

Yoga - The Ultimate Form of Mindfulness

Evidence shows that yoga is beneficial to those who have mental health problems including depression, anxiety and stress. This is particularly true of Iyengar yoga – a form of yoga that focuses on strength building and the correct alignment of the body. But why does it help?

“It is practising these poses with care and precision and accuracy that means your mind is completely focused on the work that you are doing,” says Iyengar yoga teacher Tanya Devonshire-Jones. *“When you are doing that you are not thinking about all those things that are worrying you. It is a very pure form of mindfulness.”*

One of the big mental health issues affecting students is stress, and with essay deadlines and exams looming you may be feeling the pressure. To help, Tanya has put together a short sequence of poses specifically designed to combat stress that you can do in your own home.



1. Adho Mukha Virasana - Kneel and sit back on your heels. Move your knees apart and reach your arms forwards along the mat. Rest your forehead on a rolled blanket or yoga blocks. Hold for three minutes



2. Adho Mukha Svanasana - Starting from all-fours. Your feet hip-width apart. Tuck your toes under and lift your hips up high. See if you can straighten your legs and ease your heels down towards the floor a bit. If you are tired, have some yoga blocks or cushions below your face, so that you can rest the top of your head on them. Hold for 30 seconds to one minute



3. Tadasana with Urdhva Hastasana - Stand up tall with straight legs and lift your arms above your head, palms facing each other. Really reach upwards, without hunching your shoulders. Hold for 10-20 seconds. Repeat twice more.



4. Uttanasana - Standing in front of your bed (or a chair), do Tadasana and Urdhva Hastasana as above. Then reach forwards, put your hands down first, then place the top of your head on the chair seat or bed. You can then fold your arms or just place them where they feel comfortable. Keep your legs straight and lifted up. Hold for one to two minutes



5. Halasana - Place two or three folded blankets (on top of each other) on the floor and a chair a couple of feet away from it. Lie down with your feet away from the chair and your shoulders on the blankets. The back of your head should be on the floor, not on the blankets. Now, gently bring your knees towards your chest and lift your hips up. Extend your legs over your head, towards the chair and settle your feet on the seat. Hold for two to three minutes



6. Supta Baddha Konasana - Lie on your back with the soles of your feet together and your knees wide. If your hips become uncomfortable, support each thigh with a rolled-up blanket. Relax. Hold for three minutes



7. Viparita Karani - Lie on your back, legs up the wall with two folded blankets under your hips, so that your chest and heart are a little higher than your head. Hold for three to five minutes



8. Savasana - Lie down full length, with a folded blanket under your head only. Relax but don't fall asleep. Concentrate on relaxing your muscles and breathing gently and evenly. Stay in this pose for at least five minutes, preferably ten.

To find an Iyengar yoga teacher in your area, visit www.iyengaryoga.org.uk