

Yoga for Trauma:

Creating a Healing Practice

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We are witnessing an amazing time of yoga evolution here in the West with the increasing focus on not WHAT we do in our yoga practice but HOW we do it as the way to awaken the inner physician in our yoga practice. This deeper, scientific understanding of exactly how yoga can affect our neurological and neurochemical pathways in the body has allowed us to create a powerful yoga therapy program, YogaFit for Warriors, to truly help those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as anyone with unresolved physical or emotional traumas. This advancement of understanding of what makes yoga efficacious includes: mindful movement to awaken the emotional or limbic center of the mind; breath focus to stimulate the vagus nerve; and a physical focus on the psoas and grounding postures to help release the allostatic load of traumas stored in the body. This combination creates the opportunity for organic healing through yoga therapy and provides a new path forward for those suffering from not only PTSD but mood disorders such as depression and anxiety.

It is with this in mind that YogaFit developed the 100-hour Warrior Program. Yoga, meditation and other somatic treatment modalities have been shown to help PTSD and chronic stress better than cognitive therapy alone. This bottoms-up approach to healing helps release physical and neurologically held tension in the body and teaches practitioners how to better tolerate sensations in the body. Additionally, this body-focused approach increases somatic self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-regulation, which are strong indicators of mental health. Chronic stress and trauma result in physical changes in the various structures of the brain resulting in a change of hormone and neurotransmitter secretion, which in turn affect the nervous system response. Research has shown that mindfulness practices such as yoga and meditation are successful at reversing some of the physical effects of chronic stress and trauma that can help reset our nervous system. Yoga has been shown to increase Heart Rate Variability (HRV) which is a measure of our autonomic nervous system health as well as the neurotransmitter GABA, which makes us feel happy, more than other types of exercise. High HRV and GABA levels are correlated with a healthy autonomic nervous system. A YogaFit for Warriors class is a combination flow style class with restorative therapeutic poses in the last third of the class. It is much slower paced and focused on creating rhythmic movement with breath and designed to help discharge energy as well facilitate the release of deeply held tension.

A mindful yoga practice leads to a healthy balanced body and mind. Over time yoga decreases emotional reactivity as we learn to embrace life more fully. Yoga practice helps us reframe situations so that we find more meaning even from difficulties and challenges. Essentially, yoga helps us to reclaim lost power, which is very important in healing trauma. Yoga teaches us that while we cannot control external events, we can control our reaction. Yoga gives us the tools to activate the innate healer within all of us.

YogaFit Warriors: Psoas release class

(preferable to use eggs if available, if not use blocks or core balls)

Start in Natural Psoas Release position (NPR)– supine, knees bent, feet flat – hands on belly to start 3-part breath – allow gravity to release psoas natural for 5 minutes with focused awareness on breathing

Find hip bones and then lift one leg up and down about 10 X keeping the knee bent 1- inch off floor (not too high or quads engage) – **do both sides**

Hug one knee in and extend other leg straight lengthening through inner thigh then lift extended leg 1- inch off floor and do this leg lifting and lower movement multiple times

Staying on the same extended leg, turn toes to the side and move leg (movement emanates from hip) out to the side about 1 inch and then back in and flex the foot –repeat sequence about 10 X on same leg

Staying on Same leg drag it back in and out SLOWLY multiple times allowing the heel to glide along floor on the way in and out – 10X

Switch legs and repeat entire sequence starting with hugging one knee in and extending leg

Flowing bridge (x5) SLOWLY with egg wedged in the belly of the thighs – squeeze and slightly internally rotate adductors pushing egg slightly towards ground but keeping sacrum broad by stabilizing pelvis and lengthening through the quads

Flowing bridge (x5) with egg between palms lengthwise, slowly moving arms over head towards the floor but stopping when arms start to bend or when ribcage starts to move with the arms - this allows us to get at upper psoas connection - thoracic spinal extension while keeping ribcage stable - if ribcage moves when the arms go overhead stop at that place and breathe into diaphragm to help uncouple movement

Staying on back in **NPR** bring knees over hips with shins parallel to ground – egg stays between thighs -

Belly twisting pose with arms out like a T, shoulders back and down so neck is clear. Bring knees SLOWLY to one side keeping them parallel while squeezing egg and internally rotating through inner thighs - only going as far as knees can stay together

NPR - Place block under sacrum and gently rock side to side with knees bent, flat on floor then stop and **slowly extend one leg out** to release inner thighs and psoas as it runs over the front of the hip bone while simultaneously lengthening and upper body and into lateral flexion on the same side as the extended leg – switch sides

Roll over and come onto all 4's

Cat/Cow with egg between legs – stabilization and lengthening through spine

(move block to side)

Forearm extended Childs pose (thoracic spine focus/extension) **up and through to cow** - flowing slowly (3-5X)

Same flow as above but **add in crocodile/chaturanga** eventually moving all the way to belly (3-5 times)

Take time to **breathe** on belly with hands stacked and **forehead (3rd eye pt) resting on hands** – either bring awareness to this place and breathe or gently rock side to side over brows

Cobra flow – making figure 8's with upper back – upper psoas release

Reverse crocodile up into **kneeling plank** SLOWLY with core awareness and stabilization – to extended child's

Move to All 4's and then extend one leg and lift up and down SLOWLY (maybe only 1-3 inches) multiple times then bring it forward to kneeling lunge but move hips back into alignment over knees and adjust pelvis to neutral by gently guiding hip bones down with hands giving weight to the pelvis – hold till fatigue – 1-2 minutes – can be very challenging so give options to come out

Guide palms of hands to back of pelvis with fingertips pointing downwards providing gentle support for pelvis neutrality and awareness, keeping heel of the foot that is in front firmly on the floor **slowly start to shift forward and back multiple times** allowing knee to go over the ankle if comfortable (should be ok if heel stays down BUT if knee pain then don't do this flow)

Same leg – come back to neutral pelvis aligned over knee and take **lateral flexion** bringing the arm up overhead on the same side as the knee is on the floor then move slowly into a kneeling twist

Extended child's pose to **kneeling up dog** to open hip flexors – egg or block under hipbones useful here

Come slowly to the belly and then up into **cobra** then to **sphinx pose** (option to use egg at diaphragm for sphinx)

Back to all 4's for **sunbird flow** with the same leg as above then take that leg to a **deep lunge** with hip bones forward this time and move slowly forward and back, straightening and extending leg (like pyramid) but keeping knee soft

Hold kneeling low lunge and add lateral flexion – again until fatigue so give options

Come back to all 4's – same leg for **spinal balance** – hold for a while then child's pose to rest

Switch sides and repeat entire sequence starting at kneeling lunge with hips aligned over knee

****Students then move through their vinyasa of choice 3-5 times**

Meet in DDog – bicycle heels and then move pelvis through figure 8 flow as well

3- legged DDog with one leg extended, knee bent and open through front of hip/psoas then move slowly into plank and bring bent knee diagonally across the body to opposite elbow several times in a SLOW flow (option to do from all 4's)

Same leg comes forward as extended above into W1 – lengthening though inner thigh

Same leg W1 – take chest expansion with cactus arms through **heart opening flow** slowly straightening front leg while opening heart and bringing hands into prayer posture when moving back into W1 (3-5 X)

W1 – with twist bring back of the hand, arm straight across forward bent knee and take opposite hand to sacrum to stabilize and bring awareness to pelvis, again maintaining neutrality – hold twist and extending through inner leg

Move from W1 to **moonflowers** then hold in hips down position and move into **triangle variation** keeping both knees bent, chest open as if pressed up against a wall behind and reaching one arm along inner thigh toward the floor energetically while holding hips parallel and steady – do both sides holding

Wide-legged forward fold – chest expansion option

Turn towards opposite leg to **W1 other side** – repeat entire sequence from above and then move back into **moonflowers** sequence and repeat **triangle options**

Wide-legged forward fold this time with **big toe hold** options then reaching across to each **opposite leg** to release inner thighs and psoas

****Students then move through their vinyasa of choice 3-5 times**

Come onto belly for modified bow pose with frog/Bekhasana option on each side – rest on belly w/3rd eye awareness

Move back up through kneeling plank into Cat and hold 3-5 breaths then take **extended child's**

Rabbit pose with awareness to top of head – option is to take cat/cows

Take egg and roll gently from forehead (without straining neck) all the way to the top of the head forward and back with hands supporting movement so only 10-20% of weight is into head (pineal gland pituitary gland)

Dolphin or forearm extended child's pose

Forearm plank with side plank options – moving fluidly into **wild thing** – either in full or forearm plank

Modified Camel with egg between legs

Butterfly with option to elevate hips – flowing slowly up and down

Staff pose with egg/block between – moving from forward fold into **incline plank or table top with egg/block**

One leg forward fold (Janu Sirsana) – use strap and option to elevate hips

Seated spinal twist

Move slowly onto back

Bridge – start active with egg between legs then move to restorative with eggs/block on back side of pelvis

One leg stretch with strap – moving into **hip opening** and leg-across (like lying spinal twist) options then ending in ½ of happy baby with bottom leg straight or bent

Repeat other side

Hug knees into chest and bring forehead to knees gently for roly-poly pose then move into hands behind thighs. Hips lifted and slowly rock side to side – releases psoas on backside of body

Preparations for Savasana/final resting pose - **Reclined butterfly option** with eggs under knees

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