

CHAPTER SIX

BUSY DAYS

Poses for Times When There's No Time

IN A PERFECT WORLD, we would all have time for a long restorative yoga practice daily. But obligations to work, family, friends, and community often leave us with little time for self-care. It is precisely when we are the most stressed that we need to relax and renew ourselves. This chapter describes three series that bring restorative yoga into your busy life. The first one you can practice at home or on vacation; the second is for the office; the third is for when you're on the go.

The 15-Minute Relaxation. To relax deeply in this amount of time, you must have a quiet room, but you can get by with a minimum of props. There are only three poses: Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose, Supported Child's Pose, and Basic Relaxation Pose. Practice them in the order presented. As always, I have listed a full complement of optional props. If you can't find even 15 minutes, practice Basic Relaxation Pose for 5.

Better Than a Coffee Break. Some of the most stressful times are at work. These two restorative poses need a chair and desk (or table) and together take only 5 minutes.

The Totally Invisible Relaxation. This relaxation technique will serve you well. I have practiced it in taxis and airplanes, at the theater, and even at parties. Use it when you need it, right where you are.

Supported Child's Pose

Prop

- ▶ bolster

Optional Props

- ▶ 1 or more single-fold blankets
 - ▶ 2 towels
 - ▶ sandbag
 - ▶ long-roll blanket
- ▶ extra blanket for warmth
 - ▶ clock or timer

Supported Child's Pose is the familiar posture of rest and sleep for babies and young children. When you practice this pose, not only will it help to relieve tension in your lower back, but it may evoke a sense of security from your earliest days. This pose is one of introversion, of curling up and reconnecting with feelings of support and release.

Setting Up. Begin by kneeling on a carpeted floor or blanket, with your knees hip-width apart and your your bolster in front of you. Use more padding under your knees and shins if you need it. To avoid stress on the ligaments of your outer ankles, point your toes directly backward and not toward each other. Sit back on your heels.



FIGURE 6.2
Supported Child's Pose

If you experience discomfort in your knees, ankles, or tops of your feet, come up and try one or both of the following adjustments. Place one towel, folded lengthwise, into the bend of your knees to create more space in the knee joints. Place the other towel, rolled lengthwise, under the front of the ankles, and let your feet hang over the roll. Experiment with the thickness of these folded and rolled towels to get them just right for you.

Sit back on your heels again. Separate your knees wide enough to place the bolster between your thighs. To enhance relaxation, hold a sandbag across your lower back as you bend forward. The weight of the bag helps to relax the muscles of your lower back.

Your torso should be completely supported by the bolster and your thighs. Your chest should rest easily on the bolster. Let your tailbone

drop toward your heels. This action will lengthen your lower back as you relax. Your buttocks do not have to touch your heels.

If you need more support, try one of the following variations. Come up to a kneeling position and place a long-roll blanket on your heels and sit back, or come to a kneeling position and significantly raise the height of your torso support by adding 1 or more single-fold blankets. If you have difficulty breathing, push the bolster forward so it only supports your breastbone and lets your belly hang free.

Turn your head to one side, and bring your chin slightly toward your chest. Turn your head to the opposite side halfway through the practice of the pose. If the side head position is uncomfortable, rest on your forehead and slightly tuck your chin toward your chest. Make sure you can breathe easily regardless of your head position.

Place your arms so that they either reach back toward your feet or forward around the edges of the bolster. The position of the arms is unimportant; it is important that you are comfortable. Close your eyes.

Being There. Take several slow breaths. As you do, let your shoulders move away from the ears. Let your belly relax and feel supported. The counter-pressure of the bolster on the belly may feel especially good if you have menstrual cramps.

Coming Back. Practice Supported Child's Pose for 3 minutes. Be sure that you spend equal time with your head turned in both directions. Open your eyes. Reach back with one hand and slide the sandbag off your back and to one side. Place your palms on the floor, under your shoulders. Press your hands into the floor, inhale, and sit up slowly onto your heels. Rest for a moment. Come to a kneeling position and immediately bring one leg forward, placing your foot on the floor. Press your hands on the forward thigh, and inhale deeply as you come to a standing position. Coming out of the pose in this way prevents discomfort in the knees.

Be careful when in a hurry.
—JAMAICAN PROVERB

Benefits. Supported Child's Pose gently stretches the lower back, relieves shoulder tension, and quiets the mind.

Cautions

- ▶ To protect the knees, ankles, and feet, follow the suggestions in the Setting Up and Coming Back sections.

Do not practice this pose:

- ▶ if you have a chronic back condition, including but not limited to spondylolisthesis, spondylolysis, spinal stenosis, disc disease, nerve

symptoms (such as radiating pain or numbness, or difficulties with bowel or bladder function).

- ▶ if you are more than three months pregnant.



Desk Forward Bend

I remember how restful it was during my school days to lean forward and rest my head and folded arms on my desk. Try this pose at your desk or in the lunchroom at work or school.

Props

- ▶ desk or table
- ▶ chair



FIGURE 6.4
Desk Forward Bend

Setting Up. Place your chair (without rollers) near your desk so that you can easily lean forward. Sit at the edge of the chair seat, with your feet flat on the floor. Lean forward and place your folded arms on the desk, so you feel securely supported. Rest your forehead on your arms. Tilt your chin slightly toward your chest. Close your eyes.

Being There. Breathe slowly and deeply for the first few breaths, then resume normal breathing. Let the desk support your arms, your head, and your cares. Let the next few minutes of relaxation fill you.

Coming Back. Practice Desk Forward Bend for 3 minutes. To come up, unfold your arms as you lift your head. Inhale, and press your hands into the desk to help you return to sitting. Sit in your chair for

one more long, slow breath before moving on to the next pose or on with your day.

Caution

- ▶ Take care of your neck and lower back in this pose. When you are forward, make sure your chin is tucked close to your body. Come up slowly to protect your lower back.