

YOGA FOR ANXIETY AND STRESS RELIEF

# Yoga Stress Management Toolkit



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## YOGA FOR ANXIETY AND STRESS RELIEF

# **It's not just about sitting**

Although we will do plenty of that

**It's about the Practice**

**"Light thine own light"**

*-Buddha*

**"Try Less, Be More"**

Very Calm  
Meditator

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Very Calm  
Meditator

## **INTRODUCTION TO STRESS**

Human emotions originate and are controlled by the Amygdala in the brain. It is fully formed in infants by the age of two. Therefore, our feelings are essentially fully formed at two. It often is challenging reasoning with a two-year-old, but we can distract or entice them. In some ways, we need to do the same thing when we experience stress or anxiety arises.

**STRESS IS BENEFICIAL- Understanding stress.** Stress heightens awareness, preps our muscles and organs for flight or fight. Adrenaline floods our system, our heart rate increases, pumping blood and oxygen to muscles prepared to engage in physical activity. Cortisol, a hormone, is manufactured, part of your body's alarm system. It is involved in essential functions such as managing how we use carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. It helps control our sleep cycles. It increases our blood sugar, to prepare more fuel, for fight or flight.

But in the modern Western world, we typically do not require the actual fight or flight response. Instead, many animals, like the zebra or a dog, will do a rapid shake that "discharges" that stressed state. Unfortunately, humans have not evolved the shake, so we remain in this heightened state longer. Often for hours or even longer.

### **THE EFFECT OF POSTURE.**

An "athletic stance" picture a tennis player, hockey player, baseball fielder, or batter, slightly hunched over, prepared for activity. This posture promotes chest breathing, shallow, rapid breaths to provide muscles with oxygen. Nerve endings in the upper lobes of the lungs signal adrenaline to be released, flooding the body, preparing for fast movement. Time slows down. Heart rate speeds up.

But typically, we are hunched over a keyboard or driving in traffic. Slouched over our phones, mesmerized by social media and our news stream, or slumped in front of the T.V. These postures often trigger similar responses. We are excited, ready for flight of flight, ready for physical activity. Instead,

we sit in traffic, or work towards a deadline, or rush to an event. Perhaps which we may have overcommitted to in the first place. We gobble up social media and commiserate with friends.

Actual stress, caused by a global pandemic, coupled with often unfounded worry and a constant news cycle, and the forever-on "stress system" can become anxiety. We need to remove actual stress, address it, and use our bodies and breath to address the remaining, non-true, unwarranted stress.

## **THE TOOLKIT**

### **TRIGGERS**

Triggers are situations, topics, a physical or emotional stimulus that causes undue stress or anxiety. First, learn to identify your triggers. Then, remove yourself or the stressful situation, or learn to reduce the effect of the trigger.

### **REDUCE OR ELIMINATE**

Known Triggers

C.A.T.S. S. S.

Caffeine, Alcohol, Tobacco, Sugar, Sweeteners (artificial), Social Media

C.A.T.S.

Commiserating, agonizing, talking 🗣️

Traditionally we have been advised that "talking it over with a friend" is beneficial. However, recent research indicates that it may not be as helpful as thought. It can prolong negative thoughts, cause other concerns to blossom or become open wounds. Better to go for a walk with a friend or engage in physical activity outdoors if possible. Hugs are encouraged.

### **NEEDLESS WORRY**

The old axiom that 95% of worry is unfounded is true. Attempt to identify the 5%, if it is a valid concern (not worry) and quickly move on. We often allow ourselves to get worked up. Then we agonize on being worked up. Let it go. Take out one of your tools and use it.

Physically identify where stress is affecting you in the body. **Do not practice this initially in severe anxiety; work through it with "stress" until you feel comfortable.** Is it impacting you in the belly? The back of the skull? The neck or shoulders? Does the physical sensation have substance? Does it move or rotate? Often anxiety can feel like churning or circular movement in the belly. Does it revolve? If so, focus on reversing the movement. This self-study brings us to an awareness of being present, and we are not as focused on the trigger or anxiety.

## **THE DO'S**

Go for a walk. Just being outside is beneficial.

Walk barefooted in the grass. Do it. Get outdoors.

## **GOOD SLEEP HYGIENE**

Good sleep is paramount to remaining calm, handling stress as it comes our way. Therefore, we must work towards good sleep. Turn off electronics at least an hour before bed. Put them on Night mode—dim lights. Remove Blue lights, reduce/eliminate chargers and electronics and electrical devices in the bedroom. Use a routine that informs your body it is time to sleep.

Wear P.J.s, nightie, sleepwear, or nude. Do not wear something that you also wear during the day. Define day and night patterns.

Remove pets from the bedroom—tough one. But sleep research indicates that pets in bed affect sleep patterns.

## **THE POWER OF POSITIVE THOUGHT.**

Everything for human beings is a mindset.

Our moods are governed by the thoughts we have.

Where intention goes, energy flows (Kenneth Soares)

Start the day positively. Mindfully. No frenetic rush.



What can I do today to improve the community?

Positive thinking improves the immune system. Like anything we want to improve at, we need to practice positive thoughts. Listen to, or recite Positive Affirmations. Kenneth Soares is excellent.

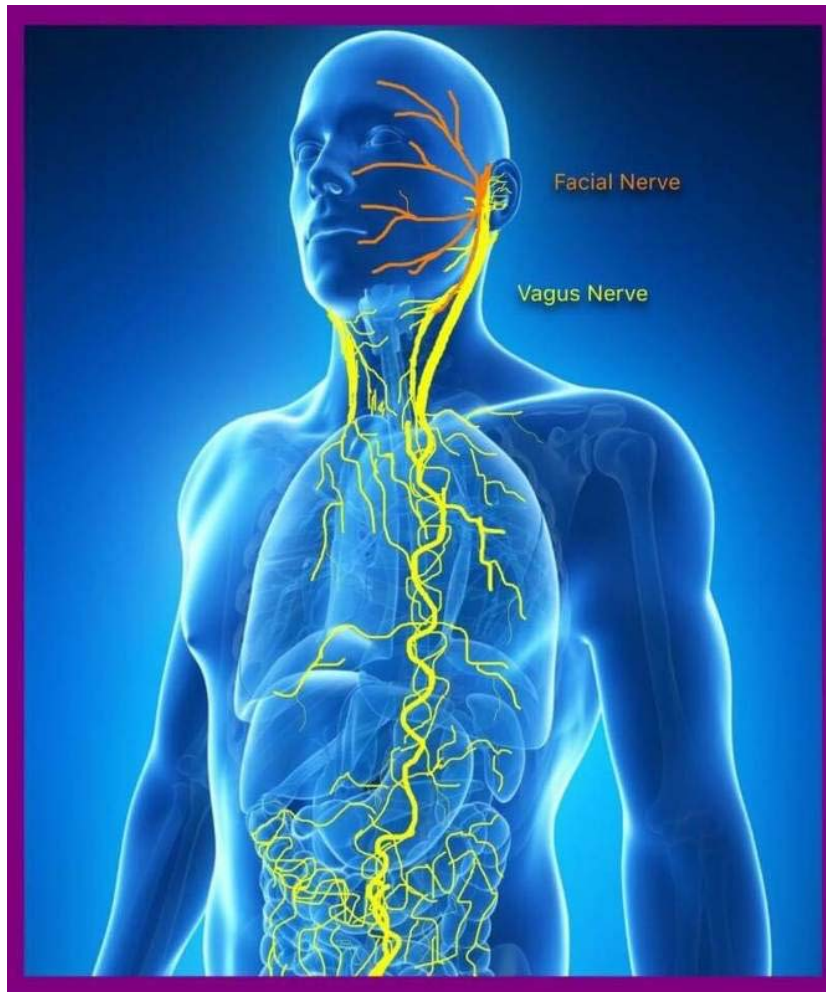
**BECOME THE WATCHER.** Talk to yourself in the second person. "Well, Dave, there is no reason to be so stressed. You can just....." Talking to yourself in the second person seems to disconnect the trigger.

Make a list of all things you are grateful for. Then, review when you are anxious.

Think of your favorite food or places. Distract the two-year-old. "Dave wasn't Colombia, and the verdant mountains beautiful...." or whatever is your feel-good, happy place.

**POSITIVE POSTURE.** No slumping, drop shoulders, shoulders back, drop belly. We want Diaphragmatic breath, full belly breath, three-part breathing. It is also called Durga Breath or yogic breath. Erect posture and supine (lying) postures signals via nerves in the lower lobes of the lungs the release of relaxation hormones. These positions tell our body we are in a non-threatening situation, a calm state.

**THE VAGUS NERVE** runs from the brain stem down through the neck



<https://enhancecbd.co.uk/blogs/wellbeing/why-we-now-suspect-the-vagus-nerve-and-gut-health-are-the-fundamental-keys-to-our-wellbeing-and-how>

and to major organs. A bilateral communication system of nerves connecting the brain with the involuntary body functions, respiration, digestive, circulatory. We can calm the body and mind by stimulating the Vagus Nerve.

## **PHYSICAL ANXIETY RELIEF**

For a severe anxiety attack, plunging your face in cold water can help alleviate the immediate attack until other methods can bring it under control.

The Stop Button – palm of the hand – press the Stop button, breath in, full Durga Breath.

Third Eye Pressure – Apply light pressure or gentle tapping in the center of the forehead.

Ear Massage – Give yourself some love, gently massaging and pulling.  
Activates the Vagus nerve.

Counting to three, with deep breaths on each number, think of a color "one (breath in) Red (exhale), two, blue, three green." It takes some practice to recall when under stress.

Sea of Tranquility Point center of the breast bone – pressure and tapping

Activate the **TRIPLE WARMER MERIDIAN**, consisting of 23 acupuncture points, starting at the end of the ring finger and passing between the knuckles of the ring and pinkie fingers. Between the two bones of the arm and the shoulder via the tip of the elbow and back of the upper arm.

Great for use with social anxiety

### **Bilateral Butterflies**

Hug tap shoulders

Breath and visualize a calm, peaceful, happy place

## **PRANAYAMA – BREATHWORK**

Stress management = breath management

Durga Breathe, three-part yogic breath.

Nadi Shodina - Alternate Nostril Breath

Chandra Behdani Pranayama - Moon Piercing Breath

Crocodile pose. Facedown head turned to the side, resting on arms. Breathe into your lower back, fill up completely

Bramarhi Breath - Bumblebee breath

Win Hoff Breath – More advanced breathwork – Next Class!

## **AROMA THERAPY**

Lavender, Chamomile, and other essential oils, or scents, are known to be effective at calming agents. Peppermint can help reduce the effects of a

tension headache. However, fragrances are very subjective, and what is relaxing for one may be a trigger for another. Try them mindfully and lightly.

## **MEDITATE**

Meditation is a state of being. Like any skill, it requires practice to get good at it. Just sit still for 10 minutes in the morning.

**ASANA** – The physical Yoga

**CHANTING/MANTRA** – See page 13

**JAPA MALA OR MALA** – Generally 108 beads, often used in chanting to keep track of the chants. Similar to Rosary Beads. Aids in occupying the mind distracts from "worry" or a tool in mediation. Much more discussion is warranted here.

**MONKEY MIND** - The brain is an organ. It has jobs do. It controls many bodily functions and processes sensory information. Historically an Active mind was beneficial for survival. Active thoughts are an advantage for problem solving, creativity and evolved to keep us safe from danger. Don't beat yourself up over a busy mind. Be proud of it. But work to harness and control it with practice.

Active mind, monkey mind can show high intelligence. Smart, active brain 🧠 = More thoughts. More ways to avoid danger, find food, less time spent on gathering food. However, threats were typically short-lived and often ended with the physical release - fight, flight, or freeze. An example is how a zebra will rapidly shake after an encounter with danger is over—quickly dissipating the stored energy and adrenaline. However, over the last 100 years in the United States, we rarely genuinely need to fight. Instead, we sit in traffic, or at school, a stressful job, or rushing to get our children to an event, practice, fed, do homework, etc.

We need to work to rewire the brain using neural placidity. Then, we can train the brain and body to learn to meditate through repeated Practice.

**THE ANCHOR – THE BREATH.** Alternatively, we can use a mantra or an item of concentration. Find what works best for you. Then use it, stick with it, and return to your anchor when you drift away in thought. Especially when first starting a meditation practice, an anchor like a mantra may prove beneficial. And even more advanced practitioners will find themselves distracted, lost in thought. Then we can return to our anchor, the breath, or repeatedly recite a mantra to bring back the mind. "I breathe in, I breathe out." So Hum = I Am That. With that being the Absolute, the ultimate.

During particularly trying times, a mantra and meditation can calm and make manageable perceived stress. Note the "perceived" stress. So much of what "stresses us out" is built up in our minds. It is not an actual stressful situation that our body is designed to react to. Most of the demands on us in today's society are self-imposed. Not like the zebra avoiding being the lion's lunch. That is actual stress.

Meditation helps cultivate Mindfulness. Right thought and right action, or in many cases inaction, reducing the number of day-to-day stressors.

## **MORNING RITUAL**

Meditation in the morning seems to set the tone for the day. The day will seem to go smoother, and things will fall into place. When things don't go perfect, we are calm and better prepared to address the issue head-on and not "stress" over it. If you are not a morning person, then meditate when you can. Meditation in the evening is the perfect way to calm the mind from a hard day of life. Even a few minutes during the day to breathe deeply and clear the mind helps reset and energize. Twenty minutes of meditation is as "restful" as a 20-minute nap.

Just Sit - Setting proper expectations. Don't expect to sit down and "drop-in" to perfect meditation. Set aside 5 minutes initially and do not get up until the time is past. Gradually increase the time.

***How wonderful to sit and do nothing***

Thich Nhat Hanh

## **BREATH = LIFE**

"Life and respiration are complementary," the English physician William Harvey wrote in the seventeenth century. "There is nothing living which does not breathe, nor anything breathing which does not live." (no longer considered valid as there is anaerobic organism near undersea volcanoes.)

Breathing is the only autonomic function that we can control.

Breathe like rolling up a tube of toothpaste from the bottom, squeezing out the breath

## **BASIC GOODNESS/BUDDHA NATURE**

Buddha Nature means that we all have everything it takes to be "a Buddha." All of the requirements are within. We just need to look within, in meditation and yoga, to become a Buddha. We all have the basic goodness. We just need to pull back the veil and reveal it. Light thy own light.

## **MEDITATION**

- 1) *Why meditate?*
  - a) *Relaxation*
  - b) *Focus thoughts*
  - c) *Possible Spiritual connection*
  - d) *Samadhi?*
- 2) *Types of meditation*
  - a) *Sitting traditional cross-legged Lotus - Padmasana*
  - b) *Walking*
  - c) *Dynamic*
  - d) *Mindfulness – Anything can become meditation, making and drinking tea, cleaning, needlepoint, painting, most repetitive tasks.*
- 3) *Posture*
  - a) *Buddhism considers four Postures or Poses*
    - i) *Sitting*

*ii) Standing*

*iii) Walking*

*iv) Lying*

*b) Traditional Yoga*

*i) Pantanjali in Yoga Sutras states the Asana should be "Steady and comfortable." There is not much more detail in the Sutras, but it has commonly been interpreted in Hatha yoga to include:*

*(1) Sukhasana – Easy Pose*

*(2) Vajrasana – Thunderbolt*

*(a) Suitable if meditating after a meal*

*(b) Said to help control celibacy*

*(3) Siddhasana – Adept Pose*

*(4) Padmasana – Traditional Lotus pose*

*(5) Gomukhasana – Cow Faced Pose with arms on legs, not behind the back or eagle arms*

*ii) In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna advises Arjuna that the quality of the Asana should be "Stable and Erect," seated like Padmasana to meditate in. Krishna describes the correct posture, seated on a deerskin and a cushion of Kusha grass. He advises Arjuna that of all the yoga paths to self-realization, Raja yoga and meditation are the best.*

*iii) Half Smile of contentment*

*iv) Dristi*

*(1) Eyes half-closed, heavy-lidded, eyes unfocused.*

*(2) Dristi towards the Third Eye in the center of the forehead.*

*(3) This effect helps work to pull the energy upward*

*v) Mula Bandha – Lightly – Discuss purpose in meditation and Asana.  
Other benefits*

*vi) Back Straight, shoulder blades back and down*

*vii) Comfort is queen*

*viii) Head level or chin slightly down*

*ix) Disregard vii as your meditation practice deepens, notice any uncomfortable feelings, pins, and needles, aching, make note "label" it, return to the breath*

## **THE MEDIATION PRACTICE**

Meditation takes practice, just like Asana or any skill you want to improve. You don't improve your one-mile run or walk time without training or learn a musical instrument without practice. Anything we want to do well generally requires effort. You get back what you put in. Try to set a time every day, even put it on your calendar and commit to 5-10 minutes. Don't get up until the time is over. Insight Timer is a good app with a countdown timer with pleasant bells or chimes, so you don't have to watch the clock.

Requires dedication, but even 5 - 10 - 20 minutes starts to produce tangible results

## **WHO AM I?**

### **LABELING**

When thoughts impose, don't get upset. Just identify the thought, label it and return to the Anchor. If a thought arises, just label "thinking, thinking, thinking, I breathe in, I breath out." If sounds distract "listening, listening, I breath in, I breath out."

Refine the breath. Feel it enter and hit the back of your nose. Find where you can feel it bump, and turn downward, the cool breath of life.

### **MUDRAS**

Common hand mudras for mediation. There are many more.

Anjali mudra

Jnana mudra

Dhyana mudra Mantra



## **MANTRAS**

### **SECULAR MANTRAS**

I breath in, I breath Out

Be Calm

I am enlightened and peaceful aware of my emotions

I am not the body. I am not even the mind

#### **Four Intentions**

- I want a joyful, energetic body.
- I want a loving, compassionate heart.
- I want a restful, alert mind.
- I want lightness of being

## **BUDDHIST MANTRA**

### ***Om Mani padme hum* – "Behold! The jewel in the lotus!"**

*"It is very good to recite the mantra Om mani padme hum, but while you are doing it, you should be thinking on its meaning, for the meaning of the six syllables is great and vast .... The first, OM.... symbolizes the practitioner's impure body, speech, and mind; it also symbolizes the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha.... The path is indicated by the next four syllables. MANI, meaning jewel, symbolizes the ... altruistic intention to become enlightened, compassionate, and loving.... The two syllables, PADME, meaning lotus, symbolize wisdom.... Purity must be achieved by an indivisible unity of method and wisdom, symbolized by the final syllable HUM, which indicates indivisibility.... **Thus the six syllables, om mani padme hum, mean that in dependence on the practice of a path which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted***

**body, speech, and mind of a Buddha....** — His Holiness the Dalai Lama,  
www.sacred-texts.com and Wikipedia<sup>3</sup>

DP personal thoughts on this....

## **YOGA MANTRAS BIJA OR SEED MANTRAS**

Each sound has innate power. The sound itself contains the essence of the teaching and power. Like all seeds, a tiny seed contains the knowledge to make a huge tree, from a mere acorn grows the mighty oak

### **Om Tat Sat**

"The Supreme Absolute Truth "  
Or "All that is"

Om - The Sound of Brahman the vibration or primordial sound

Tat - translates as That and symbolizes the Universal Consciousness

Sat - Means Truth, represents pure existence or supreme Soul

### **Sat Nam - True Identity**

Nam - Name or identity  
Sat - Truth

### **So Hum**

I am That – One with the Universe. We Are One

**Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō** - I bow to the creative energy of the infinite. I bow to the Divine channel of wisdom.

**Ra Ma Da Sa Sa Say So Hung** - Sun, Moon, Earth, Infinity, All that is in infinity, I am Thee.

**Om Namah Shivaya** - I bow to Shiva

**Om AIM Namah** - Saraswati Bija mantra  
Goddess, energy, learning, arts

## **Om Moksha Ritam**

The rhythm of the universe

**Moksha** is emotional freedom and release. It is your liberation. **Ritam** is the rhythm of the universe. So when you use the mantra **Om Moksha Ritam** you are attuning to your true nature—letting go of what you no longer need and feeling the rhythm of the universe.

Pratyahara - Withdrawal of the senses

Focus on breath on the inside of the nose

## **MANTRA - OM**

AUM

Prana - Energy

Bandha – Energy Locks

In Closing - Meditation - liken this experience to slipping beneath the surface of the waves while snorkeling. The waves have not disappeared, but they have lost their power to toss and turn you.

**Stress and Anxiety Management**  
**& Meditation Resources**

**Mantra** - The Sanskrit word "[mantra](#)," from the roots "manas" (the linear thinking mind) and "tra" (to cross over)

**App**

Insight Timer

**Meditation teachers**

Jack Kornfield

Tara Brach

Davidji

Hugh Bryne

Sharon Salzberg

**Affirmations**

Kenneth Soares

**Life coach/poet/beautiful speaker**

Sarah Blondin

**Poetry**

Rumi

**Mooji**

**Buddhism**

Silas Day

Thích Nhất Hạnh – Monk, peace activist, author

**Some Kiss We Want**

There is some kiss we want  
with our whole lives,  
the touch of Spirit on the body.

Seawater begs the pearl  
to break its shell.

And the lily, how passionately  
it needs some wild Darling!

At night, I open the window  
and ask the moon to come  
and press its face into mine.  
Breathe into me.

Close the language-door,  
and open the love-window.

The moon won't use the door,  
only the window.

- *Jelaluddin Rumi*

## **Mantras**

Paz

## **Great thinkers – Philosophers**

Elkhart Tolle

### **10 Best-Ever Anxiety-Management Techniques**

10 Best-Ever Anxiety-Management Techniques

<https://www.psychotherapyworker.org/magazine/article/774/10-best-ever-anxiety-management-techniques>

## **Books**

*Breath – James Nestor*

The secrets to rewiring an anxious brain - Health

## **YOGA, BUDDHISM, SPIRITUALITY BOOKS**

*Magic and Mystery in Tibet – Alexandra David-Neel*

*The Essential Dogen – Peter Levitt*

*The Bhagavad Gita – Eknath Easwaran translation and audiobook*

*Passage Meditation – Eknath Easwaran*

*Tanta Illuminated - Christopher D. Walls*

*Autobiography of A Yogi – Paramahansa Yogananda.* Highly recommend the Audiobook narrated by Ben Kingsley

The author Georg Feuerstein:

Tantra: Path of Ecstasy

The Yoga Tradition

Yoga Morality

The Deeper Dimension of Yoga

Yesterday I was  
clever, so I wanted to  
change the world.  
Today I am wise, so I  
am changing myself.

- Rumi

*The Subtle Body -Cyndi Dale*

*Moving Inward: The Journey to Meditation – Rolf Solvik*

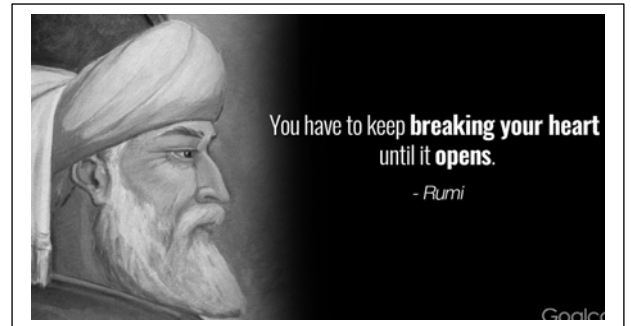
*How To Sit: Mindfulness Essentials Book One – Thich Naht Hahn*

*Classic Dharma Talks – Thich Naht Hahn*

*Food for the Heart – Ajahn Chah*

*Training the Mind – Chogyam Trungpa*

*Meditation in Action - Chogyam Trungpa*



*Science of the Breath – Yogi Ramachakara*

*Paths to God – Ram Das*

*Saltwater Buddha: A surfers quest to find zen on the Sea – Jamal Yogis*

*Tea Medicine – Aaron Fisher*

*Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion – Sam Harris*

*In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*

*The Four Agreements: A practical guide to personal freedom – Don Miguel Ruiz*

*The Tibetan Yoga of Breath – Anyen Rinpoche, Allison Choying Zangmo*

*The Bliss of Inner Fire – Lama Thubten Yeshe*

*Introduction to Tantra - Lama Thubten Yeshe*

*The Heart of Meditation – His Holiness The Dalai Lama*

*The Path to Enlightenment - His Holiness The Dalai Lama*