

# Restorative Yoga 101

by [Mitch Rustad](#)

Weight training, pilates and sun salutations are great health and fitness tools, but sometimes I'd rather suffer through a repeat of *Hey Paula!* than set foot in the gym, you know? So if you're ready for a refreshing, body nourishing, soul enriching workout in as little as 5 minutes or less, grab a blanket, eye bag, pillows, a yoga mat and even some meditative music--it's restorative yoga time!

But what kind of a 'workout' is this, you wonder? While restorative yoga isn't as active as Ashtanga or Hatha yoga, its health benefits—via these and other assorted goodies like towels, blocks and even a chair or wall—are legion, especially for overly active, stressed out and addicted multi-taskers (sound familiar?) like myself. The mere idea of getting myriad health benefits from 'striking a pose' that doesn't require a hint of straining made me downright giddy.

The good news is, you don't always have to be sweating, huffing and puffing to promote a healthy body.

In short, restorative Yoga focuses on relaxing and rejuvenating the body via restful postures (see descriptions below). So why not just take a nap instead? Restorative yoga's 'rest' is different than sleep and provides the body a unique opportunity to renew and heal, says Yoga Therapist, Jaymie Meyer, RYT, who owns Resilience for Life in New York City.

"Restorative yoga, as well as other forms of yoga, help to trigger the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for balancing the body and bringing its response system back into equilibrium," says Meyer. "You're giving yourself the opportunity to move away from the 'fight or flight' response where most of us live our lives, to a state that reduces those stress hormones that can harm us."?

Better yet, stimulating the PNS helps to lower heart rate and blood pressure, stimulates the immune system and keeps the endocrine system operating healthily. So grab your props and let the bliss (and healing) begin!

Here are two restorative poses you can do in your home.

**Savansana (corpse pose):** Lying in basic savansana and elevating the knees can be a revelation for the mind and body. Simply roll up a bath towel or even a rolled yoga mat under the knees (you don't need a bolster), which is a wonderful way to reduce back strain and reach a state of deep relaxation. You can also put minimal support under the back of the head and neck to elevate the forehead and lengthen the back of the cervical spine (neck bones). A folded towel or a flat pillow will do. Rest your arms gently at your sides, palms up. Place an eye bag over your eyes and begin the breath deeply. Make sure that your chest is opening in this pose and that your ribs are moving away from your abdominal organs. Stay here for 5-25 minutes or as long as it feels good.



**Legs up the Wall:** This gentle inversion quiets the heart; helps relieve insomnia and headaches. For those who are not inverting, legs up the wall provides nearly all of the benefits of a full shoulderstand. It also helps to reduce high blood pressure and is safe for women to practice during the final days of their menstrual cycle. Sit sideways with your right hip against the wall. Bend your knees into your chest and start to turn your front torso towards the wall. Use your arms for support as you lower yourself back towards the floor, and sweep your legs up to a vertical position against the wall. From the side, you look like the letter 'L'. It's okay if your buttocks move away from the bottom edge of the wall, but try to keep the distance as close as possible.

Make sure your body is in a straight line from the wall, that is, perpendicular from the bottom of your spine to the top of head. Place an eye pillow over your eyes and begin to breath deeply. Extend your exhalations with each breath to relax even more. Stay here for 5-20 minutes or until you feel tingling in your legs and then come out of the pose by bending the knees into the chest and rolling onto your side.

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