

Yoga for Substance Misuse Recovery

Gentle movement, grounding and rest as optional supports alongside evidence-based recovery care.

Recovery from substance misuse can involve changes in sleep, mood, stress, routine, relationships and the way the body feels. Yoga does not treat dependence or withdrawal and it cannot replace medical or psychological care. Used safely, however, gentle movement and grounding can be one supportive way to reconnect with your body, create routine and practise responding to difficult moments without demanding perfection.

Recovery is more than giving something up

Recovery can also mean building safety, connection, meaningful routines and ways of coping that support the life you want. Progress is rarely perfectly linear. A difficult day does not erase the work already done.

Six gentle poses

1	Child's Pose	Rest & release
2	Cat-Cow	Move & breathe
3	Seated Twist	Rebalance
4	Low Lunge	Build strength
5	Legs Up the Wall	Calm & restore
6	Supine Twist	Release gently

Important safety

Do not use yoga to manage acute withdrawal. Withdrawal from alcohol, benzodiazepines and some other substances can be medically dangerous and may require urgent professional assessment. If you are intoxicated, very unwell, confused, faint, having seizures, hallucinations, severe shaking or other concerning symptoms, seek urgent medical help rather than exercising.

A recovery-supportive practice

Choose what feels steady and manageable today.

1. Child's Pose

Use cushions to support the torso and head. If folding forward feels uncomfortable or vulnerable, choose an upright seated rest.

2. Cat-Cow

On hands and knees or seated, move gently between rounding and lengthening the spine. Let the rhythm be more important than range.

3. Seated Twist

Rotate gently without pulling yourself deeper. Return slowly to centre and notice how your body responds.

4. Low Lunge

Use blocks, a chair or the wall for support. Keep the stance shorter if needed. Skip this pose if balance or dizziness is an issue.

5. Legs Up the Wall

Rest the legs on a wall, sofa or chair. This is simply a supported resting position; it does not 'detox' the body.

6. Supine Twist

Support bent knees with cushions and move only within a comfortable range. Finish in any resting position that feels steady.

Breathing

Keep breathing natural and comfortable. Long breath holds are unnecessary. If breath-focused practice increases anxiety, cravings, dizziness or distress, stop and use an external grounding anchor such as sounds, sights or contact with the floor.

Cravings and difficult moments

A yoga practice is not expected to make a craving disappear. It can sometimes create a small pause in which you notice the urge and choose the next supportive action: contacting someone, changing environment, eating, drinking water, using a recovery plan or seeking professional help.

Recovery beyond the mat

Movement works best as one part of a wider support plan.

Connection

Isolation can make recovery harder. Peer support, trusted people, recovery communities and professional relationships can provide accountability, understanding and practical help.

Sleep and routine

Regular waking, meals, hydration, daylight, movement and wind-down routines can support stability. Sleep may take time to settle during recovery, so aim for consistency rather than perfection.

Triggers and planning

Identify people, places, feelings and situations associated with use. Plan what you can do, where you can go and who you can contact when risk increases.

Treatment and professional support

Depending on the substance and individual circumstances, recovery may involve medical care, medication, psychological therapy, structured treatment or mutual-aid support. Yoga should complement—not replace—appropriate treatment.

If there is a lapse

A lapse is a signal to increase support and review the plan, not proof that recovery is impossible. If overdose risk may be increased after a period of reduced use, seek specialist harm-reduction advice.

Recovery check-in

Use this to notice patterns without turning recovery into a score.

Day	Stress /10	Urges /10	Support used	What helped?
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Reflection prompts

What tends to happen before an urge becomes strong? Who can I contact early rather than waiting for crisis point? What helps my body feel steady? Which routines support recovery? What needs more professional support?

A message from Maggie

Recovery does not require you to be perfect. It asks you to keep finding your way back to support, safety and the life you want to build. Yoga can be one small place to practise being present with yourself—but you never have to do recovery alone.

Clinical note

This resource does not provide detoxification or withdrawal instructions. Acute withdrawal, overdose risk and substance dependence require appropriate clinical assessment. In an emergency, use local emergency medical services.

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