

Yoga for Life

TOTAL MIND AND BODY RELEASE

By Janet Hennard

What if your yoga class went like this. You enter a softly lit room and find your place on a mat, perhaps near the glow of strategically placed candles. Yoga props appear — a bolster for each person, along with blankets, pillows and blocks. For the next hour or so your teacher guides you through a class of only 4 or 5 poses, each held for 5 to 20 minutes. You fall in love with each gentle prop-supported backbend or forward fold, each light twist or hip-opener. You wonder

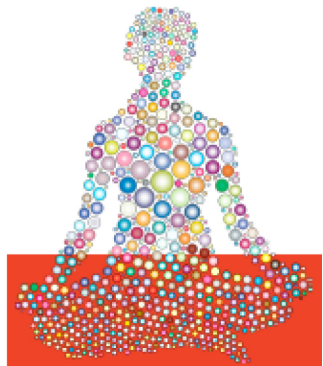
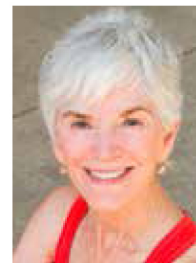
how long it's been since you've experienced such complete physical and emotional release.

You're in a restorative yoga class, and this is for real. Gaining in popularity with anyone experiencing stress or just wanting to re-connect with their center, restorative yoga is a still, slow and mindful practice. It's especially popular with the 50+ crowd whose bodies aren't necessarily crying out for high-impact exercises and which frankly may feel depleted from years of over-doing. You have plenty of time in each pose to explore and meditate on the sensations in your body and the calming of your mind.

Yoga teachers like to explain the benefits of restorative yoga by talking about the central nervous system, which has two opposite components: the sympathetic (fight or flight) system, and the parasympathetic (relaxation) system. A stressful world often helps to keep your sympathetic system excessively active, resulting in chronically high levels of stress hormones, eventually detrimental to your health. But with the very first restorative pose, you've triggered your parasympathetic system. The result is a lower heart rate, lower blood pressure and other physical responses that promote feelings of calm and well-being.

Couldn't we all use some of that? ▶

Janet Hennard, MA, RYT500, C-IAYT, is a registered yoga teacher and certified yoga therapist who teaches classes in the Dallas area. She also offers private yoga sessions for those with special needs.



How Does Restorative Yoga Restore?

- ▶ Deeply relaxes the body and mind
- ▶ Offers a still, slow, mindful practice
- ▶ Balances the nervous system
- ▶ Helps reduce high stress hormone levels
- ▶ Promotes feelings of well-being

