

move…your body

move…to flow

move…to live

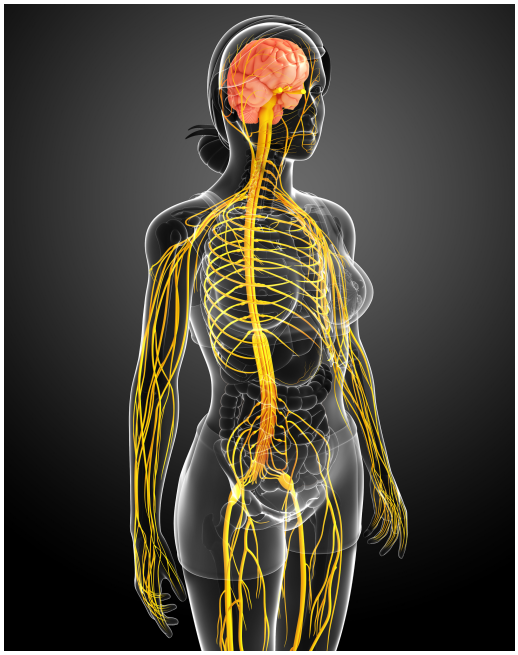
SomaFocus

Some of us think holding on makes us strong; but sometimes it is letting go.
~Hermann Hesse

Practice letting go

Pain will leave you, when you let go.
~Jeremy Aldana

Letting go requires practice and time. At the core of bodywork, massage therapy, some movement practices, biofield therapies, and yoga is the concept of letting go. We are asked to let go of muscle tension, inhibitions that prevent us from physically moving, along with habits, thoughts, and old narratives that keep us stuck where we no longer wish to be. These practices require us to integrate our physical experiences (movement and sensations) and our minds (thoughts and emotions) to let go. The nervous system is the mechanism that monitors and interprets our physical, cognitive, and emotional experiences. In response to these experiences, the nervous system regulates our physiology and induces action. If you take a hot baking dish out of the oven without oven mitts, your automatic response (reflex) is to let go of the dish. Upon touching the dish, the nerve endings of the pain and temperature receptors in your hands sent signals to your brain. Your brain interpreted the signals as heat and pain, and then sent signals to your muscles to release the hot dish.



[W]e never really encounter the world; all we experience is our own nervous system.
~Eknath Easwaran

There's a victory in letting go of your expectations.
~Mike White

The nervous system monitors and regulates our reactions to various events in our lives, whether they are pleasurable or stressful. In a short-term stressful situation, the stress response, a cycle of physiological events controlled by a region of the brain called the hypothalamus, is activated. Our muscles tense as we guard our bodies from a perceived threat, and the sympathetic nervous system triggers the release of hormones that raise the heart rate, elevate the blood pressure, quicken the breath, and increase blood sugar levels so we are ready to respond to whatever is triggering us to be on high alert. This response, also known as the fight-or-flight response, ends once the perceived threat to our equilibrium is removed, and the hypothalamus resumes promoting homeostasis (balance) within our bodies. However, if we are repeatedly exposed to stressful situations, the hypothalamus continues to trigger the release of cortisol, a stress hormone, and we enter into a state of chronic tension and are vulnerable to developing certain types of migraine, tension headaches, hypertension, diabetes, digestive disorders, and cardiovascular disease.

To counterbalance the stress response, we can induce a state of relaxation by activating our parasympathetic nervous system, which slows the heart rate and reduces blood pressure. Getting more sleep, soaking in Epsom salts or magnesium salts, limiting caffeine and alcohol consumption, and making healthier food choices are some ways we can counteract the physical and physiological effects of stress. Reiki, CransioSacral work, massage, and yoga are also beneficial for stress reduction, calming the mind, easing muscle tension, and reducing pain.

Did you know?
The vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the human body, connecting the brain to the abdomen, is the major pathway involved in the "rest and digest" response of the parasympathetic nervous system.

People have a hard time letting go of their suffering. Out of a fear of the unknown, they prefer suffering that is familiar.

~Thich Nhat Hanh

In *Soma & Psyche*, we consciously integrated movement and breath to ease tension and create mobility with tense and release exercises and Sun Salutations. This article introduces therapeutic yoga poses inspired by restorative yoga to induce a state of relaxation. You will need a mat or soft surface, blankets, towels and pillows, and if you have yoga blocks or bolsters on hand, use them as well. Choose the items you need to support your body in the best possible way.

You only need to do one of the four poses to feel the benefits of inducing a resting state. However, the sequence includes a backbend, a forward bend, an inversion, and a general relaxation pose to create more balance in the body. Some people start their day with relaxation poses, while others end the day with a rest position. Any time of day that you feel you need to decompress is the perfect time of day to spend 10-20 minutes in a state of induced relaxation.

Caution & Contraindication: If you are pregnant, have disc disease, have unmedicated hypertension, or have experienced heart failure or stroke, consult your physician before attempting any of these postures.

BACKBEND

Supported Reclining Back Bend (10 minutes)
Supported Reclining Back Bend opens the chest and counteracts the forward slumped desk posture.
Props: 1 towel, 2 blankets, 1 pillow
Support:

- Knees: Roll one blanket and place it on top of a pillow. Position this horizontally to be placed under the knees.
- Back: Roll the second blanket and arrange it horizontally to be placed beneath the shoulder blades.
- Head & Neck: Use a folded towel for support under the base of the skull so the chin is lower than the forehead.

Getting into position: Sit between the back support and knee support. Place one leg at a time over the knee support, making sure the rolled blanket is underneath the backs of the knees. Lie back, keeping the back support beneath the shoulder blades. Arrange the towel to support the head and neck. Rest here for 10 minutes, breathe normally, and allow the tension to dissipate from your body.

Lower back massage:
One at a time, slowly bring your knees to your chest. Hug your knees and rock from side to side, gently massaging your sacrum.
Getting out: Slowly bring knees to chest one at a time and roll over onto your side. Press top hand into the mat to push up to a seated position, head coming up last.

FORWARD BEND

Supported Child's Pose (10 Minutes)
Supported Child's Pose stretches the muscles and ligaments along the spine and opens the hips. This nurturing pose also helps to offset insomnia.
Props: 1 towel, 2 or 3 blankets, 1 pillow
Support:
- Torso & Head: Stack 2 or 3 folded blankets on top of a pillow. Position this vertically on the mat to be placed underneath the torso and head.
- Knees: If you need support behind the knees to increase space in the knee joint, have a folded towel nearby.

Getting into position: Start kneeling on the hands and knees, knees wide and big toes touching, with the blankets and pillow between the knees situated lengthwise so you can rest your torso and head on top of this support. Place the big toes together, sit back on the heels, and lay your torso and head on the blankets, turning the head to one side, if needed, to breathe. Extend the arms in front of you. Place the towel in your knee crease, between the hamstrings and calves, if you need to create more space in the knee joint. If you turned your head to the side, rest here for 5 minutes with your head turned to one side, then turn your head to the other side for 5 more minutes. If your head is in a neutral position, state and breathe normally for 10 minutes.
Side Stretch: Walk both hands to the right to feel a stretch along the left side of your back. Walk both hands to the left to feel a stretch along the right side of your back.
Getting out: Place the hands on your thighs and slowly roll up through the spine, head coming up last.

All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.
~Havelock Ellis

INVERSION

Legs on the Wall (5 minutes)
If you stand for long periods of time, this inverted pose helps reduce swelling and energizes fatigued legs, and also promotes better circulation.
Props: 1-3 folded blankets
Support:
- Hips: Place the folded blankets horizontally, at the base of a wall.

Getting into position: Lie on your side in front of the wall, in a fetal position, with your hips on the folded blanket(s). Your spine is perpendicular to the wall. Roll over onto your back extending the legs up the wall.



The time to relax is when you don't have time for it.

~Sydney J. Harris

If your hamstrings are tight, causing the knees to bend, move your hips further away from the wall to straighten the legs. Close your eyes and rest here for 10 minutes. Breathe normally and allow the tension to dissipate from your body.

Hip opener:

Open legs out to the side, keeping heels against the wall.

Getting out: Bring the knees to the chest and roll over onto your side. Push top hand into the mat to come up to a seated position, head arriving last.

DEEP RELAXATION

Side-lying Resting Pose (10 – 20 minutes)

Side Lying Resting Pose promotes relaxation by supporting parasympathetic nervous system activity.

Props: 1 towel, 2 blankets, 2 pillows

Support:

Head & Neck: Fold a towel to use underneath your head to maintain alignment of your cervical spine (neck).

Arm: Arrange a pillow or folded blankets beneath your top arm.

Hips/knees: Place a pillow or folded blanket between your knees.

Getting into position: Start sitting with knees bent and feet on the mat. Lay your torso on the mat and turn your body onto the left side, so the right knee is stacked on top of the left knee. Relax the right arm in front of you. Place the folded towel underneath your head, blankets or a pillow between your knees, and a pillow under the right arm. Close your eyes, breathe normally, and rest here for 10 – 20 minutes.

Getting out: Remove the props from underneath your arm and from between your knees. Push up to a seated position, head coming up last.

Remember, you can adjust the props as you need to, adding more support or taking away some of the support. If you remove or add support to your head and neck, be mindful of keeping your chin lower than your forehead. Enjoy your rest!

This information is not intended to replace the advice of a healthcare provider. SomaFlows, LLC and Allegra D. Estreet, MS, MSN, RN, LMT, disclaim any liability for the decisions you make based on this information.