

Yoga Support for Chronic Pain

A gentle 8-pose reset focused on comfort, choice, pacing and reducing unnecessary tension.

Living with persistent pain can affect movement, sleep, concentration, mood and confidence in the body. It can also make activity feel unpredictable. This resource offers a short, adaptable yoga sequence as supportive wellbeing practice. It is not designed to push through pain or to suggest that pain is simply psychological.

Pain is real - and movement should feel safe enough

Persistent pain is complex. Joints, muscles, nerves, inflammation, previous injury, health conditions, sleep, stress and the nervous system can all influence the experience. Gentle movement may help some people with mobility, confidence, relaxation or stiffness, but there is no single routine that suits everyone.

8-pose gentle reset - 5 to 10 minutes

1	Seated breathing	30-60 sec
2	Shoulder rolls	4-6 each way
3	Seated side bend	2-3 each side
4	Cat-cow	4-6 gentle rounds
5	Supported child	30-60 sec
6	Low lunge	15-30 sec each side
7	Legs on chair	1-3 min
8	Resting pose	1-3 min

Use the smallest useful dose

You do not need to complete all eight movements. Start with a range that feels manageable and keep the effort gentle. Props, a chair, cushions and a wall can reduce demand. If a movement consistently increases symptoms, adapt it or leave it out.

Safety

Stop if you experience new or severe pain, dizziness, faintness, unusual breathlessness, new weakness or numbness, or feel unwell. Seek appropriate medical advice for new, changing or unexplained symptoms, after significant injury, or when pain is accompanied by other concerning signs.

The eight movements

Move slowly enough to notice what your body is telling you.

1. Seated breathing

Sit supported with both feet comfortable. Allow the breath to stay natural. Notice the chair beneath you and soften unnecessary gripping in the jaw, shoulders or hands.

2. Shoulder rolls

Make small, slow circles with the shoulders. Reduce the range if there is pain or restriction. The aim is ease, not a large stretch.

3. Seated side bend

Keep both sitting bones supported and gently lean to one side. Keep the lower arm on the chair if helpful. Return to centre and change sides.

4. Cat-cow

From hands and knees, or seated if preferred, gently alternate between a small rounding and lengthening of the spine. Stay within a comfortable range.

5. Supported child

Use cushions or a bolster beneath the chest and head so the body can rest rather than hold itself up. A chair-supported forward rest is an alternative.

6. Low lunge

Use a chair, wall or blocks for support. Keep the stance short and comfortable. If kneeling or lunging aggravates symptoms, omit this pose.

7. Legs on chair

Lie or recline with the lower legs supported on a chair or sofa. Adjust cushions beneath the head or back until the position feels restful.

8. Resting pose

Finish in the position that feels easiest. There is no required shape. The purpose is to reduce effort and allow the body to settle.

Pain during versus pain after

A movement can feel acceptable in the moment but lead to increased symptoms later. Notice both immediate and delayed responses. This can help you find a level of activity that is more predictable and sustainable.

Working with chronic pain

A supportive approach is based on flexibility, pacing and reducing fear without ignoring genuine limits.

Pacing

Pacing means balancing activity and recovery rather than repeatedly doing too much on better days and then needing prolonged rest. Consider the whole day's demands, including work, caring, travel, appointments, sensory load and sleep.

Flare-day version

During a flare, simplify the routine. Try seated breathing, small shoulder rolls and legs supported on a chair. You may decide that rest, warmth, medication as prescribed, or another part of your existing pain-management plan is more appropriate than yoga that day.

Movement and the nervous system

Persistent pain can sometimes make the nervous system more protective and responsive to threat. Calm, predictable movement may help some people rebuild confidence in movement. This does not mean pain is imagined; pain is a real experience produced by a complex protective system involving body and brain.

Sleep, stress and emotional load

Pain can disturb sleep, and poor sleep can make pain harder to cope with. Stress and emotional strain can increase muscle tension and reduce coping capacity. Gentle yoga may be one way to create a quieter transition into rest alongside appropriate medical, psychological and practical support.

Professional support

Depending on the cause of pain, support might include a GP, physiotherapist, pain service, occupational therapist, pharmacist, psychologist or other specialist. A personalised plan is particularly important when movement is significantly restricted or symptoms are changing.

Chronic pain tracker & reflection

Look for patterns without judging yourself.

Day	Pain / comfort before	What I tried	After	Later response
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Useful questions

Before: What is my pain like today? Where do I feel tension? How much energy do I have? What is the smallest amount of movement that feels realistic?

After: Do I feel looser, calmer, unchanged or more irritated? How do I feel later? Which movements felt supportive? Which need adapting?

Evidence and further reading

This resource is informed by NHS information on chronic pain and NICE guidance on assessment and management of chronic primary pain. Evidence and suitability vary by condition and individual, so yoga is presented as optional supportive movement rather than a treatment for the cause of pain.

A message from Maggie

When pain has been part of your life for a long time, it can feel as though your body is setting the rules. This practice is not about fighting your body. It is about creating a little space to notice what feels possible today. You can make every movement smaller, use support, miss poses out or simply rest. Your body does not have to perform for this to count.

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