

Yoga for Autism

Move. Regulate. Feel more you. A choice-led guide to gentle movement, sensory regulation and rest.

Autistic people can experience sensory overload, shutdown, heightened stress, interoceptive differences, fatigue and a need for predictability. Yoga will not change or 'treat' autism. Used in an affirming and flexible way, however, movement, pressure, rhythm and rest may be useful regulation tools for some autistic people.

There is no correct way to regulate

Some people settle through stillness; others need movement. Some enjoy focusing on the breath; others find internal sensations uncomfortable or overwhelming. Eyes can stay open, instructions can be reduced, poses can be repeated, and the whole practice can be stopped at any point.

Six gentle options

1	Child's Pose	Ground & rest
2	Cat-Cow	Rhythm & movement
3	Seated Butterfly	Comfortable opening
4	Seated Twist	Gentle focus
5	Legs Up the Wall	Supported rest
6	Reclined Rest	Pause & recover

Sensory permission

Change lighting, music, clothing, room temperature, surface and props. Avoid incense, scented candles or background sound if these add sensory load. Repetition and sameness are completely acceptable.

Safety

Use comfortable ranges and props. Stop for pain, dizziness, faintness or feeling unwell. This resource is educational wellbeing support and is not medical treatment.

A predictable six-pose practice

The order can stay the same each time, or you can choose only one familiar movement.

1. Child's Pose

Use cushions under the torso or head. If pressure or folding feels unpleasant, sit upright or choose another position.

2. Cat-Cow

Move on hands and knees or seated. Repeating the same small movement can provide rhythm and predictability.

3. Seated Butterfly

Sit supported with the feet together or farther apart. Support the knees if helpful. There is no need to stretch deeply.

4. Seated Twist

Turn only within a comfortable range. A fixed visual point in the room may make the movement easier to orient to.

5. Legs Up the Wall

Use a wall, sofa or chair. This is optional; some people dislike inversion or pressure changes and can choose seated rest instead.

6. Reclined Rest

Lie, recline or sit in the position that feels most regulating. A blanket or firm cushion can add comforting pressure if wanted.

Breathing is optional

Natural breathing is enough. Do not insist on deep breathing, breath holds or closing the eyes. If internal focus increases anxiety or sensory discomfort, use external grounding instead: look at an object, listen to a familiar sound, count movements or feel contact with the floor.

Making yoga autism-affirming

Regulation works best when the person has choice, predictability and control.

Reduce language

During overload, long instructions can become another demand. Use short, concrete cues such as 'feet on floor', 'arms down' or 'pause'. Demonstration may be easier than verbal explanation.

Make transitions visible

Use a written or visual sequence, timer or clear 'first-then' structure. Give warning before changing pose. If a person wants to repeat the same pose, repetition can be part of regulation rather than something to correct.

Respect stimming and movement

Rocking, pacing, hand movements or other self-regulatory movement do not need to stop for yoga to happen. Yoga can sit alongside natural autistic regulation rather than replacing it.

Interoception

Not everyone can easily identify hunger, tension, pain, temperature or emotional body signals. Avoid assuming someone can answer 'How does your body feel?' Offer concrete choices and allow 'I don't know'.

After overload

After a demanding day, shutdown or sensory overload, a low-demand practice may be more appropriate than exercise. Rest, hydration, familiar sensory input and reduced expectations may be what the nervous system needs.

My regulation tracker

Notice what supports you without turning regulation into another performance.

Situation	Sensory load	Movement/rest tried	Helpful?	What I need next

Reflection prompts

Do I prefer movement or stillness? Which sensory inputs help? Which ones make things harder?
Do I prefer predictable repetition or variety? What signs tell me I am becoming overloaded? What helps me recover afterwards?

A message from Maggie

You do not need to become calmer, quieter or less autistic to deserve support. Regulation is about helping your body and mind feel safer and more manageable, in ways that work for you. Keep the movements you like, leave the ones you do not, and give yourself permission to do this differently.

Evidence-informed note

Research on yoga and autistic wellbeing is still developing and individual responses vary. Yoga should be offered as an optional, person-led wellbeing activity rather than as a treatment for autism or a way to suppress autistic traits.

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