

Yoga for Your Nervous System

Regulate. Restore. Reconnect. A gentle guide to noticing your state and finding supportive ways to settle, mobilise or rest.

Your nervous system continually responds to what is happening inside and around you. Stress, uncertainty, sensory overload, pain, lack of sleep and difficult experiences can all influence how activated, shut down or settled you feel. Yoga cannot make the nervous system permanently 'safe' or perfectly regulated, but gentle movement, grounding and rest can offer useful moments of support.

Regulation is not the same as being calm all the time

A healthy nervous system needs access to different states. Energy and activation help us act; rest supports recovery. The aim is flexibility: noticing what is happening and choosing something that may help, rather than judging yourself for feeling anxious, restless, numb, tired or overwhelmed.

Six gentle poses

1	Child's Pose	Rest & release
2	Cat-Cow	Gentle movement
3	Seated Forward Fold	Calm & ground
4	Legs Up the Wall	Restore & relax
5	Supine Twist	Release & let go
6	Savasana	Rest & rebalance

Breathing

There is no need to use long breath holds. Start with ordinary breathing. If it feels comfortable, gently lengthen the exhale without straining. If breath-focused exercises make you dizzy, panicky or more uncomfortable, stop and use a different anchor such as your feet, a familiar object or sounds in the room.

Safety

Move within a comfortable range and use props. Stop for pain, dizziness, faintness, unusual breathlessness or feeling unwell. This is an educational wellbeing resource, not medical treatment.

The six poses

Choose the positions that fit your body and your state today.

1. Child's Pose

Support your torso and head with cushions, or use a chair if folding forward feels too enclosed. Let the pose reduce effort rather than create a strong stretch.

2. Cat-Cow

On hands and knees or seated, slowly round and lengthen the spine. Keep the movement small. Rhythmic movement can be easier than stillness when you feel restless.

3. Seated Forward Fold

Sit on a chair or floor and hinge forward only as far as comfortable. Rest the arms and head on support if that feels settling.

4. Legs Up the Wall

Place the legs on a wall, sofa or chair. Adjust your distance and use cushions. If lying down feels vulnerable, choose a supported seated position instead.

5. Supine Twist

Let bent knees move gently to one side and support them with cushions. Keep the shoulders comfortable and avoid forcing the range.

6. Savasana

Rest in whatever position asks the least of you. Side-lying, reclining or knees-bent versions are all valid. Eyes can remain open if closing them feels uncomfortable.

If you feel highly activated

Try orientation before stillness: look around the room, name a few neutral things you can see, feel your feet or hands, and choose slow repetitive movement. Some people find stillness intensifies anxiety, so you do not need to force it.

If you feel shut down or depleted

A little mobilising movement may feel more supportive than deep relaxation: shoulder rolls, gentle reaching, standing and sitting, or a short walk. Keep the dose small and notice the effect.

Everyday nervous-system support

Regulation is influenced by more than a yoga mat.

Sensory environment

Light, noise, temperature, clothing, smells and social demands can affect how overwhelmed or settled you feel. Adjusting the environment can be a legitimate regulation strategy rather than something you have to tolerate.

Predictability and transitions

Rushing from one demand to another can keep activation high. Small transition rituals—water, a few minutes alone, changing clothes, music, stretching or writing down the next task—can give the body time to catch up.

Connection

Regulation can happen with other people as well as alone. A calm voice, safe company, shared activity or asking someone to stay nearby may be more helpful than trying to self-regulate perfectly.

Sleep, food and physical health

Sleep disruption, hunger, dehydration, pain and illness can all change how the nervous system responds. Supporting basic physical needs can make emotional regulation easier, while persistent symptoms may need professional assessment.

Trauma-aware choice

People with trauma histories can experience some body-focused practices as uncomfortable. Keep choice at the centre: eyes open or closed, still or moving, seated or lying, continuing or stopping. A trauma-informed professional can help tailor practices when needed.

Nervous-system check-in

Use this to notice patterns rather than grade yourself.

Day	State	Body clues	What I tried	What helped?
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Reflection prompts

What tells me I am becoming overloaded? What helps when I am restless? What helps when I feel flat or shut down? Which environments make regulation easier? Who helps me feel more grounded? What can I reduce rather than adding another coping task?

A message from Maggie

You do not have to be calm all the time to be doing well. Sometimes your body is responding exactly as it learned to respond to pressure, uncertainty or overload. Start with curiosity rather than criticism. A stretch, a pause, movement, rest or another person's support can all be valid ways of giving yourself space to breathe.

Evidence-informed note

Yoga and other mind-body practices may support stress management and wellbeing for some people. Popular language about 'resetting', 'healing' or permanently regulating the nervous system can overstate what a short practice can do. Use yoga as one optional support alongside appropriate psychological or medical care when needed.

Space to Breathe Therapy — educational wellbeing resource; not medical treatment.