

Trauma-sensitive Yoga

Exercises for stability and comfort



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Published by:



1.Edition 2019

Published by

TraumaHilfeZentrum Nurnberg e.V.
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www.thzn.org

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Introduction

You have come a long way. You have undergone and overcome much. Now, you feel it is time to look ahead and take your life into your own hands. This is not always an easy thing to do. There are memories, pictures and experiences you would really like to put behind you, so you can move on into your future, but they are not so easily forgotten. Perhaps you have trouble sleeping, have nightmares, can't concentrate or there are memories that come to haunt you when you least expect them. Maybe you have a hard time perceiving your own body and emotions and feel isolated from other people. All of these things are *normal* for people who have had traumatic experiences. That doesn't mean things have to stay that way. On the following pages, I invite you practice trauma-sensitive yoga, a self-help method to help you in your healing process.

For thousands of years, yoga masters have explored the connection between our breathing, our body's position and our mental state. They knew very well that words are not enough to calm a highly agitated condition or to re-connect with our own bodies and minds. The masters observed that we can influence our moods and mental condition with how we position our body and how we breathe. So, they developed positions and breathing exercises that enable us to tap into this wisdom. These tools can also help you come to terms with your trauma.

It's quite possible that this booklet will remind you of healing rituals from your own culture. Feel free to combine them with yoga exercises. This booklet and the accompanying videos offer you a way to relieve everyday pressure as well as to have more control over your emotions and your body's reactions. I invite you to take the journey that will help you to help yourself. Here is the link to the videos: <http://bit.ly/tsy-videos> or you can use the QR-Code



Good to know before you start

When you have suffered one or more traumatic experiences, many things can suddenly throw you back into memories your trauma. These things are called triggers. When your trauma is triggered, you become agitated or feel numb, have a sense of being beside yourself, and/or feel helpless. Since triggers come in all shapes and sizes, it is possible that while reading this booklet you will be reminded of your own suffering. When this happens, and you become overwhelmed by the past, I encourage you to lay the book aside for a moment. It is not always easy to recognize the signals and know when to take a break. What can you do to liberate yourself from the whirlpool of traumatic memory and to anchor yourself in the present moment? Whenever you feel you need a break, go to the practical exercises at the back of the booklet and try out a position or breathing exercise. This way, you will discover which exercises are most effective for you. When we do yoga, we enter a space where right and wrong do not exist. The only important thing in yoga is your own perception. To quickly find pointers and exercises, look for these two symbols:



Good to know



Yoga exercises

Trauma and your body

We can all imagine being in a threatening situation. And when we imagine it, we clearly notice that it is definitely a physical experience. We hold our breath and our muscles freeze up, for example. On the emotional level, we are flooded with fear, panic or anger or we are paralyzed and helpless, or even nauseous. When panic sets in, we cannot think, our heart-rate slows down, our body becomes numb and limp and we are close to fainting or actually faint. Trauma shakes us to our very foundations, it impacts our minds, our emotions and our physical reactions. Trauma plants pictures, feelings and physical reactions in our memories. These memories can come back to life and we become afraid or panic, break out in a sweat, our heart races or we become nauseous when a trigger re-awakens our traumatic experience in the present moment.

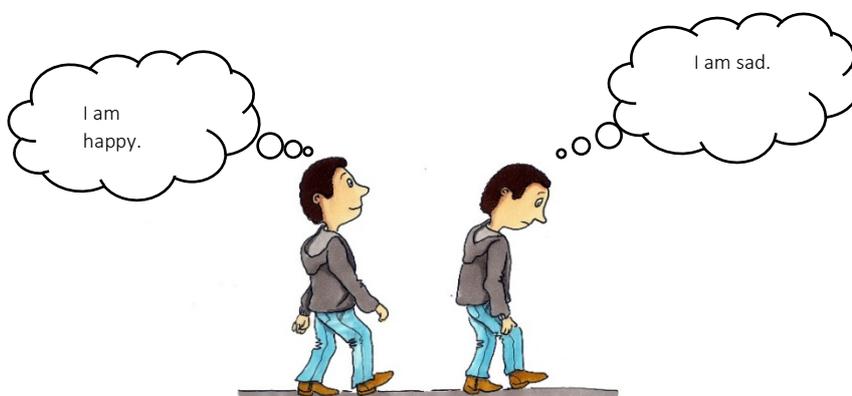
Beyond the memories embedded in our brain, there are physical memories in our bodies. These can manifest themselves with shallow breathing, with constant physical tension, with a slouching posture and with lowered eyes. When we change these physical patterns in our bodies, we can integrate and heal traumatic experiences on a physical level.

This will bring you...

- ❖ ...the ability to soothe your nervous system so you are calmer and more relaxed in your everyday life.
- ❖ ...control over your emotions and physical reactions so you can calm yourself when agitation arises.
- ❖ ...the ability to recognize agitation when it begins to take hold and handle it before it overwhelms you.
- ❖ ...the tools you need to bring you back to the present moment.

How can we help ourselves?

You probably already know that your thoughts can influence your body. Horror visions of the future effect your body and feelings differently than a hopeful, happy anticipation of tomorrow do. We can usually overcome mild stress with self-motivating thoughts and images. But when a flood of feelings and sensations overwhelm us, we need tools to help soothe and settle even powerful agitation. Your body and trauma-sensitive yoga are such tools. Posture and movements are inextricably connected to our reflexes and emotions. So, it makes sense that when we change automated posture and breathing habits, our perception and experience are influenced. A good example you may have heard of: You are slumped down, your shoulders hang low and you think, "I am so sad." When you throw your shoulders back, stretch out your chin and say, "I am happy," it is a completely different experience.



Body, thoughts and emotions

The reason our posture and movements influence our emotional state, moods and thoughts so strongly is because they communicate directly with our brain. We can use this communication to help us! We can discover how our posture and movements influence our state of mind and by changing them, we feel better. This is highly effective method for regulating our body and mind's perceptions has been helping people for thousands of years. Dance, rhythm, drumming and movement as well as tai chi, qi gong and yoga are all tools we can use to influence our state of mind. Over the next pages, I would like to introduce you to one of these methods – yoga.

Yoga

Yoga is an ancient teaching that applies physical positions and breathing exercises to bring our body, mind and emotions into harmony. Yoga supports the balance of all bodily functions and physical actions. Practiced regularly, yoga harmonizes our mental, physical and emotional state of being. If we suffer from imbalance in one or more of these areas, the natural interplay between muscles, nerves and organs is also thrown into confusion. Practicing yoga reinstates the natural interaction so that all components can once more work in harmony. Yoga is neither a religion nor a doctrine. It is a collection of methods that lead us to reestablishing the natural balance between our bodies, minds and emotions. In yoga, we turn our full attention and concentration to physical positions (asanas) and breathing exercises (pranayama) to allow us to remain in the present moment. Yoga helps us to feel at home inside and in control of our bodies, especially when we are flooded with so many distractions, thoughts, emotions and perceptions that threaten to drown us.

Positions/asanas

Yoga is not primarily concerned with physical fitness. Yoga focuses on discovering and calming our minds, on learning attentiveness and being present in the here and now. These abilities are beneficial for all people, especially those who suffer constant inner tension and excessive stimuli, which is often the case with people who have had traumatic experiences. A great many asanas support mental calm and presence in the here and now. When we practice the asanas, we learn that some of them have a calming, relaxing effect while others are activating and stimulating. We can use these varying effects to influence our nervous system and state of being. If we notice we are very tense and nervous, we can try out yoga positions and breathing exercises to find out how they work.

Breathing exercises/pranayama

Our breath is the gateway to our nervous system. Breath-control includes how fast or deeply we breathe, whether we hold our breath or breathe in and out more slowly. Simply how we breathe has a direct impact on our state of being. And every breath we take influences our nervous system – inhaling activates it; exhaling calms. By extending the length of our exhalation we can use its calming power or use the activating power of our breath by inhaling deeply and strongly. When we are frightened or shocked, we automatically take a deep breath and hold it in. When we start breathing again, our breath is shallow. When this breathing pattern becomes habitual, we are constantly stimulating our fight-or-flight response and remain tense even in peaceful, relaxed situations. When our bodies are perpetually tense, they cannot rest and recuperate. So, it's worth your while to give your breath some attention.

Attentiveness – living in the present moment

The concept of attentiveness or awareness has an important place in many traditions. We practice attentiveness, for example, when we observe how emotional excitement blooms and fades but we do not react to it. Or we perceive over-excitement and numbness before they win the upper hand. It is impossible to fail or do something wrong when practicing attentiveness. When we become aware of our thoughts wandering off, we are being attentive. With time and practice, it gets easier to distance

yourself from your *mind movies* and eventually to simply watch them without making value judgements. The better we succeed at being attentive, the less we are bowled over and swept away by emotions and perceptions. Practicing attentiveness helps us to become aware that feelings, thoughts and perceptions constantly change and fade away. In trauma-sensitive yoga, we practice attentiveness by observing how our body and state of being react to a given position or breathing exercise – during the exercise and afterwards, too.

Trauma-sensitive yoga

When you practice trauma-sensitive yoga positions, pay no attention to how the position looks on the outside. The focus is only on your inner experience. There is no other person on earth, neither teacher nor therapist, who can tell you what you should feel or how you should interpret and hold a position. No one can judge or say you are doing it right or wrong. Trauma-sensitive yoga has a variety of emphases:

- ❖ When you begin to **feel your body again**, you can better regulate your emotions.
- ❖ By **staying in the here and now** and observing attentively, you gain energy to let go of the past and re-shape your ideas of the future.
- ❖ A variety of options and choices help you to regain your **self-determination and self-empowerment**.
- ❖ Consequently, you can **act effectively** since you are aware of what you want and what you don't want.
- ❖ **Rhythm and movement** liberate you from helplessness and paralysis – you feel alive.

Reawakening your body

If you have lost contact with your physical perceptions, it can feel like parts of your body are numb or even non-existent. Some people say they exist only in their minds, not in their bodies. Maybe you also suffer from chronic pain and wish to distance yourself from your body because you would rather not feel the pain. Unfortunately, this cuts off communications between your mind, emotions and your body, which means you cannot 'read' the messages your inner being sends to you. Since our emotions and physical perceptions are inseparably interwoven, distancing yourself from your body makes it even more difficult to recognize the signs of arising agitation. Our **inner perceptions** register our body's condition. These perceptions include our heart frequency, our breathing tempo and/or muscle tension. When we are aware of these messages, we can do certain breathing and yoga exercises, so we feel better.



Good to know: Our inner perceptions only register changes in a given situation. For example, when we sit on a chair too long, we lose consciousness of our body's sensations. When something disturbs us, though, our inner perception awakens. We then notice that something has changed and correct our position if we can.

The more conscious you are of your inner perceptions, the easier it will be for you to simply observe what is going on in your body, catching sensations as they arise. This allows you to recognize anxiety or discomfort early on, so you can use an asana or yoga breathing exercise to calm yourself down again.



Good to know: Physical sensations are uniquely individual. They are never wrong! When reading the list below or practicing with the videos, it quite possible that you feel different sensations, or perceive only a little bit or no sensations at all. Any or all of these is fine. Focus on what you do feel and be as open as you can to your body's sensations.

Sensations/Perceptions:

Weight/Pressure/Contact/Textures

- ❖ When you're sitting in a chair, the pressure on your buttocks and the back of your thighs
- ❖ Also, in a chair, the tips of your pelvic bones on the seat
- ❖ The weight you feel when you stretch out an arm or leg
- ❖ A body part contacting another body part, for example, your hand on your thigh
- ❖ The texture of the floor when you slide your foot over it
- ❖ The texture of cloth on skin

Temperature

- ❖ Floor and room temperature
- ❖ The temperature of certain areas of your body, or your whole body

Stretching/ Tension/Relaxation

- ❖ Muscle expansion and pull
- ❖ Muscle tension during an exercise
- ❖ Muscle relaxation after exercising

Movement

- ❖ The movement during an exercise, when holding or relaxing a position
- ❖ The movement of your breath



Exercise: Feel your feet

When you're sitting in a chair and are ready to begin, turn your attention to your feet and perceive where they are on the floor. If they feel fine where they are, leave them there, if they don't, correct the position so it feels comfortable. Now, you have a few options: You can feel the contact your feet make with the floor, maybe by pressing down gently, stamping or moving your feet back and forth. You can also wiggle your toes. Another option is to take off your shoes and feel the floor barefoot. Maybe this way, you can perceive the floor's texture or temperature.



When your body expresses discomfort

Sometimes we need a break from ourselves, that is, from the emotional and physical experiences that are often difficult to endure. We nearly always perceive overwhelming sensations and emotions in our body's center, in the chest and belly, or more precisely, in our throat, lungs, solar plexus, stomach and intestines. We can distance ourselves from these regions step-by-step, turning our attention away from the center and focusing on our arms and legs. If anxiety overcomes you while you are holding a yoga position, concentrate on your hands, feet, arms or legs.



Exercise: Focusing on hands and feet

If you like, you can try this out right now and allow your attention to travel to your hands and feet. Maybe you perceive your feet more clearly, maybe your hands. When you notice your attention slips back to your body's center, try **moving** your hands and feet.



When that doesn't help, take another step and include your immediate surroundings, that is, your body's points of contact with the surfaces around you like the floor beneath your feet and the chair beneath your buttocks.



Exercise: Focusing on the floor and chair

If you wish to try this out, turn your attention to the contact your feet make with the floor, perceive the floor's firmness, temperature and texture. You can do the same with the chair you're sitting on, the back of the chair or its seat. Here, too, you can intensify the contact with **movement**, like rocking back and forth.

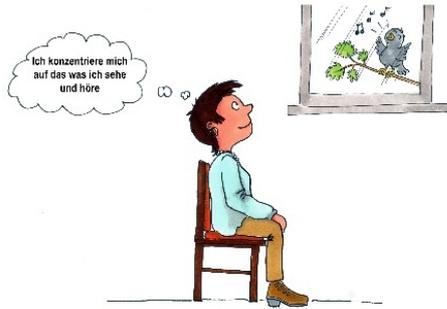


If your anxiety still increases, it helps to gain a definitive distance from your body by focusing on what is outside of you.



Exercise: Turning your senses to the outside world

Should you like to try out this option, turn your senses outward. Look around the room or the area you are in as if you have never seen it before. Open your ears and take note of all the sounds you can hear, near and far.



Staying here and now – Attentiveness

In our thoughts, we spend most of the time in the past or are busy sketching out our future. Our thoughts are seldom focused on the present moment. This is true for all of us. Yet, when our thoughts of the past are heavy with traumatic memories and our thoughts of the future are full of fear, hopelessness and limited possibilities, it becomes more important to hold ourselves in the present moment. By keeping a grip on the present reality, we soothe the anxiety in our nervous system and hold on to our self-effectiveness. Staying in the present moment gives us an anchor to resist the pull of the past and we begin to realize that emotions are like waves breaking on a beach. They begin, rise, grow and fade away like a passing storm dissolving into a cool breeze. Observing emotions and thoughts without being swept away by them is an important step toward improving your capacity for self-empowerment.



Good to know: The only time we can influence is the present moment and only in the present moment can we make good decisions, take good care of ourselves and exercise our will.

We can train ourselves to be attentive in the present moment by perceiving the movement of our breath, the contact between our feet and the floor and/or the tension or relaxation of our muscles. For example, when our breath becomes irregular or our heart beat speeds up, we can intentionally deepen our breathing and concentrate on our ribcage or belly as it rises and falls with each breath. We can focus our attention on the cool air as it streams in with each inhalation and the warm air that flows out when we exhale. As you gradually learn to be aware of your bodily perceptions and influence them, your body will become a stable 'container' that is big enough to hold all your emotions, thoughts and perceptions so you can observe and master them. Attentiveness will give you strength to observe even minor excitements in your body before they win the upper hand. Being in the here and now is an experience you have with your whole body, not just your mind. The moment we turn our attention to our body's sensations, we are in the here and now. When our thoughts wander, and we bring our attention back to our breathing, to the contact with the floor or other bodily perceptions, we come back *here*, to the present moment. When we catch ourselves getting anxious, we intentionally turn our attention to our muscle activity or similar physical sensations. With time and practice, it will become easier to observe sensations like a racing heart and other stress indicators, anchoring yourself in the here and now.



Exercise to remain present: Circling or raising and lowering your shoulders

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If you want to test out my theory to see if it's true for you, too, I invite you to set aside this booklet and take a moment's time for the following exercise. As you were reading, you probably paid no attention to your shoulders, but now that I have mentioned them, you perceive them more. Whenever you're ready, begin to move your shoulders...raising and lowering them or making small or large circles. Can you feel your muscles...feel the movement your shoulders are making while you're moving them? If you keep doing this exercise for a while, your thoughts will begin to travel to the past or future...that is completely normal and the nature of our minds...you can redirect your attention to your shoulders' movements any time. When you notice your thoughts have wandered, then you are successfully in the here and now.



Sometimes remaining present requires more pronounced muscle tension. You can then do the following exercise:



Exercise to remain present: The boat position

If you have the desire to exercise your muscles more intensely, do the following exercise. Slide over almost to the edge of the seat. Now activate your stomach muscles to give your lower back stability. When you're ready, raise your right leg, bent at the knee. You can hold raise your leg higher if you like. Do you feel the muscles in your stomach or in the raised leg? You can either hold this position or lean backwards a bit. Do you feel your stomach muscles more strongly now? If you like movement, simply rock back and forth. And if you want even more muscle action to help you perceive yourself even better, you can stretch out your right leg. If you feel 'lopsided' after this exercise, do the same thing with your left leg.



Self-determination and self-effectiveness

Suffering a trauma means there was a period of time when you had no control over events or over the actions of other people – what you wanted didn't count. This violent invasion of your being can cause you to lose contact with your own body, your own perceptions and your own will. Learning to feel yourself again lets you re-discover what is good for you and what isn't. Awareness of yourself allows you to adapt or alter situations so you feel comfortable. These are insights that have an enormous impact on the small things in everyday life. You regain control of your life. When practicing trauma-sensitive yoga, this means you give yourself permission to decide how you wish to proceed at any given moment. Here are few examples of what I mean:

- ❖ You choose which pose and which breathing exercise you would like to do.

- ❖ You decide how long you hold a pose or do a breathing exercise.
- ❖ You choose whether to practice with eyes open or eyes closed.
- ❖ You can stop any time you want without explanation or reason.
- ❖ You can move anytime, even if you're practicing a motionless asana.
- ❖ You can breathe through your mouth or nose, whatever's good for you. You are free to experiment.
- ❖ You determine how fast you practice a dynamic asana.
- ❖ You decide how minimal or expansive you make your movements.
- ❖ You consciously decide not to hold poses that make you feel uncomfortable or helpless.



Good to know: When trying out an exercise, always make sure it 'agrees' with you. You can adapt the position or your breathing or find other exercises at the end of this booklet to suit your individual needs. If an exercise triggers traumatic memory, look for an exercise that helps you to soothe your nerves and return to the here and now. You can also gain distance from memories when you do something familiar, such as household chores or the like.

Every person has a unique understanding of the positions, experiencing and absorbing them in an individual way. Trauma-sensitive yoga offers you choices to adapt the asanas and breathing exercises to your own needs. You decide how you wish to practice the breathing exercises and poses so your experience is good for you. For example, when you have difficulty breathing slowly and you quickly become breathless, your observation and perception is correct, and you can change the breathing pattern, so you feel safe and secure again. Your personal experience is what counts. There are no ideals to strive for, telling you what you should do or feel.



Exercise: Stretched mountain pose, arms bent or out-stretched

If you like, take some time for the following exercise. Sit down in a chair and straighten your back as far as is comfortable for you. Now, I invite you to raise your arms and stretch them. If you're curious and would like to experiment with what feels best right now, try this: Bend your arms...stretch them up again. Maybe you feel more pull in your sides and arms when your arms are stretched and more in your chest when your arms are bent. Test the two variations and decide which one feels best right now. Maybe they are both good, maybe both are uncomfortable. Sometimes it takes us a while to choose. Take your time.



If you find it difficult to decide and get caught up in selecting criteria to make a decision, let it go. We want to have a physical experience. Why it feels like it feels and how to quickly make a decision are not part of the process. When you notice you begin brooding, simply turn to the next exercise or pose. The more you practice, the more you will realize that the movements and/or poses cause varying sensations, messages your body sends to help you make decisions.

Acting effectively

A traumatic situation is marked by our body's reaction to danger. Our entire organism prepares to fight or to flee the threat. If we cannot defend ourselves by fighting or fleeing, we freeze up, and this inability to act takes hold of our body's memory. For many people, this leads to years of reliving the same situation and repeating the same behavior patterns without knowing how to change things and so they remain unable to act effectively. Taking small steps, we would like to counteract these physical and mental patterns.



Exercise: Making effective corrections

I now invite you to take a short break from reading and reflect a moment to see how you feel in your current position. Maybe you are comfortable through and through. And maybe it's time for a few adjustments, perhaps a bit of movement to release muscle tension and sit more comfortably. When you notice that something's not quite right, slowly and consciously change your position...maybe stretching or bending a bit feels good...or moving your shoulders around. Do your feet have pleasant contact with the floor? If the chair is too high, you can put a pillow under your feet or fold a blanket until it has the right height and your feet are well-supported. How about the chair's seat and back? Are they soft enough? Maybe it's fine for you or you would rather drape a blanket over the chair or get some cushions to make it cozier.



During this small example, you have listened to your bodily perceptions, understood the choices you have and put them into effective, intentional action. Conscious, intentional action is the opposite of conditions common in traumatized people – helplessness, suffering and paralysis. When we experience our own effectiveness, we enjoy a satisfying sense of empowerment and self-determination.



Exercise: Effectively correcting your dancer pose

Now, let's transfer the idea of effective action onto a yoga exercise. To assume the dancer pose, shift your weight onto your right leg. When you're ready, bend your left knee and catch hold of your left ankle with your left hand and gently pull it towards your buttocks. To complete the pose, stretch your right arm straight upwards. If you notice you have difficulty keeping your balance, get a chair or stool to support you. Place your left knee on the chair and complete the pose as described above. If you find the chair seat too hard, remedy the situation by placing a blanket or cushion beneath your knee.



Experiencing your body's rhythm

For many people, life in the aftermath of trauma is as if time stands still. Changes as such are no longer consciously perceived. Yet, life is rhythm. Our lives are distinguished by the constantly shifting interchange from day to night, from tension to relaxation, from inhalation to exhalation and much more. People who can no longer perceive movement are imprisoned in a monotonous state of pain, fear, isolation or numbness.

A series of yoga exercises also follows a rhythm. We take on a position, hold it and then let it go. Before we take on the next pose, we take a moment to become aware of the asana's effect. We can also perceive rhythm when we contract and relax muscles. When we stretch or contract a muscle and then relax it again, we still feel the impact for a while until it eventually fades away. By taking the time to observe sensations as we stretch or contract, but also as we rest and regenerate, we discover that our body is constantly and naturally in motion. When we perceive our bodies at rest following a time of activation, we experience calm – automatically, without doing anything. Taking note of this natural process, whether in your breathing or in your muscles, will strengthen your trust in your own body.



Exercise: Perceiving muscle tension as it rises and falling

If you would like to know how this works, you can do the following exercise. Sit down on the edge of a chair with your legs stretched out and heels on the floor. When you're ready, tighten your stomach muscles to stabilize your lower back and raise your right leg in the air. Maybe you feel muscle tension in your right thigh or in your stomach muscles...maybe nothing happens or something completely different. If you're having difficulty making contact with your internal experience, it may help if you lay a hand on the active muscle. You decide how long you wish to hold your leg up and lower it whenever you're ready. Take a moment's pause to perceive your body. Do you feel your muscles relaxing? Maybe in your stomach or thigh? Or maybe you feel there's a difference in the tension in your right leg and left leg that fades after a moment and then they both feel the same again. When your muscles have recuperated, and your curiosity is aroused, do the same exercise with your left leg.



Motion instead of paralysis

Paralysis and the inability to move are major symptoms of shock reactions and panic. Stiff, frozen positions can trigger and intensify these states of being. This is why we transform static positions into dynamic motion. What can you move? Literally any joint in your body! You can send an impulse to any joint in your body and transform stasis into dynamic motion. Here are a few examples:

- ❖ Circling, turning, bowing your head
- ❖ Raising, lowering, circling your shoulders, arms, hands and feet
- ❖ Swinging your arms from right to left
- ❖ Crossing and uncrossing your arms over your chest
- ❖ Bending and stretching your elbows or knees
- ❖ Twisting, bowing and bending sideways your upper body
- ❖ Moving your whole body back and forth, rocking, circling and/or shaking from head to toe

- ❖ Moving in rhythm with your breathing
- ❖ ...



Exercise: Perceiving breath as a rhythm

I would like to invite you to turn your attention to the movement of your breath. Take a moment's time and ask yourself: Where do I feel myself breathing? In my chest, my ribs or my belly? Maybe you can't feel any movement right now? Sometimes it's easier to notice the movement when you put your hands on the above-mentioned body parts. For example, lay both of your hands on your chest and take your time, probing into the movement. You might feel the movement very strongly or just slightly. You may go a step further if you like and focus on your ribcage. Lay your hands on it, perhaps. After a few breaths, you may notice an inward-outward or upward-downward movement. You can do the same thing by investigating your belly as you breathe. Breathe naturally without changing anything, there is no right or wrong way to breathe. This exercise is simply a way to arouse your curiosity about this endless rhythm and the motion it creates in your body.



How can you start practicing?

Now that you've read this booklet, you're probably wondering how you can begin practicing and reaping the benefits of trauma-sensitive yoga. You can either access and practice with the videos and/or apply the instructions at the back of this booklet.

Videos

You will find the videos on YouTube: <http://bit.ly/tsty-videos> or via:



The videos will help you to focus your entire attention on the exercises. You can practice alone or in a group. You can also take the exercises with you to your therapist and show him or her the ones that help you to relax or feel more present in the here and now. Your therapist can then watch the videos in her or his language and you can practice them together.

Practicing with pictures and instructions

On the last pages of this booklet, you will find a selection of exercises with instructions. These will help you to expand your practice independently, to try out new exercises and set up your personal yoga practice program. Practicing regularly is the key to success, but you do not have to practice every day. You will gain many benefits by practicing once or twice a week.

Effects of the poses and exercises

As you know, we can influence our state of being with poses and breathing exercises. We can also shift our focus to the outside world, opening our eyes and ears, consciously perceiving and feeling our surroundings. Only you, however, can judge the effect a pose or exercise has on you. Here are a few helpful, basic guidelines.

When you feel agitated:

- ❖ Balanced breathing with counting
- ❖ Sun breathing and gentle exercises like cat-cow
- ❖ When you are extremely agitated, begin with vigorous poses such as the stick pose, stretched stick pose and/or boat pose, followed by gentle shoulder circles or neck movements.
- ❖ Forward movements like the cat where you can bend as deeply as you like

When you notice you dissociate (feel 'beside' yourself):

- ❖ Vigorous poses like the stick pose, boat pose, stretched mountain pose or back bend
- ❖ Rhythmic movements are not recommended here since they might intensify the feeling of being beside yourself.

When your body feels numb and stiff

- ❖ Vigorous and rhythmic movements like energetic sun breath or rhythmic side bends or strong, rhythmic movements in the boat pose



A golden rule: Every person reacts differently, depending on her or his personal story, their individual preferences and aversions. Find out what is good for you. Suggestions may be useful, but they also may contradict your personal needs. Listen to your body. It will send you reliable messages with your heartbeat, muscle tension, heat or cold, sweaty hands. Even if you don't know why your body is reacting this way, trust your body's memory – it is truthful – and do not force yourself into positions that are not beneficial to you.

Practical pointers

- ❖ Take a break between exercises. This allows you to perceive how the exercises work on your body. You will notice how muscle tension relaxes or even disappears altogether, how warmth spreads through your body and cools down again. These pauses help your organism learn how to regulate itself again.
- ❖ You are always in control of how long, how intensively and/or how quickly you hold a particular asana – there are no rules.
- ❖ Many asanas are practiced first on one side of your body, then on the other. I have described only one side in this booklet. You can hold a position in the same way on both sides or choose other variations.
- ❖ When you create a yoga program for yourself, you will probably notice that a balancing movement after an exercise feels good. For example, bending after stretching, stretching after bending or shaking out your limbs. Let your body guide you.
- ❖ Trauma alters the way we perceive time, so it's easy to take on too much. Your body, however, will give you reliable messages when a position becomes a strain. To avoid this, you can hold a position for a certain number of breaths, and then relax the position.
- ❖ When you notice you tend to overstep your limits, practice with the videos first. They will help you to find the right measure of practice without overdoing it.

Breathing exercises and yoga positions for everyday practice

You will find a couple of breathing exercises below that you might already know from the videos, others you can read and try out. Remember: When you are doing a breathing exercise, you are in control. You decide how, how long and how intensively you practice an exercise.

Balanced breathing

Balanced breathing is a simple way to learn to control your breathing. With balanced breathing, you can influence the rhythm of your breathing by intentionally inhaling and exhaling for the same amount of time. Balanced breathing has a soothing effect on many people and can help to calm panic attacks.



Exercise

Sit comfortably in your chair. When you are ready to begin, count silently to 3 every time you inhale and again to 3 every time you exhale. If this rhythm is comfortable, then continue with it. If you feel you are running out of breath too soon, then inhale for a count of 2 and exhale for a count of 2. If you want to slow your breathing rhythm even more, inhale for a count of 4 and exhale for the same count. Keeping your breathing rhythm steady and balanced.

Example:

1...2...3 inhale 1...2...3... exhale or longer:

1...2...3...4...5 inhale 1...2...3...4...5 exhale

Extended exhalation

Extending your exhalation is the key to gaining control over your nervous system. Every inhalation activates our nervous system and every exhalation calms it. Once you are familiar with balanced breathing, you can experiment with extending your exhalation. Extended exhalation can help you to soothe yourself and to control a looming panic attack.



Exercise: Extended exhalation

Sit comfortably in your chair. When you're ready to begin, silently count to 3 while inhaling and to 4 while exhaling. If this tempo is comfortable for you, then continue with it. If you feel you are running out of breath, count to 2 when inhaling and to 3 when exhaling. If you want to breath slower, count to 3 as you inhale and to 4 or 5 when you exhale.

Example:

1...2 inhale 1...2...3 exhale or

1...2...3 inhale 1...2...3...4...5 exhale

Throughout the exercise, your breath should come and go smoothly and calmly. The counting will help you to stay in the present moment.



Mountain pose

Sit down in a chair and make your back as straight as feels good right now. To make the stretched mountain pose, raise your arms straight over your head or bend your elbows and raise your hands.



Boat pose

Slide to the edge of the chair and activate your stomach muscles to support your lower back. Raise both arms and then one leg. You can rock back and forth or stretch out your leg.



Feel your feet

Bring your attention to your feet. You can press your feet into the floor, slide them back and forth, lift them up and down or stamp your feet on the floor.



Stick pose

Slide a bit forward on the chair and stretch out your legs, pulling your toes gently toward your body. Intensify the exercise by activating your stomach muscles and stretch out one leg parallel to the floor.



Perceiving your sitting bones

Bring your attention to the contact you make with the seat of the chair. You can intensify the contact with your sitting bones by rocking left to right, by circling your upper body or by rocking front to back.



Back bend

Place the chair with its back on your side. Straighten your back from your buttocks to your neck and bend your spine backwards. You can place your hands on your back to give you support.



Arm stretching

In the mountain pose, interlock your fingers. With your palms pointing outwards, raise and stretch your arms to the front of your body or over your head.



Dancer with chair

Slide to the right of the chair so you can bend your right leg. Take hold of your right ankle with your right hand and gently pull your leg towards your body. Hold onto the chair with your left hand or raise it into the air.



Dancer

Place your weight on your right leg. Bend your left leg and take hold of your left ankle with your left hand, pulling it gently towards your body. Raise and stretch your right arm. If you want, use a chair to support your knee.



Warrior II

Take a step to the right side and turn your right foot to point forward. Raise your arms parallel to your shoulders, keeping your eyes on or beyond your right hand. Good to know: Your right knee is bent in a straight line from knee to ankle.



Shoulder circles

Starting with the mountain pose, begin to make circles with your shoulders or place your hands on your shoulders and make circles with your elbows.



Opening your hips

Lay one ankle on the opposite thigh and pull it gently towards your belly. You can intensify the feeling by gently pressing on the upper knee.



Spinal twist seat

Straighten your back and cross your right leg over your left leg. Lay your left hand on your right thigh and turn your head and upper body to the right. You can let your right arm hang loosely by your side or stretch it out.



Cat cow

Lower your head and bend your spine from the top to the bottom like a cat and then bend forward from the bottom to the top like a cow. Repeat this several times. To stretch your front more, you can raise and stretch your arms.



Side stretches

Raise your right arm and stretch it over your head, bending your upper body to the left and letting your left arm hang loosely at your side. You can practice this exercise more dynamically by stretching your right and left arms alternately, bending your upper body to the right and then to the left.



Neck movements

Turn your head from one side to the other. You can also lower your chin toward your chest and make half-circles from one shoulder to the other. Another option is lower and raise your chin, first toward your chest and then up again.



Warrior II with chair

Slide left on the chair and stretch your left leg behind you with your left foot pointing to the side. Slightly activate your stomach muscles, stretch and raise both arms to your sides. Keep your eyes on your right hand or the space beyond it.



Warrior I with chair

Slide left on the chair and stretch your left leg behind you with your left foot pointing to the front. Slightly activate your stomach muscles and raise your arms over your head.



Sun breath

Begin with the mountain pose on a chair. While breathing in, raise your arms at your sides up to your shoulders or over your head. Breathing out, lower your arms back to your sides.



Breath movement

Consciously breathing in and out, lay your hands first on your chest. After a few breaths, place your hands on your ribcage and then, after a few breaths on your belly. Notice how your breathing moves your body.

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We extend our thanks to all those who have made this project possible