

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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JOYFUL & MERRY CHRISTMAS

**THE
YOGA
WHEEL**

YIN YOGA
BALANCE &
RESTORATION

ayahuasca



**SHARATH
JOIS**

**PERIMENOPAUSE &
yoga nidra**

**REMEMBERING
BKS IYENGAR**



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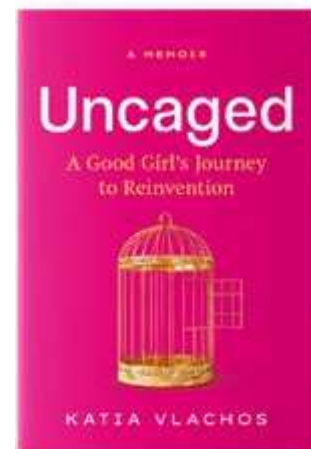
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YIN Yoga

A PRACTISE FOR BALANCE & RESTORATION THIS WINTER

Words: Gillian Cawte, BWY Yin Yoga
Module Tutor





Half Caterpillar Pose



Winter is a time of hibernation in the natural world, as animals conserve their energy during the colder, darker months. Similarly, we can honour this season by turning inwards, slowing down and restoring our energy reserves. A winter Yin yoga practise can help us do just that.

WHAT IS YIN YOGA?

Yin yoga is a quiet, floor-based practise which stimulates the energy meridians within the body. Poses are held for a duration of time, usually three to five minutes or longer, allowing emotionally charged pockets of energy, or Chi, to be released from the joints and tissues.

During a Yin pose, the muscles are relaxed which places gentle stress on the body's deeper connective tissues: the joints, ligaments, tendons and fascia, helping to release tension and move Chi. Yin yoga can be meditative, allowing students to soften in each pose and become curious about the sensations that arise.

It is a practise for everyone regardless of their preferred style of yoga or physical ability. Each Yin pose can be adapted to suit any body type.

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Yin yoga is deeply rooted in ancient yoga traditions. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, one of the earliest texts on *Hatha* yoga, was written around 1350 C.E. by Swami Swatmarama. It describes only sixteen postures, half of which are seated and are yin-like in nature and were meant to be held for a long time. These long-held poses helped practitioners prepare their bodies for meditation.

Yin yoga, as we know it today, was popularised by my yoga teacher Paul Grilley who was inspired by the Yin and Yang principles of Chinese martial arts. While he did not invent Yin yoga, he played a pivotal role in educating International yoga teachers about its benefits. The term 'Yin yoga' was coined by his student, Sarah Powers, in 2000 to describe the quieter, more meditative style of yoga practise.

HOW TO PRACTISE YIN YOGA

There are no absolutes to practising Yin yoga. You can practise any time of the day or night whether your muscles are cool or warm. However, it is important to listen to your body and choose the right time for your practise. If you've been sitting or sedentary all day you may benefit from a more dynamic (yang) practise to move your Chi energy.

Practising Yin yoga can take you outside your comfort zone. Yin is not meant to be comfortable, unlike restorative yoga which focuses on relaxation. Yin yoga actively stresses the joints, bones, ligaments, tendons and fascia by using long-held floor-based poses that allow the muscles to relax. This exercises the ligaments at a

Full Caterpillar Pose



microscopic level and increases space and strength within the joint.

While Yin yoga focuses on connective tissues, Yang yoga, which includes *Hatha* and *Ashtanga* styles, targets the muscles through rhythmic repetitive movements to stress the muscle fibres and make them stronger.

In a Yin pose we either stretch, compress or twist the tissues while also working the fascia and energy within the meridian channels.

Ultimately the aim of yoga whether Yin or Yang is to move the Chi throughout the body. This requires us to be actively but comfortably challenged in a pose.

A balanced practise of both Yin and Yang is important and listening to your body can help guide you in finding this balance.

FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES FOR A YIN PRACTISE

Enter slowly with relaxed muscles

Ease into each pose gently with relaxed

Up Swan Pose



muscles, allowing your breath to slow down as you go. Moving without force helps you become aware of areas where there may be tension. This relaxed approach enables you to become more sensitive to where there may be tension.

Find your edge

As you settle into a Yin pose, notice where you start to feel resistance in the target area—this is your edge. Avoid pushing as deep as possible straight

away. After a few breaths, you may feel ready to go a bit further, exploring new edges within the pose. These edges may shift as you hold the pose, inviting you to move with mindfulness to a new edge.

Hold the pose for a length of time

Aim to hold each pose for 3–5 minutes, although 1–3 minutes is ideal if you're new to Yin. Holding poses longer allows you to surrender fully, giving space to observe any sensations that arise and to soften further into the experience.

Remaining Still

Yin is a practise of stillness, so aim to hold steady in each pose, only moving if you find a new edge or experience pain. Your breath acts as an 'anchor,' grounding both body and mind. While we're not used to such stillness, resisting the urge to fidget deepens your Yin practise.

Come out slowly and feel the rebound

Transition out of each pose with mindfulness, observing any sensations that arise. You might initially feel stiff, but this quickly passes, making way for an awareness of Chi, or energy, moving through the meridians. The

Sleeping Swan Pose





rebound can bring tingling, warmth, or even a gentle vibration to the body. Close your eyes and tune into these sensations to fully experience the release.

TOP FIVE YIN POSTURES FOR WINTER

In winter, Yin yoga focuses on postures that stimulate the Kidney and Urinary Bladder meridians which are connected to the body's water element in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

These channels are associated with our vital energy reserves and are believed to help manage stress, fear and the ability to cope with life's challenges. Poses that target these meridians often include forward and backward bends.

Each of the following Yin postures encourages Chi flow, calms the mind, and enhances flexibility in the connective tissues. They allow for deeper relaxation, helping to reduce stress and create a sense of balanced energy during the winter season.

Butterfly Pose

- Sit with the soles of your feet together, letting your knees drop outwards. Round your spine as you fold forward, relaxing your head and neck.



Butterfly Pose

- Stimulates the Kidney and Urinary Bladder Meridian in the lower back and hips.
- Opens the hips, stretches the adductors and lower spine, and calms the mind.
- Rebound

ensuring no pain in the knee. Extend your other leg back. For a deeper stretch, fold forward over the front bent leg.

- Stimulates the Kidney and Urinary Bladder Meridians, focusing on the hips and lower spine.
- Opens and stretches the hips and glutes, promoting relaxation and balance in these areas. This posture helps to lubricate the hip joints, calms the nervous system, and can aid in reducing stress and anxiety.
- Rebound

Up Swan / Sleeping Swan Pose

- From all fours, bring one knee forward, placing it behind your wrist with your shin angled until you feel the gluteal muscles



Rebound

Child Pose

- Kneel with big toes together and knees apart. Sink your hips back toward your heels, stretching your arms forward and resting your chest between your thighs.
- Stimulates the Urinary Bladder Meridian along the spine.
- Gently stretches the lower back, hips, and spine, helping to regulate Chi. This pose calms the body and mind, making it a wonderful meditation posture to help balance the yin and yang aspects of your life.

Sphinx Pose

- Lie on your belly with forearms on the floor, elbows under shoulders. Lift your chest and allow a gentle arch in the lower back.
- Stimulates the Kidney and Urinary Bladder Meridians in the spine and abdomen.
- Opens and gently compresses the lumbar spine. This pose helps to calm the nervous system, supporting a sense of emotional stability. By gently stretching the abdominal area, it also improves Chi flow through the organs.
- Rebound

Half / Full Caterpillar Pose

- Sit with one leg extended (half) or both legs straight (full). Fold forward, allowing your spine to round as you reach toward your feet.
- Stimulates the Kidney and Urinary Bladder Meridians along the back of the legs and spine.
- Stretches the spine, hamstrings, and fascia along the back body, releasing tension and aiding mobility in the spine. It encourages deep relaxation and introspection, making it a powerful pose for meditation and stress reduction.
- Rebound

CONCLUSION

Yin yoga offers a powerful counterbalance to the yang activities that often dominate our lives. By embracing Yin, we cultivate a deeper awareness of our inner landscape, opening ourselves to insights and sensations that resonate both on and off the mat. A regular Yin practise encourages us to slow down, listen to our bodies, and explore areas of stillness and tension. The true value of Yin lies in the simplicity of coming down to the floor, grounding ourselves, and practising mindfully to restore balance and resilience.

Sphinx Pose



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While Yin yoga focuses on connective tissues, Yang yoga, which includes Hatha and Ashtanga styles, targets the muscles through rhythmic repetitive movements to stress the muscle fibres and make them stronger.

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Join Gillian for a Yin yoga session at the BWY Winter Solstice online event on Thursday 19 December. This special day of yoga honours the shortest day of the year – a time for rest and inner reflection. Alongside Gillian, five other expert tutors will guide you through Yin yoga, Restorative yoga, Tibetan healing, breathwork, and meditation.

Tickets: £50 for non-members, £40 for BWY members. [Book here.](#)



Gillian has practised yoga since 1999. She trained at The Life Centre in London (2005–2007) and is the Yin yoga module teacher for BWY, as well as a Senior Trainer with Yoga Alliance UK. With over 1500 hours of training under Paul and Suzee Grilley, Gillian holds a Level 5 Diploma in Yin Yoga. She runs retreats and teacher training and is based in Manchester.

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