



Yoga to manage stress following acquired brain injury

Ever thought about trying Yoga?

Yoga is a mind/body practice that comprises postures, breathing and meditation. It helps you develop a range of skills that can enable you to relax fully and counteract the negative effects of stress. It does this by creating the relaxation response, helping you to feel calmer, focus on the present and decrease the stress or the fight or flight response.

It can lower blood pressure, lower cortisol levels and increase blood to vital organs.

It has been shown that the practice of postures and postures associated with breathing exercises, have positive effects on pain, depression, and anxiety. On top of managing the symptoms associated with your brain injury you are also currently living through a difficult and stressful period.

“One of the things about yoga that is different from traditional rehabilitation exercises is that it is more whole-body focused. It helps people learn to take their nervous systems to a more calm and relaxed state, which helps with healing.” –Kristine Miller, assistant professor in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences’ [Department of Physical Therapy](#)

To practice Yoga there is no need to purchase any fancy equipment, all you really need is some comfortable clothing and a quiet space. Contrary to what is portrayed in the media, Yoga is not just for flexible people, anyone can access Yoga, it can even be practiced from a chair!


We have produced some breathing practice and some simple yoga postures for individuals with brain injury that can be done standing, sitting, or lying.

As with all exercise be guided by your body and the people around you. Only do the exercises if they are within your abilities and be guided by how you are feeling at the time.

If you are unsure or if you have any concerns you should seek professional advice.

 01722 466117

 enquiries@krysalisconsultancy.co.uk

 www.krysalisconsultancy.co.uk



Simple yoga practice – coordinating movement with the breath

Standing yoga following acquired brain injury

Take care if you have difficulties with your balance. It may be helpful to stand in front of a high back chair for support if you need it.

Stand with your feet roughly hip width apart and with your spine long. To achieve this, it may be helpful to imagine a piece of rope pulling up from the top of your head.

Close your eyes if you feel comfortable and your balance is ok. If you have difficulties with your balance this will be hard for you so keep your eyes open if you need to.

Keep your knees soft.

On an inhale of your breath lift your arms up, fingers pointing to the ceiling. Then exhale and lower your arms back down by your side.

Try to slow the breath down and synchronise the length of the moment with the breath.

Repeat 10 times and then be completely still noticing the effect this has had on your body.

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Simple yoga practice – coordinating movement with the breath

Seated yoga following acquired brain injury

Sit in a firm upright chair with your feet firmly on the ground and with your spine long. To achieve this, it may be helpful to imagine a piece of rope pulling up from the top of your head.

On an inhale of your breath lift your arms up, fingers pointing to the ceiling.


Then exhale your breath and lower arms back down by your sides.

Try to slow the breath down and synchronise the length of the moment with the breath.

Repeat 10 times and then be completely still noticing the effect this has had on the body.

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Simple yoga practice – coordinating movement with the breath

Yoga following acquired brain injury

Lie on your back. If you can get on and off the floor independently you can lie on the floor, alternatively you can lie on your bed.

Use some pillows to make yourself more comfortable by placing one under your knees and two either side of your arms.

Take a moment to feel your body resting on the surface.

On an inhale of your breath lift your arms up, fingers pointing to the ceiling.


Then exhale your breath and lower your arms back down by your sides.

Try to slow the breath down and synchronise the length of the movement with your breath.

Repeat 10 times and then be completely still noticing the effect this has had on the body.

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Breathing practice following acquired brain injury

Sit in a comfortable position, ensuring your back is lengthened. To achieve this, it may be helpful to imagine a piece of rope pulling up from the top of your head

Place your hands wherever they are comfortable.

If you prefer and are able, you can also lie down on your back with your knees bent, feet parallel and roughly hip width apart.

Lower your chin slightly to lengthen the back of the neck.

Close your eyes.

If it is comfortable breath in and out of your nose.

Softly close your mouth, relax the jaw.

Bring your awareness to the breath for few moments.

On an inhale, feel your breath moving through your nose and down into your belly, feel your belly fill.

On an exhale feel your belly empty and your breath moving back up and out of your nostrils.


Work with this for as long as is comfortable for you.

You may want to start off with just several breaths and build it up each time.

After the practice sit or lay quietly for a few moments before getting up.

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Reconnect with nature

Being around nature has a positive impact on our health and well-being. It is also good for our immune system.

Connecting with nature we switch our body into a 'rest and digest' mode which is the opposite of "fight or flight" (our stress response)

Spending time in nature helps us feel happier and more connected, and being both happy and connected makes us feel healthier.


Just 20 minutes per day around nature can have a significant impact on our stress levels. Examples of getting this nature 'fix' could include;

- taking a walk in the park
- sitting under a tree
- tending to a flower bed.
- put up a bird feeder in your garden
- Grow a plant from seed i.e sunflower or cress!
- Watch the sunrise

If you are unable to get 20 minutes, then small bursts of 5-10 minutes can be beneficial too.

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