your body, maybe hold for a brief moment, and then release any tension in your lower back as you exhale and allow your pelvis to roll back to neutral. Keep this up for about 6 rounds.

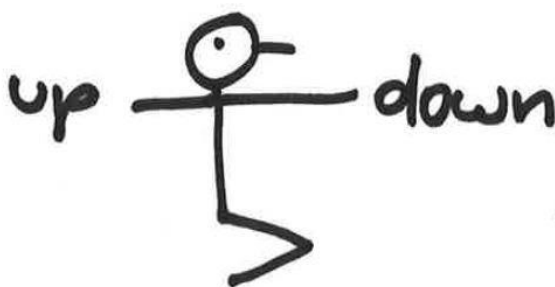
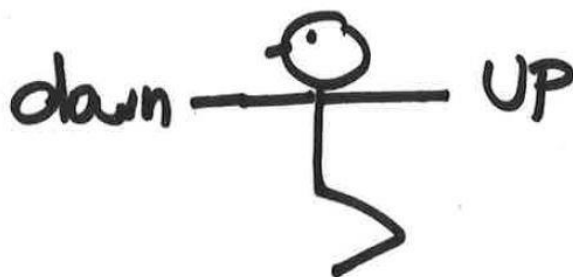




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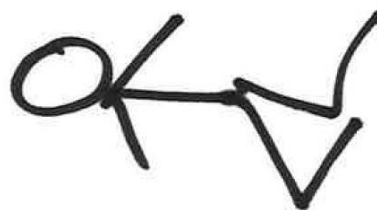
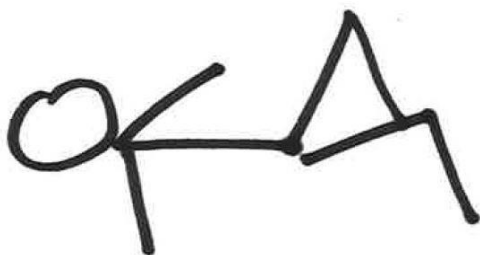
### Washrag twist for upper body

Bring your arms out at shoulder height. Palms up. Turn your head to the left and turn your right palm down. Then turn your head to your right, while turning your left palm down and your right palm up. It sounds more complicated than it is. Imagine you are like a washrag through your shoulders and you are gently ringing the tension out. Move slowly and breath smoothly. Find a pattern that works for your body.



### Windshield wiper twist, allow head to move with the body

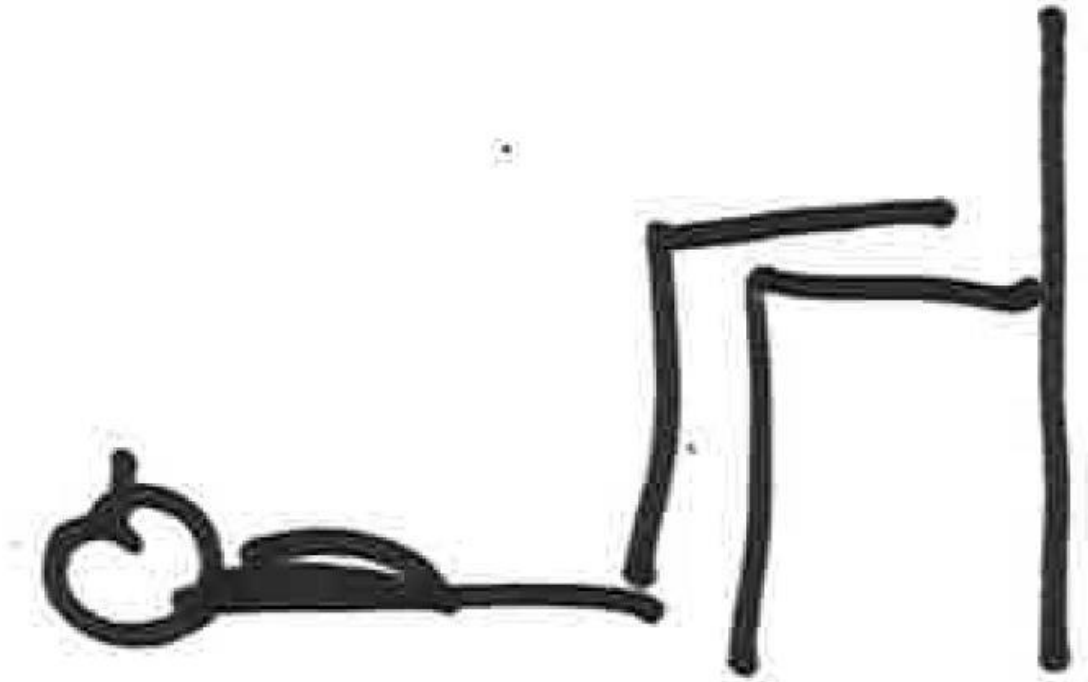
Keep the arms at shoulder height and bring the legs wider apart. As you exhale allow your right knee to drop towards your left ankle. Your left arm can sweep up towards your ear if you like, and you can also move the head if comfortable. Inhale return to centre and exhale to the other side. You are still now gently wringing yourself out, this time through the sides of the body. Allow yourself to relax and enjoy the movements.



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## Legs up wall

This is a brilliant all-round yoga pose, it can help rejuvenate, but it can also help promote rest. Find a chair or a wall, or the end of the bed. Support your legs on something. Knees can be bent over the chair or bed, or straight on the wall. If having straight legs creates tension in your hamstrings, then bend them. Allow your belly to soften and come back to the smooth rhythmic breath in the belly. Rest your hands here. Follow the cycle of breath for about 12 rounds. You can progressively let your exhale breath become longer with each breath until it is twice the length of your inhale if that is comfortable. Otherwise just have focus on breathing as smoothly as you can.



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## YOGA FOR CALM



### How does yoga help create calm?

When we experience stress and anxiety, we experience an increased arousal of the sympathetic nervous system – fight or flight response. We can assist the nervous system to return to homeostasis by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. This can be done from the top down – use the prefrontal cortex to help regulate the system, and also from the bottom up using the primitive brain and the body to help regulate the system. Yoga when practised slowly and mindfully uses both the top down and the bottom up approaches. Studies have found yoga can increase vagal tone (i.e. increase parasympathetic nervous system activity), reduce cortisol (a stress hormone) and lower inflammation.

<https://theconversation.com/how-yoga-makes-us-happy-according-to-science-77840>

### Tips for using yoga to create calm

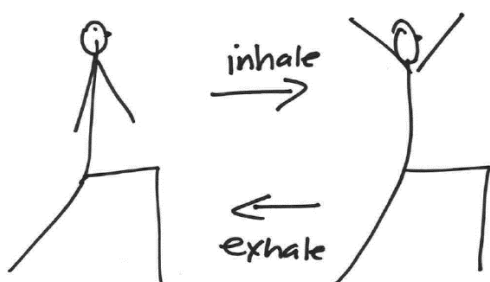
- Start standing. Then go to hands and knees, backbends, lying poses and then breathing practises.
- Meet yourself where you are at, compassionately and kindly. Include pauses between poses.
- The mind responds to both repetition and novelty. Consider doing the same sequence every day, but maybe vary where you put your arms.
- Do what you enjoy.

## Yoga for Calm – Sample Practice Sequence



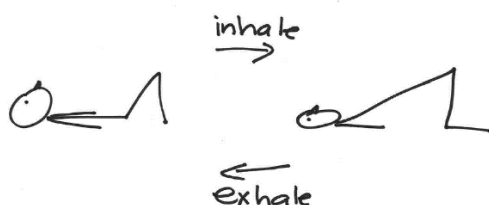
### 7. Standing Mountain Pose – Tadasana:

Take a moment or two to connect your feet into the ground and allow your spine to straighten up.



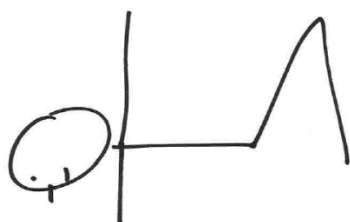
### 8. Warrior One:

Place one leg forward and find your balance as you bend the front knee. As you inhale raise your arms over your head, and as you exhale, lower your arms. Repeat. You can hold the pose for a few breaths if that feels good, but remember to breathe while you are holding the posture.



### 9. Bridge Pose:

Come to the floor. Place your feet close to your buttocks and your arms alongside the body. As you inhale, raise the buttocks. As you exhale, lower the buttocks. Repeat. Hold if comfortable, remembering to breathe freely.



### 10. Supine Twist:

From a lying position with your feet on the floor, find the breath. Allow the exhale breath to move your knees towards one side and your head in the other direction. Inhale to centre, repeat to the other side. Repeat and then hold.



### 11. Constructive Rest Position – Belly Breathing:

Come to stillness on your back with you knees bent. Find a spot where the feet are not too close, a bit further away than your bridge pose. Allow the lower back to release and activate 'belly breathing'. Place your hands on your abdomen and notice how your hands move as you breathe. Let your belly stay soft and notice as it naturally expands with your inhale, and gently releases as you exhale. Stay for as long as you want.