

Dedication

This book is dedicated to anyone who needs time to slow down their day and enjoy being with themselves.

Special thanks to my teacher, Cyndi Lee, who taught me what restorative yoga is all about. To Kelly Hartman and Josie Schweitzer who helped with this book with their input and editing skills. To Brandon Goodyear for the skillful photography.

And to all my students who come to the studio to learn from me, because I learn from you just the same.

Introduction

I began practicing yoga, as many people do when they start searching for something to bring awareness and joy to their lives, because I felt a need to change my daily routine. I felt disconnected in the daily grind of

1. Wake up
2. Go to work
3. Come home
4. Make dinner
5. Go to bed
6. Repeat!

There were moments of joy, moments of wakefulness, and times of sadness but it felt like I was going through the habit of life with no direction or awareness of how I was living. I knew something needed to change, but what was it? With time and curiosity, and much searching for the “right teacher” I had an epiphany which presented a very important series of questions: If I were to write an autobiography at 80 years old, how would I want each chapter of my life to go? What should I do? Where should I live? How do I get to the point in my life where I’m content with what I’ve done?

As I began my yoga practice, I discovered that yoga is such a profound and deep practice. It doesn’t provide the answers, but enables a person to be able to ask the right questions and make peace with the answers that come up. In other words, this practice won’t change you, but will instead open your mind to what you already know within yourself. What you have within you is enough. It is powerful, and it is worthy of discovery. Although ambition is a powerful thing, can we learn how to let go of constantly reaching for the next thing? I’m not saying to become complacent, but maybe just be comfortable. Comfortable with where we are and know that it’s okay to be happy with that. What you have and what you are now can be enough.

I found my sense of contentment through yoga and deepened my understanding and appreciation for the small details in practice and in life. With restorative yoga the profound idea of doing less to achieve more just started to make sense.

As a 200-Hour certified yoga teacher and operating room nurse, my passion is to use my knowledge from each realm to inform the other. I teach vinyasa yoga classes that incorporate mindfulness, compassion, and precise detail to alignment to provide a safe and caring environment for students to explore their practice. I believe it is important to listen to students and incorporate their needs into a yoga class. Having worked in the high stress, fast-paced realm of healthcare for over 7 years, I understand the demands that work can place on people and their bodies. Yoga, especially of the restorative variety, offers significant benefits for such demands. The 6-week series in this book is an opportunity to bring restorative yoga to your home and provide a guide to achieve the ultimate in relaxation.

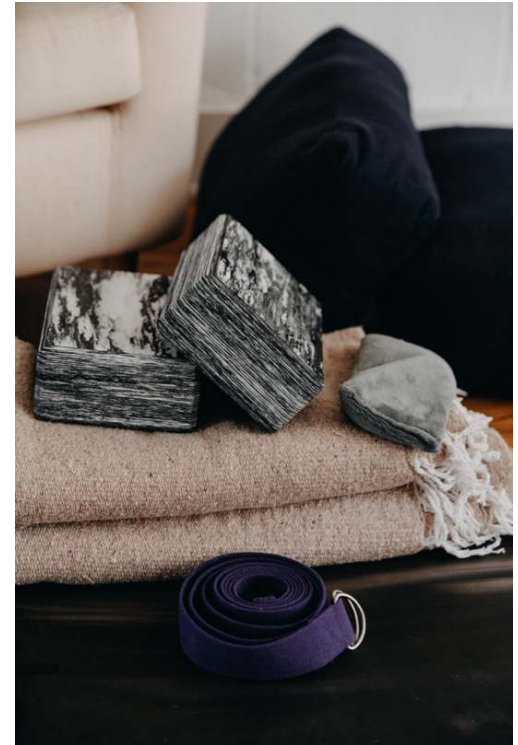
Why *Restorative* Yoga?

I'm sure you've felt it: your mind just can't seem to slow, and you feel like you're swimming in your thoughts. You can't come up for air. The 'to-do' lists that never end or the ever-growing checklist of tasks pull your attention in many directions. Multitasking is something you've gotten good at, but perhaps almost a little too good. The idea of taking time to just slow down and relax seems selfish at this point.

If you've ever ridden on an airplane, you've heard the flight attendants tell you in the safety briefing before takeoff that if there is a sudden depressurization, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling and you must put your mask on first before helping others. That same principle can be applied to many other arenas of life, including the self-respecting practice of restorative yoga. Take the opportunity to slow down and just be in one place, so that you can learn how to focus with the fullest attention on what is happening right in front of you. This time for yourself will have far reaching effects so that not only you, but all beings benefit from your dedication to yourself.

With restorative yoga, you can choose a dedicated time and setting to learn how to let your body relax and slow down. Once this is accomplished, your mind will naturally follow. This may take more than one time on the mat to achieve, but that's why this 6-week series is so helpful. Taking the time, whether it's 5 minutes or 75 minutes, to take notice of your breath, your body, and the thoughts in your mind cultivates compassion and patience. These characteristics are important to develop. Practicing them on yourself will allow for a natural overflow to those around you.

Restorative yoga is a practice which puts emphasis on simple postures and soft stillness, with the goal of feeling a deep sense of relaxation and calm. The postures we will visit in this book are derived from traditional yoga postures found in any book or class, simplified and supported with props to facilitate ease in the body and mind.



The yoga props needed throughout the book are few, but they provide a wealth of options to support and cradle the body in each posture. The suggested props are blocks, blankets (preferably cotton blankets that fold easily), bolsters, and a strap (D-ring, or buckle are both good options). Of course, not everyone has a yoga studio's worth of props laying around the house (although my house seems to be turning into a studio pretty quickly). Part 1 of this book gives a guide to common items found in your home, hotel room, or even your in-laws' guest bedroom that can be used as a substitute. Feel free to get creative and use what you have on hand. Part 2 of the book will guide you through the 6-week series of restorative yoga practices using both the traditional yoga props as well as the homemade variety.

Key reminders while practicing restorative yoga

- As your body begins to relax and drop into the posture, your comfort level can change. What felt comfortable and nice for the first 2 minutes may not feel the same after 10 minutes. Always feel free to adjust or change your position if you feel discomfort. You should not live in discomfort during your practice.
- The suggestions made for the amounts of props used are just that; a suggestion. Explore with more or less prop support as you feel fit. Each body, and honestly each time on the mat, is different and will have different needs. If this is your first experience with this style of yoga, try the suggestions I provide and then make changes if you need.
- As real life happens, you may have days where time allows for one or two postures, or just a few minutes altogether. That's okay. A short practice can provide large benefits to the body and mood. Just showing up can be the most difficult part, but once you do, the comfort makes it all worth it.

I like to equate preparing for restorative yoga with preparing to bake a dessert at home in the kitchen. It takes a little bit of preparation by gathering the utensils, making sure you have all the ingredients called for in the recipe, and patience (most importantly) once the concoction is baking in the oven. Tender loving care in putting everything together in just the right way yields a wonderful and joyous result in the end. Take your time and take care in each step along the way.

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Part 1

Restorative Yoga & Household Props



Household Yoga Props

There are many varieties and uses for yoga props to aide in your practice, whether it's an active asana class, meditation session, or restorative yoga practice. However, it's unrealistic to expect everyone to have a yoga studio's inventory of props available to make each posture the supreme in luxuriousness. The following is an appendix of options for replacements to a traditional yoga prop that you may find around the home. If you find other replacements in a moment of inspiration, don't hesitate to get creative and give old objects new uses.

Armchair

An armchair presents the perfect opportunity to recline on the floor and prop your legs up on the padded seat. Ardha Viparita Karani (pg. 35) is a great posture for this prop because it elevates the legs and keeps them supported without effort.

Beach towel

A beach towel or robust bath towel is a good exchange for a yoga blanket because they are thick, soft, and provide excellent padding.

Bed or body pillows

Pillows are a good substitute for several different props depending on the posture and where you place them. They can stand in for blocks to support your legs in Supta Baddha Konasana (pg. 61), as your full body support in Balasana 1 (pg. 45), or even blankets for your head and torso in Savasana 3 (pg. 59).



Couch

Using your own furniture from around the house is easy and fun. Take a look around and the couch comes to mind quickly as a prop for your legs in Ardha Viparita Karani (pg. 35), or even Supta Upavistha Konasana (pg.49).

Couch cushion

Continuing with the couch theme, it's time to disassemble the furniture. If your cushions are removable, they can be a replacement for bolsters in any posture. Try using them with Supta Baddha Konasana (pg. 71) or Setu Bandhasana I (pg. 32).



Books

Books provide excellent substitutes for a yoga prop because they are easily stacked and sturdy by nature. Urdhva Dhanurasana (pgs. 28, 105) is an excellent example of a posture that would use books instead of blocks to support your feet.



Box of Uncooked Pasta

Any firm, lightweight box would be a good alternative prop for a block in poses like Viparita Karani (pg. 25), in which the box rests between your calves as a spacer to keep your lower legs in line with your hips.



Soup cans

This variation may seem odd but it's useful and easy because who doesn't have soup cans in their pantry just waiting to be used? Grab those garbanzo beans that have been taking up space in the back of the cabinet since last fall and put them to use. In any posture where your arms are resting on the ground, place a can under your wrist for cheap and easy wrist props. For a little extra cushion, you can even place hot pads over the can so you don't feel the cold metal against your skin.

Socks

Pick out your favorite, most fuzzy and cozy socks you have and roll them up into a ball for hand weights or double them up and lay them across your eyes for a homemade eye pillow.



T-shirt

Eye pillows, straps (as in Viparita Karani), and cushions for your wrists can all be replaced with a shirt during your home restorative practice.

Note: Throughout the book when listing the items needed for each posture, I will list the traditional yoga props as well as suggestions for alternatives, but the description of getting into (Incoming) each posture will focus on the traditional props for ease of explanation.