

Yoga for Chronic Illness

Gentle movement. Deep breath. Stronger you. A flexible, low-pressure approach for changing energy, pain and capacity.

Living with chronic illness can mean that energy, pain, dizziness, mobility, concentration and tolerance for activity change from day to day. Yoga is not a cure for chronic illness, and it should never be used to push through symptoms. It can instead be adapted as an optional way to explore comfortable movement, supported rest and body awareness.

Meet your body where it is today

A practice that feels manageable one day may be too much the next. Pacing means responding to today's capacity rather than trying to match yesterday. Five minutes, one position or complete rest can all be valid choices.

Six gentle options

1	Child's Pose	Rest & release
2	Seated Forward Fold	Supported stretch
3	Supine Twist	Gentle mobility
4	Legs Up / on Chair	Supported rest
5	Supported Bridge	Optional movement
6	Resting Pose	Recover & pause

Breathing

Natural, comfortable breathing is enough. Avoid breath holds or deliberately deep breathing if these worsen dizziness, breathlessness, pain or anxiety.

Safety first

If you have a condition affected by position, blood pressure, heart rate, joints, balance or exertion, use guidance from your own healthcare team. Stop for new or severe pain, chest pain, fainting, unusual breathlessness, new weakness or numbness, or feeling acutely unwell.

A low-demand practice

Use cushions, a wall, sofa or chair and leave out anything that does not suit your body.

1. Child's Pose

Support the torso and head generously. If kneeling or folding is uncomfortable, choose seated or reclined rest.

2. Seated Forward Fold

Stay upright or hinge only slightly. Rest the arms on cushions or a table rather than reaching.

3. Supine Twist

Keep the movement small and support the knees. Skip twisting if your condition or clinician advises against it.

4. Legs Up / on Chair

Rest the lower legs on a chair or sofa. If this position worsens dizziness, reflux, breathing or other symptoms, choose another resting position.

5. Supported Bridge

Only if comfortable and appropriate for you: place support under the pelvis rather than holding a muscular bridge. Skip it if uncertain.

6. Resting Pose

Lie, recline or sit with as much support as needed. Rest is not the reward after yoga; it can be the whole practice.

The flare-day version

On a difficult day, reduce the practice rather than abandoning self-care altogether: settle into a supported position, notice contact with the chair or bed, make one or two comfortable movements if wanted, and finish. The smallest useful dose is enough.

Pacing, symptoms and recovery

The aim is sustainability, not achievement.

Avoid the boom-and-bust pattern

Doing much more on a better day can sometimes be followed by a difficult recovery period. If this is a pattern for you, experiment with stopping while you still have some capacity rather than using all available energy.

Track delayed responses

For some illnesses, symptoms can worsen after activity rather than during it. If you experience post-exertional symptom exacerbation, follow condition-specific medical guidance and do not use generic exercise advice to push through.

Sensory and cognitive load

A yoga session can also contain noise, instructions, decisions and sensory input. Reduce these demands: use a familiar sequence, quieter environment, fewer transitions or a visual prompt.

Pain and fatigue

Movement does not need to be painful to be worthwhile. With persistent pain or fatigue, comfort, confidence and pacing may be more useful goals than increasing range or duration.

Professional support

A physiotherapist, occupational therapist or clinician familiar with your condition can help you understand appropriate movement, positioning and energy management. Yoga teaching should complement—not override—condition-specific advice.

My pacing & symptom tracker

Use this to notice patterns, including how you feel later or the following day.

Day	Before	What I did	After	Later / next day
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Reflection prompts

What tells me I have enough capacity today? What are my early warning signs that I need to stop? Which positions feel supportive? Do symptoms change later rather than immediately? What helps me recover?

A message from Maggie

Chronic illness can ask you to renegotiate what 'enough' looks like again and again. You do not have to earn rest, prove your effort or keep pace with anyone else. Let your practice belong to the body you have today. Being gentle with yourself is not giving up.

Evidence-informed note

Yoga may support aspects of wellbeing, function, stress or symptom management for some people living with chronic illness, but evidence and suitability vary substantially by condition and individual. It should be adapted and used alongside appropriate healthcare.

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