

# Yoga support for stress & burnout

A gentle 8-pose reset for days when your body and mind feel overloaded.

Stress and burnout can leave the nervous system feeling as though it has been switched on for too long. You may notice muscle tension, shallow breathing, irritability, mental fog, restlessness, exhaustion or a sense that even small tasks require too much effort. Gentle yoga is not a cure for burnout, but it can offer a structured pause: a few minutes to reduce physical effort, notice the breath and reconnect with the body without demanding performance.

## How to use this guide

Choose a quiet space where you feel reasonably comfortable. Wear clothes that do not restrict you and keep a chair, wall, cushion or folded blanket nearby. You do not need to complete every pose. On a difficult day, one or two positions may be enough. Aim for ease rather than depth. Breathe naturally and avoid forcing a stretch.

## Before you begin

If you feel pain, dizziness, numbness, unusual shortness of breath or anything that concerns you, stop. If you are pregnant, recovering from surgery or injury, have significant joint or spinal problems, uncontrolled blood pressure, balance difficulties, or another medical condition that may affect exercise, ask an appropriately qualified health professional whether these movements are suitable for you.

## A 5-10 minute reset

|   |              |                     |
|---|--------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Easy pose    | 30-60 sec           |
| 2 | Neck release | 20-30 sec each side |
| 3 | Cat-cow      | 5-8 slow rounds     |
| 4 | Child's pose | 30-60 sec           |
| 5 | Low lunge    | 20-30 sec each side |
| 6 | Forward fold | 20-40 sec           |
| 7 | Legs up wall | 1-3 min             |
| 8 | Resting pose | 1-3 min             |

# The eight poses

Move slowly. A smaller, supported movement is still yoga.

## 1. Easy pose

Sit on a cushion, folded blanket or chair. Let the hands rest. Allow the shoulders to soften. Notice three to five natural breaths. If sitting cross-legged is uncomfortable, keep both feet on the floor.

## 2. Neck release

Sit or stand tall without stiffening. Let one ear move gently toward the same-side shoulder. Keep the opposite shoulder relaxed. Do not pull the head. Return to centre and repeat on the other side.

## 3. Cat-cow

On hands and knees, or seated with hands on thighs, gently alternate between rounding and lengthening the spine. Let the movement follow a comfortable breath rhythm. Keep the range small if your back or wrists are sensitive.

## 4. Child's pose

From hands and knees, move the hips back only as far as comfortable. Support the head or chest with cushions if helpful. A seated forward rest over cushions or a table is an alternative.

## 5. Low lunge

Step one foot forward from kneeling and keep the back knee supported. Shift only slightly forward until you notice a comfortable opening at the front of the hip. Use a chair or blocks for balance.

## 6. Forward fold

From standing, soften the knees and hinge forward a little, resting hands on thighs, a chair or blocks. There is no need to reach the floor. Keep the neck relaxed and rise slowly.

## 7. Legs up the wall

Lie on your back with the legs supported against a wall, sofa or chair. Adjust the distance until comfortable. If lying flat does not suit you, rest the lower legs on a chair instead.

## 8. Resting pose

Lie down or recline with cushions supporting the head and knees, or sit in a supportive chair. Let the eyes close if that feels safe. Notice where the body is supported and allow breathing to settle.

# Using yoga when you are burnt out

The aim is regulation and recovery, not another task to complete perfectly.

## Make it smaller

Burnout often reduces capacity. A full routine may feel impossible, so shrink the practice until it feels doable: one pose, two minutes, or simply sitting with both feet supported while you notice your breathing. Consistency can be helpful, but rigid targets can turn recovery into another source of pressure.

## Use sensory support

Consider the environment as part of the practice. Lower lighting, reduce noise, choose comfortable fabrics, use a familiar mat or blanket, and avoid strong scents if they are distracting. If silence feels uncomfortable, quiet predictable audio may help. Neurodivergent people may find that reducing sensory load is as important as the movements themselves.

## Notice rather than judge

Try replacing 'Am I doing this right?' with 'What do I notice right now?' You might notice warmth, tension, a racing mind, tiredness, or nothing in particular. The purpose is not to manufacture calm. It is to give the nervous system a period with fewer demands.

## After the practice

Take a moment before returning to work or responsibilities. Have some water if appropriate, stand slowly, and notice whether you need food, quiet, movement, fresh air or a longer rest. Yoga can be one part of recovery, alongside sleep, nutrition, boundaries, medical care, psychological support, workload changes and practical help.

## A simple check-in

Before: What is my energy from 0-10? Where am I holding tension? What do I need less of right now?

After: Has anything shifted, even slightly? Which pose felt supportive? Is there a movement I would leave out next time?

# Gentle weekly practice & reflection

Use this as an invitation, not a rule.

| Day | What I tried | Before | After | What helped / what I noticed |
|-----|--------------|--------|-------|------------------------------|
| Mon |              |        |       |                              |
| Tue |              |        |       |                              |
| Wed |              |        |       |                              |
| Thu |              |        |       |                              |
| Fri |              |        |       |                              |
| Sat |              |        |       |                              |
| Sun |              |        |       |                              |

## When more support may be needed

If stress or burnout is persistent, worsening, affecting your ability to function, or accompanied by significant anxiety, low mood, sleep disruption or physical symptoms, consider speaking with your GP or another qualified health professional. Workplace adjustments, counselling or psychotherapy, occupational health support and changes to workload or responsibilities may also form part of recovery.

## Sources and further reading

NHS guidance on exercise and physical activity and on stress; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance relevant to common mental health difficulties; World Health Organization information describing burnout as an occupational phenomenon; and research reviews on yoga, stress and wellbeing. Evidence for yoga is promising for some stress-related outcomes, but results vary and yoga should not replace appropriate medical or psychological care.

## A message from Maggie

When you are exhausted, rest can start to feel like something you have to earn. This short practice offers a different experience: a few gentle minutes in which nothing needs to be achieved. Adapt it, shorten it, use a chair, skip a pose, or simply rest. The most useful version is the one that respects the body you have today.

Space to Breathe Therapy - Educational wellbeing resource; not medical treatment.