

Sweet Surrender

Find stillness and greater depth by holding poses longer in a Yin Yoga sequence.

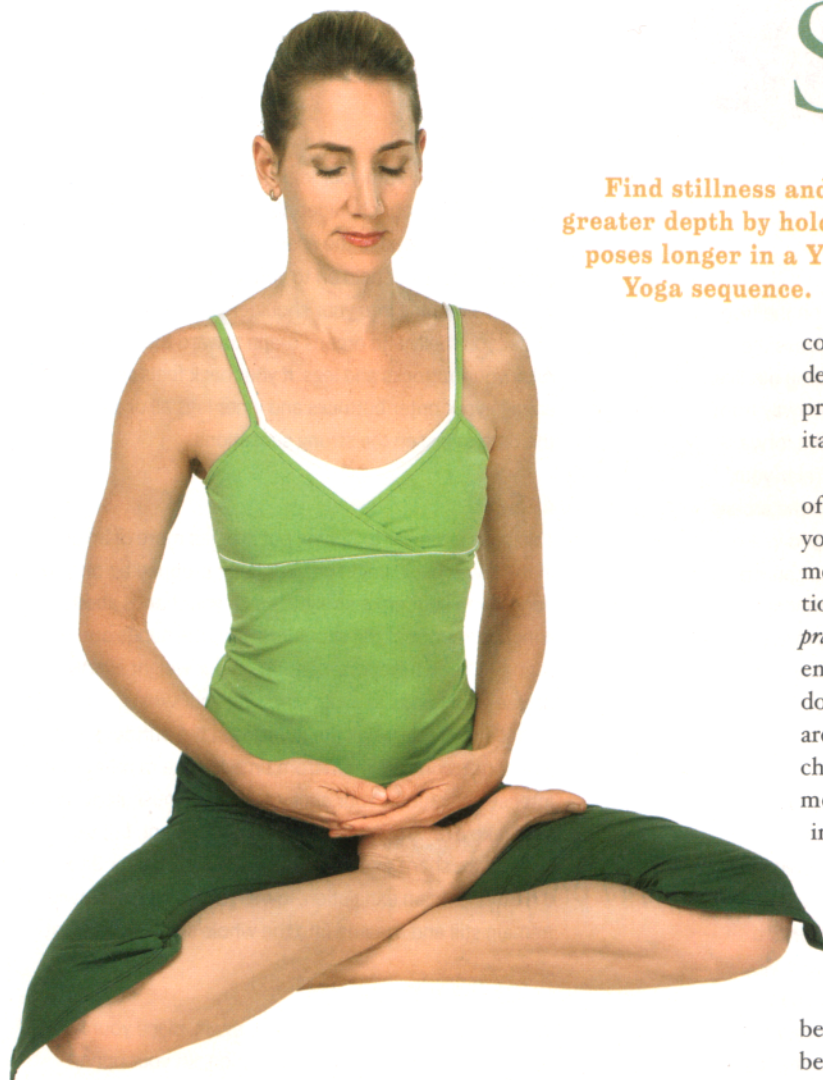
IF YOU'RE ACCUSTOMED to sweating your way toward glamorous poses, Yin Yoga may at first glance seem too slow, too simple, and, well, too boring. But this

complex practice of long, passively held floor poses is deeply nourishing and has myriad benefits for any yoga practitioner, says San Francisco Bay Area yoga and meditation teacher Sarah Powers.

On a physical level, Yin enhances the natural range of motion in the joints. By keeping your muscles soft, you release deep layers of connective tissue, creating more ease in any style of yoga and in seated meditation. On an energetic level, Yin enhances the flow of *prana* (life force) in the tissues around the joints, where energy often stagnates. Powers likens the practice to doing an acupuncture session on yourself: Sequences are often geared toward strengthening certain energy channels (called *nadis* in yoga or meridians in Chinese medicine), which ultimately support the organs, immune system, and emotional well-being.

And then there are the mental benefits: Holding poses for three to five minutes often brings up discomfort. Yin conditions you to stay with the intense sensations that arise, rather than quickly moving into the next pose. "It trains you to become more comfortable with discomfort instead of becoming alarmed," Powers says. "It marries meditation and asana into a very deep practice."

All that and you don't have to trade in your dynamic practice to reap the benefits. Powers, who teaches Yin together with Yang (her version of flow yoga), encourages students to do Yin poses before or after a regular routine, or as a stand-alone sequence. She recommends a Yin session at least two to four times a week. "You're conditioning the tissues to become more elastic, so practicing has a cumulative effect," she says. "The more you do it, the more you'll want to do it."



practice tips

There are three crucial things to do as you practice Yin. First, come into a pose to your appropriate edge in a respectful way. Second, become still, just as you would during meditation. Third, stay for a while, as you would for an acupuncture session. In the beginning aim for three to five minutes, but if one minute is enough, start there and grow into two minutes.

sequence focus

The sequence that follows on page 74 balances what traditional Chinese medicine calls the kidney meridian—essential for mind-body health. "When kidney chi is revitalized, you'll feel vibrant," Powers says. The sequence includes passive backbends, because the kidney channel flows through the lower back. Seated forward bends act as counterposes and stimulate the urinary bladder meridian, which intersects all of the other meridians in the body.

home practice

sweet surrender

sequence by Sarah Powers



1 Butterfly Pose

Sit on a blanket or cushion. With your weight on the front edge of your sitting bones, bend your knees, press the soles of your feet together, and let your legs drop out like butterfly wings. Take your heels at least a foot away from your hips. With your hands on your ankles, bend forward from the hips to your appropriate edge, then relax your upper spine and let it round. Rest your head in the arches of the feet, on top of the stacked fists, or cupped in the hands while the elbows rest on the feet. If you can, stay for 3 to 5 minutes in all of the poses in this sequence. Inhale as you come up, then stretch your legs forward and lean back on your hands. Pause for a few moments in a neutral position after each pose.

2 Saddle

Sit on your shins and lean back on your hands. (If this is already too much for your knees, skip this pose.) Lower yourself slowly onto your back, keeping your lower back in an exaggerated arch. If your quadriceps feel strained, rest your shoulders and head on top of a bolster or a folded blanket. Otherwise, come down onto your elbows or upper back, allowing your knees to spread apart if you need to. If there is too much pressure on your ankles, place a folded towel or blanket underneath them. To come up, place your hands where your elbows were. Engage your abdominal muscles and inhale as you lift yourself up.

1



2

3 Sphinx

Lie on your belly with your legs outstretched. Place your elbows on the floor shoulder distance apart and about an inch or so ahead of the shoulder line. Place your hands straight forward or hold on to your elbows. Rest here without slumping into your shoulders or lifting them up.

Let your belly and organs drape toward the floor as you relax your buttocks and legs. If your back feels sensitive, engage your outer buttocks and inner legs all or part of the time to lessen the strong sensations.

4 Seal

This pose is similar to Sphinx but creates more of an arch in the lower back. Begin on your belly, propped up on your hands with your arms straight. Place your hands about 4 inches in front of the shoulders. Turn the hands out slightly, like seal flippers. Distribute your weight evenly across your hands to avoid stressing your wrists.

If it's tolerable, relax the muscles in the buttocks and legs. If not, contract them from time to time to relieve the intense sensations. Your ability to remain muscularly soft may take a few months of practice. Be patient, but do not endure sharp or electrical sensations. Stay for 3 to 5 minutes. On an exhalation, lower yourself down slowly. Remain still and breathe into the whole spine as you rest.

5 Child's Pose

When it feels appropriate to move again, place your hands under your chest, and on an inhalation, lift your upper body away from the floor. As you exhale, bend your knees and draw your hips back toward your feet in Child's Pose.



9



6 Half Dragonfly

Sit on a blanket or cushion with your right leg outstretched and the sole of your left foot pressing into your inner right thigh. Move your left knee back a few inches. If the knee does not rest on the floor, place a cushion under it. As you exhale, bend your spine over your right leg, placing your hands on either side of it. Do both sides before moving on.

7 Dragonfly

Bring your legs into a straddle, exhale, and bend forward from the hips. Place your hands on the floor in front of you, or rest on your elbows or on a support like a bolster or folded blanket. If it feels natural, come all the way down onto your belly. If your knees are unstable, back off the pose and engage the quadriceps from time to time. Attempt to hold this pose for 5 minutes or more.

8 Full Forward Bend

Gently bring your legs back together. Bend forward at the hips, curving your spine into a forward bend. If you have sciatica or if your hips tilt backward, eliminate this pose and lie on the floor with your legs up the wall.

9 Savasana

Come into Corpse Pose with your palms facing up or with your hands resting on your abdomen. Place the legs wider than the hips and relax your buttocks, legs, and feet. Invite ease in your mind and body, making this the most nourishing posture of all.



cut out
and save!