

YIN YOGA SEQUENCES





Dr Bryan Ng (Osteopath)

Bachelor of Science (Clinical Science)
Master of Health Science (Osteopathy)

Bryan is a qualified Osteopath registered with the Osteopathy Board of Australia and the Pain Association of Singapore. He is a graduate of Victoria University, Melbourne, and has clinical work experience in Australia and Singapore. He has conducted postgraduate research on the treatment and management of low back and sacroiliac joint pain, and completed further postgraduate training in pain neuroscience.

As a complement to his osteopathic practice, Bryan is a certified yoga instructor (Yoga Alliance E-RYT 200) and has a keen interest in teaching yoga for therapeutic and preventative care. He is also a highly sought-after anatomy and movement mechanics trainer for yoga-related workshops and teacher-training programs. Currently, he runs his own private practice at The PainFree Clinic in Novena Medical Centre (www.thepainfreeclinic.com.sg)

WHAT IS YIN YOGA?

Yin Yoga is a quiet, meditative practice consisting of floor poses held for 3 to 5 minutes with the muscles relaxed in order to affect the body's connective tissues, joints and ligaments. These tissues are stretched or compressed in a safe and balanced manner, to allow for smoother flow of energy through the body, aiding joint lubrication and restoring vitality. By consciously attending to the breath, sensations and thoughts that arise with clarity and compassion, Yin Yoga helps to cultivate a sense of equanimity both on and off the yoga mat.

WHY PRACTICE YIN YOGA?

The benefits of Yin Yoga can be further elaborated by examining its influence on different dimensions of human life:

PHYSICALLY, Yin Yoga engenders increased pliancy in the joints within natural ranges of motion. Sustained but appropriate degrees of tension and compression of the fascia, tendons and ligaments of various joints in the yin poses stimulate hydration to these tissues, bringing more ease and comfort when we are being still, and more gracefulness in movement.

ENERGETICALLY, Yin Yoga enhances and harmonizes blood circulation and calms the nervous system. This allows us to feel both relaxed and rejuvenated after a yin yoga practice.

EMOTIONALLY, by being mindful of and accommodating various emotions as they arise while we hold a yin pose, we get to 'ventilate' the emotional energy and allow it to flow through, and thus become less stressful and more workable.

MENTALLY, the mind-training component of Yin Yoga helps to cultivate mental steadiness in face of challenging or difficult sensations, emotions or thoughts that may arise as we hold a pose. We do this by training ourselves to bring the focus back to the felt-sense of breathing in and out as we hold the pose. We begin to see thoughts as less 'solid' and substantial like clouds passing through a clear sky, hence we cultivate the ability to become aware of and question long-held beliefs. We learn how to choose to cultivate wholesome or more skillful ways of thinking (perspectives) and abandon, unskillful thought patterns.

THREE PRINCIPLES OF YIN YOGA

1. COME INTO THE POSE TO AN APPROPRIATE DEPTH

Move slowly into the shape of the pose, feeling for the first sensation of stretch or pressure, and stopping there at the balance point between comfort and challenge.

2. RESOLVE TO REMAIN STILL

Minimise on unnecessary fidgeting to allow both the body and mind to settle into stillness, moving only when the sensations become a little too overwhelming to sustain, requiring modification or coming out of the pose earlier.

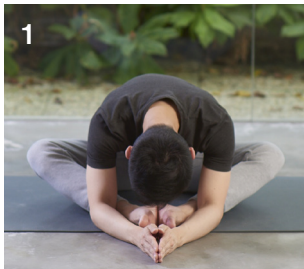
3. HOLD THE POSE FOR A PERIOD OF TIME

Each pose is usually held for 3 to 5 minutes unless otherwise stated. The sustained stretch or pressure is what helps to strengthen and hydrate the collagen fibres in ligaments and tendons.



BASIC YIN YOGA SEQUENCE

This is a basic sequence working on the spine, hips and legs in a balanced way. Proceed slowly and carefully, listening to your body as you come to an appropriate edge, where the stretch sensations are moderately stimulating and NOT a painful struggle. Be especially cautious with any sharp, burning and electric quality of pain near joints. For beginners, each pose can be held for up to 3 mins, gradually extending the time to 5 mins with regular practice. Coming out of the pose early or modifications may be necessary, and the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher is advisable.



1. BUTTERFLY

From a seated position, bring the feet together and then slide them away from you until you form a diamond shape with your legs. Bend forwards from your hips and allow your spine to round, resting your forearms on the floor. Allow your head to hang down towards your feet arches.

Target areas: stretch to inner thighs, outer hips, and entire back.



2. SHOELACE

Sit cross-legged then slowly bring the left knee on top of the right. When the left leg is on top, the weight will be shifted slightly more towards the right sitting bone. Try to ground through the entire pelvis as you round the spine forwards. Rest the hands or forearms on the floor in front of you. Remember to repeat the pose on the other side, with the right knee on top of the left.

Target areas: stretch to low back, outer hips and thighs, compression in groin region.



3. SPHINX

Lie on your belly and prop yourself up on your forearms with the elbows directly under or slightly forwards of your shoulders. Keep the chest slightly lifted and the chin slightly tucked in to lengthen the back of the neck. The legs are relaxed with the feet about hips-distance apart.

Target areas: mid to low back compression.



4. CATERPILLAR

Sit with legs straight out with feet about hips-distance apart. Allow the knees to bend slightly (or supported on a bolster) as you round your spine forwards, bringing your front lower ribs as close to your thighs as possible. Relax your arms by your sides and keep the head and neck in line with your spine.

Target areas: stretch to entire back, hamstrings and calves.



5. RECLINING TWIST

Lie on your back with both knees bent. Shift your hips slightly to the right before lowering both knees to the left. Keep your right shoulder blade on the mat as you form a twist in your spine. Rest your right arm with the elbow bent at a right angle on the floor next to your head. Remember to repeat the pose on the other side.

Target areas: rotation stretch to mid and low back, stretch to right hip and right chest areas.



6. LEGS UP WALL

Sit up with the right hip against the wall then swivel to lie on your back, sliding both legs up the wall. Have the buttocks as close to the wall as possible with the sacrum resting on the mat. You may wish to add padding to the back of the head.

Target areas: gentle stretch to back of legs while allowing the spine to be relaxed.

Finish the sequence by hugging the knees to your chest then turn to one side before sitting back up.

YIN YOGA FOR THE SPINE

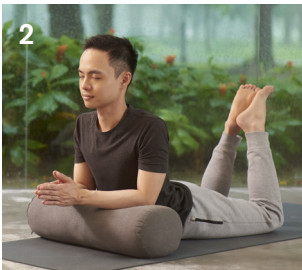
The spine has six degrees of freedom, meaning that it can move forward and backward, side-bend and rotate right and left. The following sequence explores all these movements, purposefully and carefully stressing the ligaments and fascia of the spine. Dull, diffuse and achey sensations are to be expected, but feel free to adjust the intensity or come out of the pose earlier if it feels too overwhelming. Practitioners with history of disc or sciatic nerve-related pain are cautioned not to push themselves to the maximal limits of their range of motion. A gentle firming action of the low abdominal and inner thigh muscles may provide additional support to the spine.



1. SUPPORTED BRIDGE

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet hips-distance apart on the floor. Lift the buttocks off, placing a block at the appropriate height under your pelvis (NOT low back). The low back is arched, with the arms, shoulders and head resting on the mat.

Target areas: stretch to hip flexors, abdomen and chest, mild low back compression.



2. SPHINX PLUS

Lie on your belly and prop yourself up on your forearms with the elbows resting elevated on a bolster. Keep the chest slightly lifted and the chin slightly tucked in to lengthen the back of the neck. The legs are bent at the knees with feet resting against each other. If the intensity of low back pressure is too much, feel free to lower the forearms and legs onto the floor.

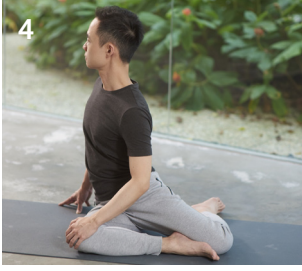
Target areas: mid to low back compression, stretch to hip flexors.



3. HALF BUTTERFLY

Sit with both legs straightened out on the mat, then bend the right knee placing the sole of right foot against the left inner thigh. Bend forwards from the hips and allow the spine to round. Rest your hands on the mat while keeping the shoulders relaxed. Continue with #4 Deer Twist on the same side.

Target areas: stretch to hamstrings and calf of straight leg, and entire back.



4. DEER TWIST

From Half Butterfly, bend the left knee to point the left foot behind you, keeping the right foot against the left inner thigh. Take hold of your right knee with your left hand and turn your chest further to the right.

Target areas: spinal twist with hip joints in both external & internal rotation.

Remember to repeat poses #3 and #4 on the other side.



5. CATERPILLAR

Sit with legs straight out with feet about hips-distance apart. Allow the knees to bend slightly (or supported on a bolster) as you round your spine forwards, bringing your front lower ribs as close to your thighs as possible. Relax your arms by your sides and keep the head and neck in line with your spine.

Target areas: stretch to entire back, hamstrings and calves.



6. BANANA

Lie on your back with the legs straight and begin to walk your feet slowly to the left until you feel a stretch to right side of your hips. Cross the right ankle over the left. Then side-bend the trunk to the left and clasp on to your elbows overhead. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Target areas: stretch to convex side of outer thigh, hip, ribcage and armpit areas.



7. FINAL RELAXATION

Finish the sequence by hugging your knees to your chest and then lying on your back with arms and legs comfortably apart. You may also wish to support the knees with a bolster under them, which will help to ease the low back. Let go of any remaining tension with each exhalation effortlessly. Allow your body and mind to rest in that calm, quiet space.

YIN YOGA FOR THE HIP JOINTS

The hip joint is a ball-and-socket joint formed between the thigh bone and pelvis. It facilitates rotary movement essential in walking and provides stability as weight-bearing joints. Yin yoga helps to maintain flexibility in the hip joints while hydrating and strengthening the ligaments and tendons. In this sequence, appropriate stress will be applied to the groin, inner thigh and outer hip areas. Practitioners need to exercise caution that no localised pain around the knee joints are felt at any time. Dull sensations of stretch are mainly around the hips.



1. WIDE KNEE CHILD

Sit on your heels with the big toes touching, then bring the knees apart until a light stretch is felt in the inner thighs. Bend forwards to bring your chest towards the mat, resting the forehead on your forearms. Try to keep the buttocks weighted on or towards the heels.

Target areas: stretch to groin and inner thighs.



2. SWAN

From Child pose, glide forwards onto your hands and knees. Bring the right knee behind your right wrist and rotate the hip so that the right heel is resting in front of your left hip. Straighten and slide the left leg back and keep the trunk as upright as you can. You may need some padding under your left kneecap and right buttock. Continue with #3 Sleeping Swan on the same side.

Target areas: stretch to outer hip and thigh of front leg and hip flexor of back leg, mild low back compression.



3. SLEEPING SWAN

From Swan, bend forwards to bring the chest towards the right knee, resting the forehead on your forearms. You may also choose to rest more propped up on a bolster, especially if there is any pain in the front knee. Rest in Child pose when you come out of Sleeping Swan.

Target areas: stretch to groin, outer hip and thigh of front leg.

Remember to repeat poses #2 and #3 on the other side.



4. SHOELACE

Sit cross-legged then slowly bring the left knee on top of the right. When the left leg is on top, the weight will be shifted slightly more towards the right sitting bone. Try to ground through the entire pelvis as you round the spine forwards. Rest the hands or forearms on the floor in front of you. To release, uncross the legs slowly and lean back. *Move on to #5 Dragonfly before repeating Shoelace on the other side.*

Target areas: stretch to low back, outer hips and thighs, compression in groin region.



5. DRAGONFLY

Sit upright with your legs stretched out in front of you, then slowly bring the legs apart until you feel a mild stretch in the inner legs. You can choose to stay upright or bend forwards to the point where the chest is still lifted and the spine is not over rounding. To release, hug the knees into the chest seated. *Remember to repeat #4 Shoelace with the right knee on top.*

Target areas: stretch to groin, inner thighs and low back areas.



6. SLEEPING BUTTERFLY

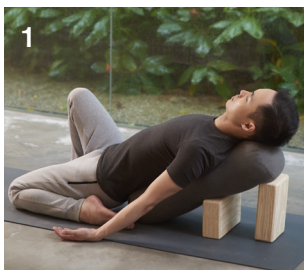
Set up the bolster on an incline with two blocks at medium and high levels. Sit in front of the bolster and lie back onto it, add padding behind the head if needed. Bring the feet together then drop the knees out to either side. The closer the heels are to the pelvis, the stronger the stretch in the inner thighs, so choose an appropriate level of intensity.

Target areas: stretch to groin and inner thighs.

Finish the sequence by hugging the knees to your chest then turn carefully to one side before sitting back up.

YIN YOGA FOR THE FRONT BODY

Prolonged sitting and slouching tends to restrict full diaphragmatic breathing and compress the soft tissues located in the front of the body. This sequence will work on stretching these areas including the ankle dorsiflexors, quadriceps, hip flexors, abdominal and chest muscles. Practitioners need to exercise caution that no localised pain around the knee and low back joints are felt at any time. The use of a bolster for back support is usually necessary in the Saddle poses to avoid undue strain to the knee and spinal joints. The three poses of the Dragon cycle are meant to be done all on the same side, holding each Dragon variation for 1 – 2 mins, before repeating the cycle on the other side.



1. HALF SADDLE

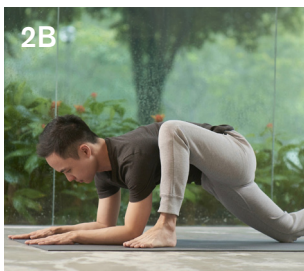
Set up the bolster on an incline with two blocks at medium and high levels. Sit on your heels in front of the bolster before releasing the right leg, placing the right foot on the mat. Slowly lie back onto the bolster, add padding behind the head if needed. For a more advanced option, the right leg can be straightened and the back can rest on a flat bolster or even on the mat. Release by carefully rolling off the bolster to the right side. Repeat the pose on the other side.



Target areas: stretch to hip flexor and front thigh/shin of reclining leg.

2A. DRAGON CYCLE: HIGH DRAGON

From Down Dog, step the left foot forwards between the hands and lower the right knee onto the floor into a low lunge. Check if you need padding under the right kneecap. Bring the torso upright, resting your hands on the left thigh or on blocks placed on either side of the front leg. Sink the pelvis forwards and down.



Target areas: stretch to hip flexor and quadriceps of back leg, and to groin area.

2B. DRAGON CYCLE: LOW DRAGON

From High Dragon, lower your forearms down onto the mat. You may also choose to rest your forearms on a bolster to lessen the intensity of the pose. The left foot may also be angled out 45° to give more space to the left hip.

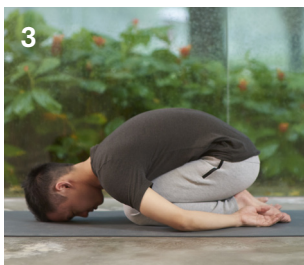
Target areas: stretch to quadriceps of back leg, groin and inner thigh of front leg.



2C. DRAGON CYCLE: DRAGON TWIST

From Low Dragon, keep the right forearm on the mat and turn the chest to the left, placing the left hand on the left knee. Angle the left foot out more to the side of the mat if necessary.

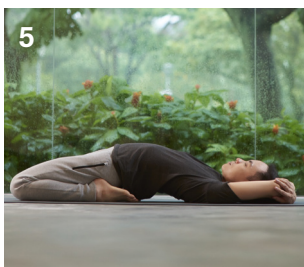
Target areas: mild spinal twist with stretch to quadriceps of back leg, both groins and inner thighs.



3. CHILD

From Dragon Twist, bring both hands onto the floor, supporting the body weight as you slowly bring both knees together before sitting back onto your heels. Rest in Child pose for a few minutes before repeating the Dragon cycle on the other side.

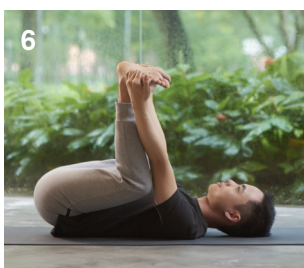
4. DRAGON CYCLE ON OTHER SIDE



5. FULL SADDLE

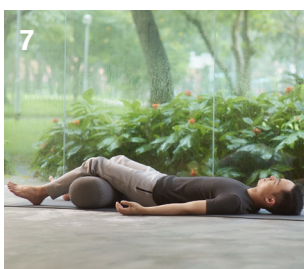
A bolster either flat or inclined like in #1 Half Saddle may be used to support the back. Otherwise, sit on your heels before leaning backwards to lie on the mat. The knees may be apart and arms either resting by your side or clasped overhead. To come out, release one leg at a time, then hug the knees to the chest.

Target areas: full stretch to front of ankles, thighs, hip flexors, abdomen and chest, mild low back compression.



6. STIRRUP

Lie on your back with the knees bent and hugged against the chest. Then separate the knees apart and grab hold of the feet with your hands from the outside. Gently pull at the feet so that the knees move closer towards the armpits.



Target areas: stretch to groin and inner thighs, low back decompression after Saddle.

7. FINAL RELAXATION

Finish the sequence by hugging your knees to your chest and then lying on your back with arms and legs comfortably apart. You may also wish to support the knees with a bolster under them, which will help to ease the low back. Let go of any remaining tension with each exhalation effortlessly. Allow your body and mind to rest in that calm, quiet space.

YIN YOGA FOR THE SHOULDERS & NECK

The shoulder girdle includes the collar bones, shoulder blades and the ball-and-socket shoulder joints resting on the foundation formed by the ribcage and upper back. To improve shoulder mobility and lessen unnecessary strain to the neck, stretches targeting the thoracic spine and chest areas are essential. The following sequence works these areas in a balanced manner. In comparison to the hip joint, the shoulder joint has less stability and the ligaments are not as strong and extensive. Hence, yin poses stressing the shoulders are generally held for shorter duration of 1 – 3 mins. Care needs to be taken that no sharp, burning or electric-like sensations are felt in the arms and shoulders while holding the poses.



1. WIDE KNEE CHILD TWIST

Sit on your heels with the big toes touching, then bring the knees apart until a light stretch is felt in the inner thighs. Bend forwards and bring your right elbow in front of the left knee and rest the back of your right arm on the mat. The chest is turned towards the left and the right side of the head is on the floor. The left hand can be rested on your low back. Release and rest in child pose before repeating on the other side.

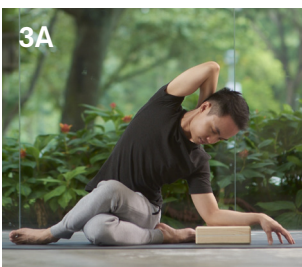


Target areas: stretch to groin and inner thighs, rotation of the spine and compression of right shoulder.

2. MELTING HEART

From child pose, glide forwards onto your hands and knees. Keep the buttocks directly over the knees then bring your chest and chin down onto the mat, extending your arms forwards. The mid back will be arched but try to minimise over-compression in the back of the neck. To release, sit back into child pose.

Target areas: stretch and compression to thoracic spine and shoulder joints.



3A. SHOELACE CYCLE: LATERAL SHOELACE

Sit cross-legged then slowly bring the left knee on top of the right. Keep the right buttock grounded as you sidebend to the left, resting your forearm on a block. The right arm can be raised with the hand resting on the upper back to deepen the stretch. Turn the head to look downwards.

Target areas: stretch to neck, triceps, shoulder & ribcage on the convex side.



3B. SHOELACE CYCLE: EAGLE ARMS

From Lateral Shoelace, sit back upright and cross the right elbow over the left and spiral-wrap the hands to bring the shoulder blades apart. Alternatively, the hands can hold onto the shoulders if spiral-wrapping is not possible. Option to bend forwards resting the elbows on the top knee or on a block.

Target areas: stretch to muscles between shoulder blades and upper back.



3C. SHOELACE CYCLE: COWFACE ARMS

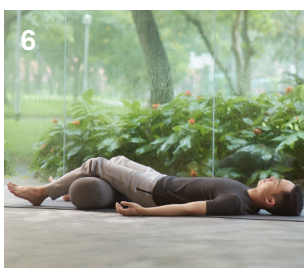
Bring the left hand behind the back and up between the shoulder blades. Take the right arm overhead and bend at the elbow, reaching to hold the fingers of both hands together. The hands can hold on to a towel or yoga belt for an easier option. Avoid over-straining the shoulder joints.

Target areas: deltoid, triceps, rotator cuff muscles and shoulder joint ligaments.

Release arms and legs, rest on your back for a while before repeating the Shoelace cycle on the other side.



4. SHOELACE CYCLE ON THE OTHER SIDE



5. RECLINING TWIST

Lie on your back with both knees bent. Shift your hips slightly to the right before lowering both knees to the left. Keep your right shoulder blade on the mat as you form a twist in your spine. Rest your right arm with the elbow bent at a right angle on the floor next to your head. Remember to repeat the pose on the other side.

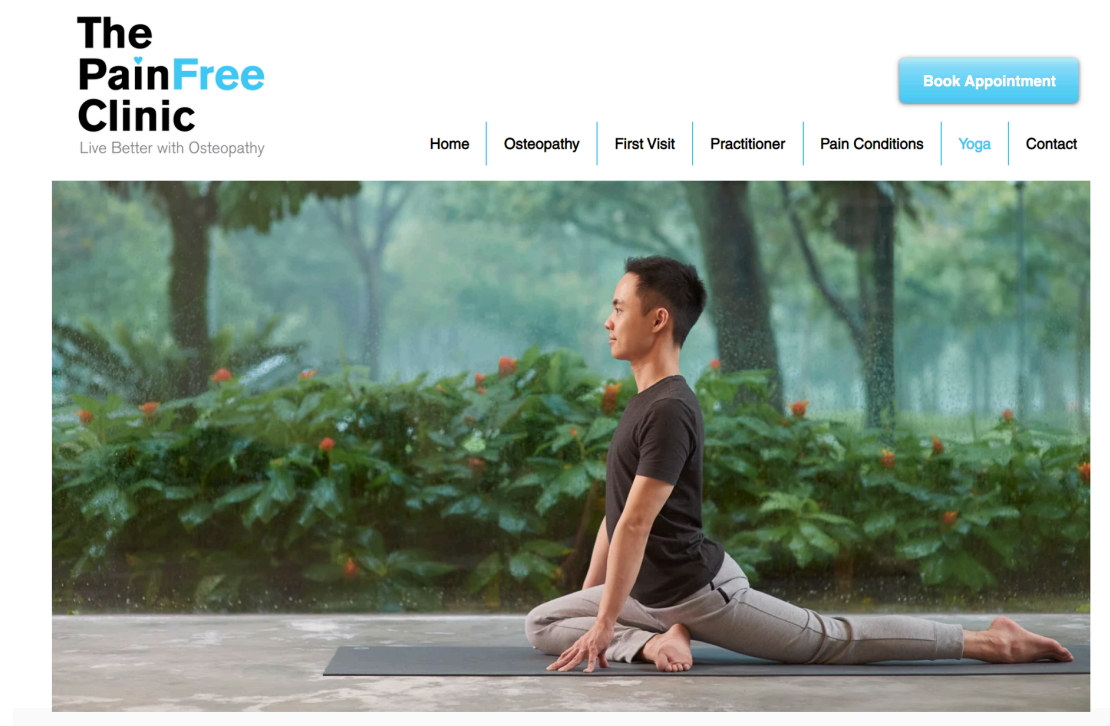
Target areas: chest stretch and spinal rotation to mid and low back.

6. FINAL RELAXATION

Finish the sequence by hugging your knees to your chest and then lying on your back with arms and legs comfortably apart. You may also wish to support the knees with a bolster under them, which will help to ease the low back. Let go of any remaining tension with each exhalation effortlessly. Allow your body and mind to rest in that calm, quiet space.

For more information on Bryan's clinical work and yoga-related goodies, please follow him on social media.

- **The PainFree Clinic Website** www.thepainfreeclinic.com.sg



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