

THE YANTRA TECHNIQUE

The Yantra Technique is a brand new health and fitness practice inspired by the Swedish acupuncture mat phenomenon which helps to relax, revitalise and restore the body's energy levels. The 45 minute routine has been devised by yoga and acupuncture therapist Tracey Wilkinson focusing on breathing to calm the mind, physical poses to strengthen core muscles and relaxation to improve overall wellbeing.

Positioning yourself for your practice



1. Sit at the edge of the non-logo end of your mat with your knees bent and the soles of your feet resting on the floor.
2. Place your back on the contact points, from the base of your spine through to your upper back and shoulders. If your frame is long, centre your back on the mat. Draw your chin in slightly to lengthen throughout your neck. Place your arms by your sides with the palms facing down, keeping your knees bent with your feet placed on the floor.

If you find your head tilting back slightly, place a folded blanket or towel behind your head. Preferably not a pillow because the spine needs to be supported in a neutral position. For the first few minutes you may experience some discomfort but this will subside. If you prefer, until you grow used to the affects of the contact points, you may choose to wear an additional long-sleeved t-shirt, or place a pillowcase between yourself and the mat.



The routine

Stimulating the relaxation response



1. Close your eyes, relax, and become aware of your breathing. Try not to control your breath, simply watch your body breathe.
2. After about a minute, stretch out your legs. Separate your feet to hip width apart, take your arms away from the sides of your body and turn your palms to face the ceiling. Come back to an awareness of your breath noticing the inhalation and the exhalation.
3. If you find your lower back aches when your legs are outstretched, come back to having your knees bent and place a rolled up blanket or towel behind your knees for support.
4. With your next inhalation, draw your toes in towards your nose, push through your heels, tightening up through your feet, legs and into your hips. As you slowly exhale release and relax from your toes, throughout your legs and up into your hips.

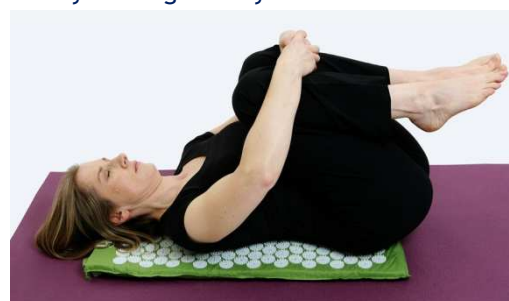
5. As you inhale draw your navel in towards your spine, easing your lower back towards the mat. As you slowly exhale release and relax your abdomen and back.
6. As you inhale open your chest towards the ceiling drawing your shoulder blades closer. As you slowly exhale, release and relax throughout your chest and upper back.
7. As you inhale make tight fists and tense throughout your hands, wrists, arms and shoulders. As you slowly exhale, release and relax through your hands, up your arms and into your shoulders.
8. As you inhale draw your chin close in towards your throat extending through the back of your neck. As you slowly exhale, release and relax throughout your throat and neck.
9. As you inhale tense your face, scalp, and mouth. As you slowly exhale, release and relax throughout your head and face. Unclench your teeth, relax your tongue and perhaps swallow to deepen relaxation in your throat.
10. Stay here in this relaxation position for 2-3 minutes staying focused on your breath without controlling it, simply watching your body breathe.

Deepening your breath

1. Continue to keep your eyes closed and your body relaxed by slowly inhaling to a count of 3. To encourage a gentle pace, try adding the word 'relax' into your count. So "Relax 1 relax 2 relax 3".
2. Now slowly exhale to your count of 3. Practice for 8-10 rounds of breathe.
 - This time retain your breathe for the count of 3 at the end of the inhale. So in for 3, retain for 3, out for 3. Again practice for 8-10 rounds of breathe.
 - Then hold your breathe out for your count of 3 at the end of the exhale. So in for 3, retain for 3, out for 3 and hold out for 3. Again practice for 8-10 rounds of breathe. (Don't worry if you're not sure how many you've practiced, stay relaxed and try not to clock watch. Over time, you'll become used to the length of your practice).
3. Let this extended breath fall away, allowing your natural breathing pattern to return as you focus on being still once again.

The moving practice

1. Let your awareness move to your fingers and toes. Begin to brush the tips of your fingers with the tip of your thumbs. Start to wiggle your toes.
2. Bring your arms up over your head, and stretch out from your fingers to your toes.
3. Bring your knees together and draw them into your chest. Place your hands around your knees and hug in tight, easing out your back by gently rocking from side to side.



4. Bring the soles of your feet together, sliding the heels halfway in towards you, letting your knees drop out to the sides. Bring your arms up alongside your ears, bend your elbows allowing the backs of your hands to rest to the floor. Relax your arms, hands, legs and feet

while softening throughout the length of your back and spine. Make sure your chin is still drawn in. Stay here for about a minute.

5. Draw your knees in and bring your arms alongside your body. Have your left foot to the floor in line with the hip keeping your knee bent. Place the outside of your right ankle at the base of the front of your left thigh.



6. Pick your left foot off the floor drawing the left thigh in towards your chest. Interlace your fingers around the back of your left thigh as you relax your legs and feet, continuing to draw the legs closer in towards your chest. If reaching your thigh with your hands is not available to you, keep drawing your legs in, working your stomach muscles with your arms by your sides palms facing down.

7. Release the left foot back to the floor in line with your hip, and raise your right leg taking hold of it with both hands. Have your hands as far towards your ankle as you can without letting your shoulders lift off the floor. Draw your relaxed right leg in towards your chest. Keep the back of your head resting on the floor. Stay here for about a minute continuing to draw your leg in.



8. Keep the leg raised, releasing your arms back to rest by your sides palms facing down. Push through your right heel drawing your toes in towards your face as you slowly lower your leg until it is in line with your left thigh. Take a few rounds of breath. Slowly lower your leg as you continue to push through your heel, if you would like an additional stretch, hover the heel a couple of centimetres off the floor for a few rounds of breaths. Repeat on the other side.

9. Hug your knees back into your chest with your hands around your knees and relax.

10. Turn around placing the front of your body centrally on the contact points. Have your big toes touching and your ankles dropping out to the sides, relaxing your legs and feet. Bring your arms to your sides with your palms facing the ceiling and turn to rest on the right side of your face. Relax. After a minute or two, turn to rest on the left side of your face.



11. After another 1-2 minutes resting on the left side of your face, bring your forehead to the floor and your arms up alongside your ears.

12. As you inhale raise your right arm, your left leg and head. As you exhale release back down. Repeat with the left arm, right leg and head in time with your breath. Do one more on each side.



13. As you inhale, raise both your arms and both your legs along with your head. Keep breathing as you lift, relaxing into the abdomen. Hold for a few rounds of breath. Release.

14. With your forehead still resting to the floor, keep your lower body anchored as you walk your hands as far round to the right as you can. Hold your pose for about a minute if possible, release sooner if the stretch becomes too strong. Repeat to the left.



15. Move far enough forward on your mat that you can feel the contact points at the lowest point of your thighs, just above your knees. Come up onto your elbows making sure they are in line with your shoulders and wrists. Relax your legs, back and abdomen with your head centred.

16. After about a minute, straighten your arms keeping your abdomen resting on the mat. You can walk your hands a little away from you but if the abdomen is still lifted, come back down onto your elbows. Stay here about a minute, and then come back down to lay on your front again.





17. Bring your hands underneath your shoulders and push yourself up. Walk your knees forward until the front of your ankles just meet the contact points. Rest your chest on or towards your thighs, and make a pillow with your hands having the palms and inside of your arms resting on the contact points.

18. Slowly come up, turning over to place your back centrally on the mat again with your knees bent and soles of your feet to the floor. Have your chin drawn in as you bring your arms out to shoulder height with your palms facing the ceiling. Have your ankles and knees touching, walking your feet in as close to your buttocks as you can.



19. Inhale. Exhale and drop your knees towards the floor on your right side turning your face to the left. Inhale bringing your nose and knees back to centre. Exhale and drop your knees to the left and turn your face to the right. Inhale back to centre.

20. Draw your knees in towards your chest. Inhale. Exhale and drop your knees towards the floor on your right side. Relax from your feet through your legs, hips, back and arms, and then turn your face to the left. Stay in the pose for about a minute or two. Repeat to the left side. If having the knees drawn into your chest is too strong, place your feet back on the floor and rework the first variation.



Total relaxation

1. Release your spinal twist pose and come back to your resting position. Feel the plane of connection between your body and the mat. Rest here, letting go of any remaining tension within your body, within your mind. Once you've settled into physical stillness, come to watch your breath. Stay here resting for 10 minutes.

The Yantra Mat, £39.90 is available at Holland & Barrett, GNC Stores and all good pharmacies and direct from Lifes2good on 0845 399 0038 or www.yantramat.co.uk.