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Yoga for the menopause – stretches to soothe your symptoms

Why more women are turning to yoga to help them alleviate symptoms of the menopause

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More and more women are turning to yoga for help with some of the symptoms of the menopause.

Yoga provides a **variety of health benefits** as we get older, and it can also have a positive impact on the quality of life for women going through the **menopause**. You may be experiencing hot flushes, difficulty sleeping or even forgetfulness.

While yoga is not a miracle cure, it can certainly be part of a strategy to help you cope with your symptoms.

Credit: Petra Coveney

Many women find yoga can help with their menopause symptoms

Petra Coveney is a menopause yoga specialist. She's a published author on the subject and has trained more than 400 instructors in her particular style of menopause yoga.

Here she gives her advice on practicing yoga during the menopause, along with three simple postures for you to try at home.

I've never done yoga before. Is it safe to start when I'm going through the menopause?

"Yes, you can begin yoga at any age or stage of life," says Coveney. "Start with a beginner's course with a teacher who can offer props and safe modifications for any physical injuries or conditions you may have."

What form of yoga is best to practise?

"Start with beginners' or level one hatha yoga classes – you can try other styles when you gain confidence.

"Avoid hot yoga if you are experiencing hot flushes, headaches, menopause fatigue. Restorative yoga is good for stress, insomnia and fatigue. Yin yoga is helpful for relaxing emotion and muscle tension.

"Or look for a specific menopause yoga class, so you can combine different types of yoga to alleviate your symptoms. Being in a class with other menopausal women reminds us we are normal and we are not alone."

Credit: Petra Coveney

Petra Coveney says practising yoga can really help during the menopause

Does meditation in yoga help?

"Lower levels of oestrogen in menopause affect our brain, not just our body. Some of us experience more psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression and feeling overwhelmed or cognitive symptoms such as brain fog and short-term memory loss.

"Stress also exacerbates these symptoms, so learning simple breathing and meditation practices can reduce stress, improve concentration and help lift your mood."

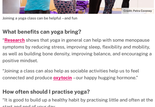
How can yoga help my menopause symptoms?

"Yoga cannot rebalance the hormones that decline in menopause, but it is a valuable part of a holistic approach that can include nutrition, exercise, mental health and medication such as HRT."

Is there any reason I shouldn't do yoga?

"Everyone can practise yoga, but it is important to find a teacher and a style of practice that suits your needs. If you have physical injuries or any concerns, then speak to your doctor first. Then find a teacher who is trained to modify poses to support your body.

"Not all styles of yoga are the same. Hot yoga can aggravate hot flushes, and dynamic ashtanga yoga builds strength – but it can be exhausting if you have menopause insomnia or joint pain. Restorative yoga is relaxing, but it won't boost your bone density, strengthen your muscles or improve heart health."


Credit: Petra Coveney

Yoga can be helpful as part of a holistic approach to the menopause

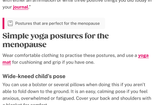
Can I practise yoga while I'm taking HRT or other menopause medication?

"Always check with your doctor first if you are taking any medication, but yoga is a very safe practice for most people and oestrogen in HRT can improve flexibility by reducing muscle inflammation and joint pain."

Are inverted postures safe if I am having hot flushes?

"Standing forward-fold poses, where the head is lower than your heart, can cause a rush of blood to your head. This may trigger a hot flush or headache, so try to avoid these if those are issues for you.

"There are other restorative inverted poses you can try instead. For example, you can lie on your back with your legs raised up against a chair or a wall. This is perfect for calming your nervous system, helps restore energy if you are feeling fatigued and can aid in preparing your body for sleep."


Credit: Petra Coveney

Joining a yoga class can be helpful – and fun

What benefits can yoga bring?

"**Research** shows that yoga in general can help with some menopause symptoms by reducing stress, improving sleep, flexibility and mobility, as well as building bone density, improving balance, and encouraging a positive mindset.

"Joining a class can also help as sociable activities help us to feel connected and produce **oxytocin** – our happy hugging hormone."

How often should I practise yoga?

"It is good to build up a healthy habit by practising little and often at the start and end of your day.

"A 15-minute yoga stretch in the morning will help lubricate and mobilise stiff joints and muscles. You can add a simple breathing technique to feel energised and stimulate digestion, and then finish with a gratitude meditation or an affirmation to create a positive mindset for the day ahead.

"In the evening, before bedtime, practise 10-15 minutes of stretches that release physical and emotional tension stored in your body, add a calming **breathing technique** to soothe your nervous system, and finish with either an affirmation or write three positive things you did today in your **journal**."

Postures that are perfect for the menopause

Simple yoga postures for the menopause

Wear comfortable clothing to practise these postures, and use a **yoga mat** for cushioning and grip if you have one.

Wide-kneed child's pose

You can use a bolster or several pillows when doing this if you aren't able to fold down to the ground. It is an easy, calming pose if you feel anxious, overwhelmed or fatigued. Cover your back and shoulders with a blanket for comfort.

Credit: Petra Coveney

Wide-kneed child's pose is an easy, calming pose for when you're feeling anxious

Come to your hands and knees on the yoga mat. Spread your knees as wide as your mat, keeping the tops of your feet on the floor with the big toes touching.

Bring your belly to rest between your thighs and rest your forehead to the floor. Relax the shoulders, jaw and eyes.

If it is not comfortable to place the forehead on the floor, rest it on a block or on your fists. Finding a comfortable place to rest the forehead is key to gaining the soothing benefit of this pose.

Unless you're resting your head on your fists, you can stretch your arms in front of you with the palms facing the floor, or bring your arms back alongside your thighs with the palms facing upwards.

Raised legs on a chair

This is a perfect pose for fatigue or a feeling of being overwhelmed. It can help prepare you for sleep and is soothing for the nervous system.

Credit: Petra Coveney

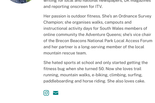
Lying on your back with your legs raised is soothing

Place a blanket just in front of a chair, sofa or coffee table. Sit down on the floor and then bring your legs on to the chair, low table or cushions.

Place a small cushion or folded blanket under your pelvis. Elevate your hips slightly and wrap a blanket around your head –tuck it in around your neck and ears to cut out external sounds.

Restorative reclined butterfly pose

Do this with your spine elevated at an angle on a raised bolster and hips supported on pillows. It is perfect for hot flushes because it helps to release physical heat from your hips and chest, while restoring energy.


Credit: Petra Coveney

Reclined butterfly posture can help with hot flushes

Begin sitting on the floor, legs extended. Bring the soles of your feet together with the knees out to the side, so that your legs make a diamond shape.

Lie back, either on the floor or a bolster. Place your hands on your belly or out to the sides. Use cushions under your knees too, to help your legs to relax without overstretching the inner thighs.

Try to build up to being able to stay in each of these poses for at least ten minutes if you can. Set a timer and take a mere pause – a break in your day to alleviate these symptoms and reset your nervous system. Your body will thank you.

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Philippa Cherryson is Saga Exceptional's Fitness Passions Channel Editor. Philippa has been a journalist for 30 years, writing for local and national newspapers, UK magazines and reporting onscreen for ITV.
Her passion is outdoor fitness. She's an Ordnance Survey Champion; she organises walks, campouts and instructional activity days for South Wales members of online community the Adventure Queens; she's vice chair of the Brecon Beacons National Park Local Access Forum and her partner is a long-serving member of the local mountain rescue team.
She hated sports at school and only started getting the bug for exercise in her late 40s, through dancing, running, mountain walks, k-biking, climbing, surfing, paddleboarding and horse riding. She also loves cake.

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