

Just Breathe Registered Yoga School · JBRYS

Yin Yoga Teacher Training Manual



A Comprehensive Guide to the Art and Practice of Yin

"Be still. Go deep. Return to yourself."

Authored by Nicole Hayman-Sherman, Grand Master of Yoga, E-RYT
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Just Breathe Registered Yoga School (JBRYS)
Rome, New York · 2026

Welcome Letter

Dear Student,

Welcome. I am so glad you are here.

This manual and training are an invitation — not a demand, checklist, or curriculum to conquer. They invite you into a practice with the quiet power to change everything precisely because it asks you to do so little.

Yin Yoga is a practice of slowing down. In a world that prizes speed, productivity, and constant stimulation, stillness is a radical act: to stay with sensation, meet yourself honestly, and soften into the long, quiet space of a held posture. This is the heart of Yin.

During this training, you will study anatomy, philosophy, Traditional Chinese Medicine, sequencing, and the art of holding space. You will learn postures, meridians, and connective tissue principles. More than any of that, I hope you will learn for yourself. Your relationship with stillness, discomfort, and surrender is the truest foundation of your teaching.

There will be moments when things feel hard — when sensation asks you to stay, when a concept feels elusive, or when a posture feels impossible in your body. I invite you to stay, get curious, and let those moments be teachers too.

You are entering this training at the right time, as the right person, with exactly the body, mind, and history you carry. That is enough. You are enough.

I am honored to walk this path with you.

With warmth and deep respect,

Nicole Hayman-Sherman

Grand Master of Yoga, E-RYT 500, YACEP, RCYT, RPYT, CMT, AP, AYS

Founder & Lead Teacher

Just Breathe Registered Yoga School (JBRYS)

Rome, New York

How to Use This Manual

This manual is designed to be a living companion for your training and your teaching life beyond it. Rather than reading it once and setting it aside, return to it throughout the course, mark the passages that challenge or clarify something for you, and use the reflection prompts to connect the material to your own body and practice. The manual is most useful when it becomes part study guide, part teaching reference, and part personal journal.

As you work through the chapters, read slowly. Let the ideas settle before moving on. Some concepts will land immediately; others will make more sense after you have felt them in your own body during class. Allow your practice and your study to inform each other in this way.

Write in the margins. Use the notes pages at the back. Keep a separate journal alongside this manual if that serves you — one where you record your personal reflections, the moments that surprised you in your practice, the questions that haven't yet found answers. Yin Yoga is a contemplative tradition, and your inner landscape is as important a text as anything written here.

Pay particular attention to the *Teacher's Note*, *Key Concept*, and *Reflection Prompt* callout boxes throughout the manual. These moments are where the conceptual and the experiential meet — where information becomes wisdom. Sit with them.

Above all: approach this material with the same quality of attention you will bring to a Yin posture. Not urgency. Not striving. Curious, present, unhurried awareness. That is the practice — here on the page, and there on the mat.

This manual brings together the full foundation of the Yin Yoga Teacher Training: history and philosophy, anatomy, Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Three Tattvas, posture study, sequencing, teaching methodology, pranayama, meditation, contraindications, continuing practice, resources, and key terms. As you move through the chapters, notice how these strands continually return to one central teaching: Yin Yoga is not about achieving a shape, but about learning to meet the body, breath, mind, and spirit with patience, curiosity, and respect.

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Introduction to Yin Yoga

What You'll Learn: The basic definition of Yin Yoga; how Yin differs from Yang practice; who the practice serves; why stillness is central to the method; and how the principles of time, surrender, and individualized alignment shape every posture.

What Is Yin Yoga?

Yin Yoga is a slow, floor-based yoga practice in which postures are held for extended periods of time — typically three to five minutes, and sometimes considerably longer — with the deliberate intention of targeting the deeper connective tissues of the body. Unlike the more active, dynamic styles of yoga that engage and strengthen the superficial muscle groups, Yin Yoga directs its attention to fascia, ligaments, joint capsules, and bones: the slow responding, relatively inelastic tissues that are inaccessible through brief or repetitive movement.

The practice was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s primarily by Paulie Zink, a martial arts expert and yoga teacher whose background in Taoist yoga and Chinese martial arts formed its philosophical and physical foundation. Zink called his method "Taoist Yoga." Paul Grilley studied with Zink and, combining this approach with his extensive knowledge of anatomy and the meridian system of Traditional Chinese Medicine, shaped the practice into what we now know as Yin Yoga. Sarah Powers later deepened the practice's contemplative dimension by weaving in Buddhist mindfulness and psychology, giving students not only a physical practice but an integrated framework for working with the mind and the interior life.

The Yin-Yang Principle

To understand Yin Yoga, one must first understand the ancient Taoist concept from which it draws its name. In Taoist philosophy, Yin and Yang are not opposing forces at war with one another — they are complementary, mutually arising qualities that together form the wholeness of any

phenomenon. Night is not the enemy of day; cold is not the enemy of warmth. They define and depend upon each other, ebbing and flowing in a perpetual dance of balance.

In the context of the body and of yoga practice, Yang qualities include movement, heat, rhythm, repetition, and muscle engagement. They are the qualities of active yoga styles — Vinyasa, Ashtanga, Power Yoga — which build strength, cardiovascular capacity, and heat in the body. Yin qualities, by contrast, include stillness, cool, slowness, passivity, and surrender. A body in Yin is not working; it is yielding.

Modern life, by almost any measure, is predominantly Yang. We are stimulated, hurried, scheduled, and stressed. Our nervous systems rarely receive an invitation to truly rest. Yin Yoga is precisely that invitation: a deliberate, structured turn inward, away from doing and toward being. To practice Yin is to restore balance — not by rejecting the Yang of active life, but by honoring what the body and mind need in order to sustain it.

Who Is Yin Yoga For?

Yin Yoga is, in principle, accessible to practitioners of all experience levels — from complete beginners to seasoned yoga teachers. Its slow pace and floor-based nature remove many of the barriers that more dynamic practices present, and its emphasis on individual variation means that no two students need to practice identically. There is no single correct expression of a Yin posture; there is only the expression that is correct for a specific body on a specific day.

The practice is especially beneficial for athletes and individuals engaged in high-intensity physical training, who often experience tightness in connective tissue that dynamic movement does not adequately address. It is deeply valuable for those dealing with chronic stress, anxiety, or nervous system dysregulation, as the long holds activate the parasympathetic response and quiet the body's alarm systems. Practitioners of active yoga styles who find their flexibility is not improving despite consistent practice will often discover that adding Yin is the missing piece — the quality of load required to create change in the deeper tissues. And for those seeking a more contemplative, meditative dimension to their physical practice, Yin Yoga offers an unparalleled door.

Yin is also practiced with appropriate modifications by those recovering from certain injuries, those managing chronic conditions, older adults, and individuals for whom the demands of more active practice are simply not accessible. This breadth is one of the great gifts of Yin Yoga: it meets students where they are.

Teacher's Note

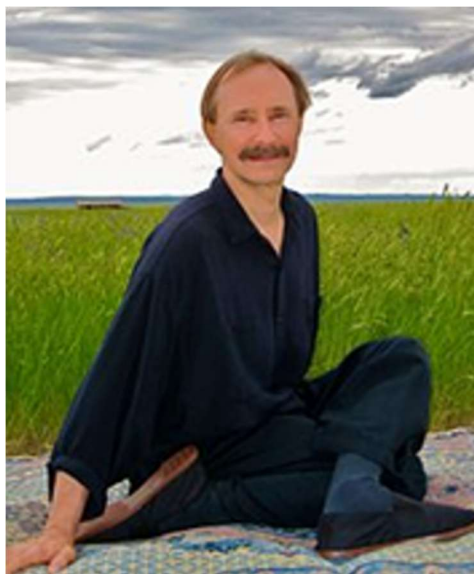
"You may find that students come to Yin Yoga expecting ease — only to discover it is one of the most challenging practices they have ever encountered. Stillness asks us to meet ourselves fully. There is nowhere to hide in a five-minute hold. Hold space for that. Let it be exactly as hard as it needs to be."

History & Philosophy

What You'll Learn: How Yin Yoga emerged from Taoist, Hatha Yoga, anatomical, and contemplative traditions; how Tao, Yin/Yang, Wu Wei, Qi, and mindfulness inform the practice; and why philosophy matters for teaching.

Origins of Yin Yoga

The roots of Yin Yoga reach back through multiple streams of wisdom: the Taoist movement arts of China, the hatha yoga traditions of India, and the anatomical investigations of contemporary Western teachers. Paulie Zink, the practice's originator, was a Taoist Yoga master and martial arts champion whose approach to the body was fluid, receptive, and deeply informed by Chinese philosophical traditions. The postures he developed were not separate from philosophy — they were philosophy made physical.



Paulie Zink. Source: Wikipedia

Paul Grilley encountered Zink's work in the late 1980s and was immediately struck by the distinctiveness of what Zink was teaching. Grilley had a background in anatomy and a deep personal interest in the meridian theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine. He recognized that the long-held, passive postures of Taoist Yoga were doing something fundamentally different from anything he had encountered in conventional yoga: they were reaching the connective tissues. Drawing on his anatomical knowledge and his study of the meridians, Grilley developed the systematic framework, the vocabulary, and the anatomical rationale for Yin Yoga as a distinct practice. His teachings continue to be considered foundational in any serious study of the form.



Paul Grilley. Source: YinYoga.com

Sarah Powers, a longtime student of Grilley, brought a third essential dimension to the practice. A devoted practitioner of Buddhist meditation and a student of Vipassana, Theravada, and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, Powers recognized in the long holds of Yin Yoga a natural container for the development of mindfulness. She integrated Buddhist psychology — particularly the teachings on impermanence, suffering, and the nature of mind — into the Yin framework, creating what she calls an "insight practice in the body." Her book *Insight Yoga* remains one of the field's essential texts.



Sarah Powers. Source: SarahPowers.com

Both Paul Grilley and Sarah Powers have written and published books, produced videos, and offer training and in-depth workshops for those interested in learning more about their yoga styles, methods, and broader approaches to practice.

And finally, we would be sorely amiss not to include Bernie Clark. Clark created and runs YinYoga.com and has written several books on Yin Yoga, anatomy, and practice, including *The Complete Guide to Yin Yoga: The Philosophy and Practice of Yin Yoga*, *YinSights*, *Your Body, Your Yoga*, *Your Body, Your Spine*, and more.

According to his biography on YinYoga.com, Bernie has been teaching yoga and meditation since 1998. He holds a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Waterloo and brings together an intense interest in yoga with a scientific approach to investigating the nature of things. His ongoing studies have taken him deeply into mythology, comparative religions, and psychology, all of which have clarified his understanding of the ancient Eastern practices of yoga and meditation. His teaching, workshops, and books have helped many students broaden their understanding of health, life, and the source of true joy.

Bernie's yoga practice encompasses both the hard, Yang styles, such as Ashtanga and Power Yoga, and the softer, Yin styles exemplified by Yin Yoga. His meditation experience reaches back to the early 1980s, when he first began to explore Zen meditation. During those years, while wrestling with the relationship between practice and theory, Bernie also worked as a member of the executive team of one of Canada's oldest and largest high-technology companies.



Bernie Clark. Source: YinYoga.com

Yin Yoga as Hatha Yoga

Yin Yoga is also a form of Hatha Yoga: the yoga of bodily mastery and the yoga of asana. Although modern Hatha Yoga is often associated with visible postures, strength, and flexibility, its deeper purpose has always been to prepare the body and mind for steadiness. The body is trained so it can sit, breathe, concentrate, and meditate without being constantly pulled away by discomfort or restlessness.

In this sense, the original purpose of asana was deeply Yin-like. Sitting for meditation is passive, but it requires training: the spine must be supported, the breath must remain steady, and the mind must learn not to flee the first moment of discomfort. Yin Yoga returns us to this earlier understanding of practice. It trains the body for stillness and trains the mind to remain present inside that stillness.

Taoist Philosophy

Taoism is among the oldest and most influential philosophical and spiritual traditions in the world, arising in China and attributed in its written form to the sage Lao Tzu, whose *Tao Te Ching* remains one of the most widely translated texts in human history. Taoism is less concerned with doctrine than with nature, flow, and intelligent surrender to what is. Tao, sometimes translated as “the Way,” refers to the natural order of the universe — the movement toward balance, wholeness, and harmony that underlies all things. Yin and Yang are relative qualities within Tao: each

contains the seed of the other, and balance is a living process of adjustment, response, and return.

In *YinSights*, Bernie Clark uses the familiar Serenity Prayer to explain the philosophy of balancing Yin and Yang: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, grant me the courage to change the things I can change, and grant me the wisdom to know the difference.” This prayer is a simple and accessible doorway into Taoist understanding. To yield to serenity is Yin: receptive, accepting, and willing to soften into what cannot be forced. To have the courage to change what can be changed is Yang: active, decisive, and willing to move. The wisdom to know the difference is what creates harmony. In Taoist language, that living harmony is Tao.

Yin & Yang Attributes

Yin Qualities	Yang Qualities
Dark, quiet, cool, receptive, passive, yielding, inward, moon, water, earth, valleys, softness, stillness, winter, and the capacity to nourish spirit.	Light, warm, active, expressive, outward, sun, fire, heaven, mountains, firmness, movement, summer, structure, creativity, and the capacity to give form.

Wu Wei — non-doing

Wu Wei, often translated as "non-doing" or "effortless action," describes the Taoist ideal of acting in complete harmony with the natural order — not forcing, not straining, but moving with the current of things rather than against it. In a Yin posture, *Wu Wei* is the instruction to stop trying. To stop reaching for the pose and simply allow the body to surrender into it. The effort of Yin is the effort of letting go — paradoxical, subtle, and enormously powerful.

The Five Elements Theory

Taoist cosmology describes the universe, and the body within it, as organized around five elemental forces: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. Each element governs a season, a set of organs and meridians, a set of emotional qualities, and a characteristic way of moving through the world. In Yin Yoga, the Five Elements provide a rich framework for designing seasonal and

thematic classes — matching postures to the meridians of the season and offering students a way to understand their bodies and their emotional landscapes through this ancient lens.

Qi — Life Force Energy

Central to Taoist philosophy and Traditional Chinese Medicine is the concept of *Qi* (also written as *Chi*): the vital life force or organizing energy that animates living beings within this traditional framework. In Chinese medicine, Qi is understood as the intelligence that supports physiological function, vitality, and internal balance. Qi is said to flow through specific pathways in the body called meridians. When Qi flows freely, health, vitality, and emotional steadiness are supported; when Qi is blocked, deficient, or excessive, discomfort or imbalance may arise. Yin Yoga, through sustained load on the connective tissue pathways through which meridians are traditionally mapped, is understood within this framework to support the free and balanced flow of Qi.

Five Systems of Taoist Practice

Traditional Taoism includes several streams of practice. These are offered here not as a complete scholarly survey, but as a broad orientation for yoga teachers noticing the parallels between Taoist and yogic practice.

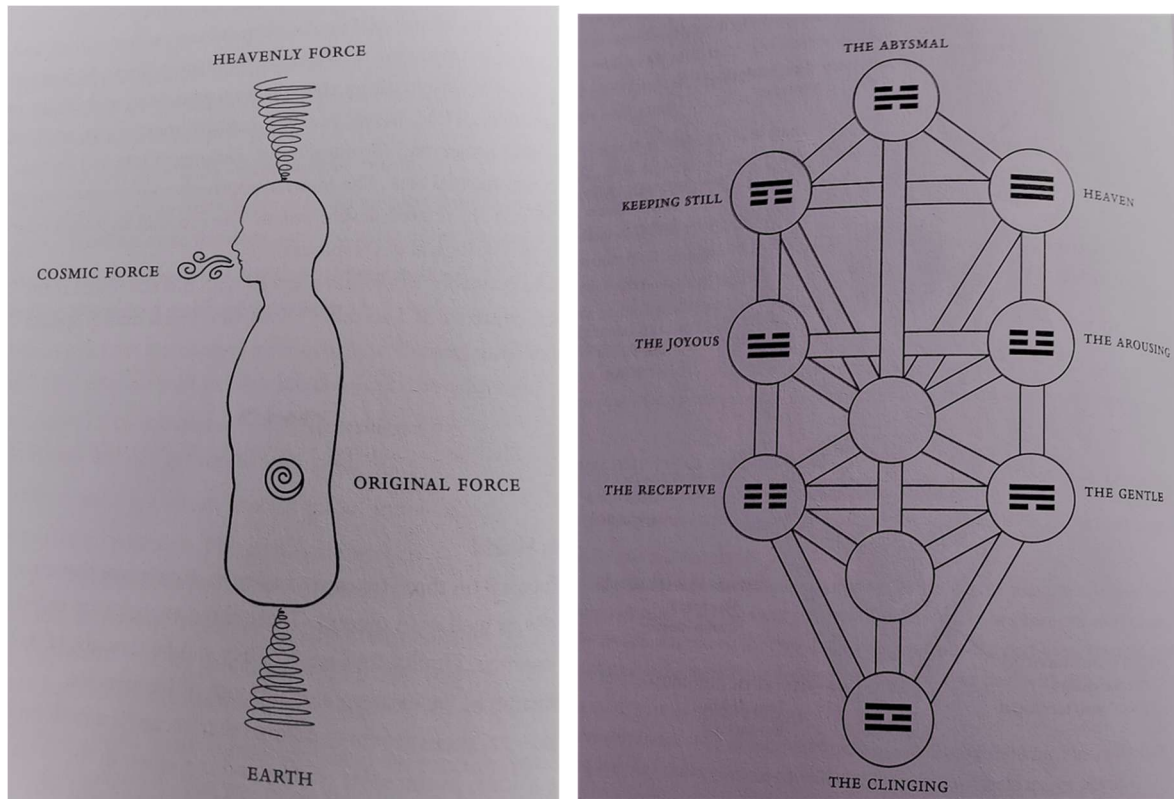
- **Magical Taoism** invokes the powers of nature, elements, and spirits for healing, protection, health, and prosperity.
- **Divinational Taoism** studies patterns in the heavens, earth, and life itself in order to live in harmony with universal forces; the I Ching belongs to this stream.
- **Ceremonial Taoism** developed Taoism into more formal religious and ritual structures.
- **Action and Karma Taoism** emphasize proper action, morality, good deeds, and the accumulation of merit.
- **Internal Alchemy** focuses on conserving, refining, and circulating energy to cultivate health, longevity, and spiritual transformation.

Internal Alchemy, Breath & the Tan Tien

Internal alchemy is concerned with transforming the ordinary body-mind into a more refined, balanced, and awakened state. Its first priority is the conservation of energy. Yin and Yang energies are cultivated and balanced through breath, movement, meditation, and energetic practice. Taoist systems describe three primary energetic centers, often called the Tan Tien: the

lower center in the pelvis or hara, the middle center in the heart region, and the upper center at the third-eye area. Breath is used to stimulate, refine, and circulate energy among these centers.

This offers a meaningful bridge to yoga. Just as yogic practice speaks of prana moving through nadis and chakras, Taoist practice speaks of Qi moving through meridians and energetic centers. Both traditions recognize the breath as more than oxygen exchange: breath is the carrier of life force, the vehicle through which subtle energy is gathered, directed, and refined.



Source: Complete Book of Chakras by Cyndi Dale

Buddhist Influences

Sarah Powers' integration of Buddhist psychology into Yin Yoga deepened the practice from a physical discipline into a full-spectrum contemplative path. The Buddhist concept of *sati* — mindfulness, or clear, non-reactive awareness of present-moment experience — is perhaps the most foundational of these contributions. In the long holds of a Yin posture, students are invited not merely to endure sensation but to observe it with clear, nonjudgmental attention. This is

precisely the practice of mindfulness: meeting what is, as it is, without the overlay of preference or aversion.

The Buddhist teaching of *dukkha* — the suffering that arises not from pain itself but from our resistance to it — is made viscerally immediate in a Yin posture. When a student resists the discomfort of a four-minute hold, the discomfort often intensifies. When they soften their resistance and allow the sensation to simply be what it is, it frequently becomes workable, even interesting. This is not a theory; it is a lived experiment students can conduct in every class.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness — mindfulness of the body, of feeling-tone (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral), of mental states, and of mental objects — find a natural home in the held postures of Yin Yoga. A five-minute Dragon pose is an invitation to observe all four. This is why experienced Yin practitioners often describe the practice as inseparable from meditation. It is meditation, conducted in the body.

Key Concept

"In Yin Yoga, the pose is not the point. The pose is the container. What happens inside the container — the quality of attention, the willingness to be present, the choice to stay — is the practice itself."

Anatomy for Yin Yoga

What You'll Learn: The anatomical logic of Yin Yoga, including tissue response, connective tissue, fascia, ligaments, joint capsules, tension, compression, range of motion, skeletal variation, and safe stress.

Yin vs. Yang Tissues

To understand why Yin Yoga works the way it does, we must first understand the fundamental distinction between the two broad categories of tissues in the human body as they relate to yoga practice. This distinction is not merely theoretical — it has profound practical implications for how we approach postures, how long we hold them, and why.

Yang tissues — primarily muscles and blood — are warm, elastic, and highly vascular. They respond beautifully to repetitive, dynamic movement. When a muscle is worked rhythmically — contracted and released, lengthened and strengthened — it adapts relatively quickly. The blood flow that supports muscles means they heal efficiently and respond to training with measurable speed. This is the domain of Yang yoga: the steady breath, the flowing sequence, the muscles warming and opening with each sun salutation.

Yin tissues — fascia, ligaments, tendons, joint capsules, and bones — operate under an entirely different set of principles. They are relatively inelastic, largely avascular, and slow responding. They require a different quality of stimulus in order to be safely and effectively stressed: low load, long duration, and soft, surrendered musculature. When muscles are fully relaxed, the mechanical load of a posture is able to travel beyond them and reach the deeper connective structures. This is the biomechanical premise of Yin Yoga: by approaching postures passively, with relaxed muscles and sustained time, we create an appropriate stress in precisely the tissues that most need it.

The Theory of Exercise

The theory of exercise is simple: we stress the tissues of the body, and then we allow them to rest. In this context, stress does not mean chronic fight-or-flight stress. It means an appropriate mechanical load applied to tissue for the purpose of stimulating adaptation. Muscles, fascia, tendons, ligaments, joints, and bones all respond to stress and rest, but they do not all respond in the same way.

Yang exercise stresses muscles through rhythmic contraction, repetition, heat, and movement. Yin exercise stresses the joints, ligaments, deep fascial networks, and connective tissues through stillness, relaxation, low load, and time. This is why Yin tissues should not be trained in a Yang way and Yang tissues should not be trained in a Yin way. Each tissue type has its own intelligence, timing, and method of adaptation.

Neither Yin nor Yang asana is superior. They are different medicines. Yang practice builds strength, heat, mobility, and muscular stability. Yin practice supports joint health, fascial hydration, patience, interoception, and the capacity to stay. Practiced together, they complete one another.

Fascia, Connective Tissue & Fixations

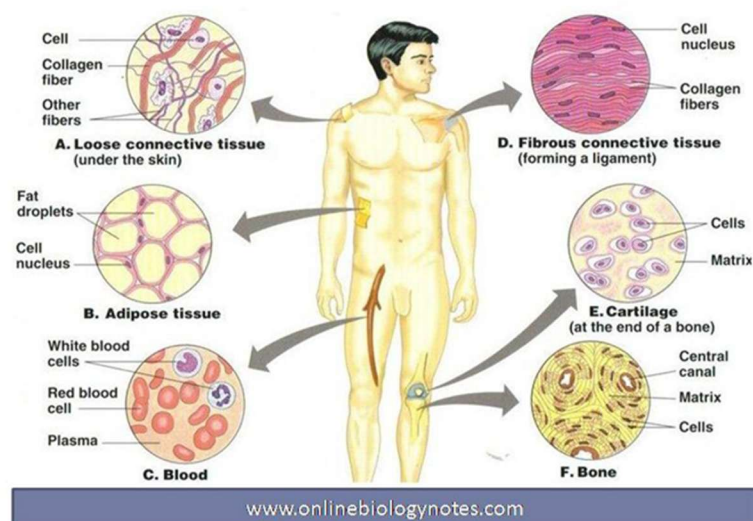
Connective tissue is tissue that connects, supports, binds, or separates other tissues or organs. It typically contains relatively few cells embedded within an amorphous matrix, often with collagen, elastic, or other fibers. Connective tissue is the material between and surrounding cells, and it includes cartilaginous, fatty, elastic, fluid, and structural tissues. In other words, it is not one single thing; it is a family of tissues that gives the body support, shape, continuity, and internal relationship.

Six commonly recognized types of connective tissue are:

- Loose ordinary connective tissue
- Adipose tissue
- Blood and blood-forming tissues
- Dense ordinary connective tissue
- Cartilage
- Bone

Connective Tissue Type	Primary Role in the Body	Relevance to Yin Yoga
Loose ordinary connective tissue	Supports, cushions, and connects structures while allowing movement between layers.	Responds to gentle, sustained loading and contributes to fascial glide and tissue hydration.
Adipose tissue	Stores energy, cushions organs, and provides insulation.	Reminds teachers that every body has different padding, pressure tolerance, and prop needs.
Blood and blood-forming tissues	Transport nutrients, oxygen, hormones, immune cells, and waste products.	Supports the broader conversation about circulation, recovery, and tissue nourishment.
Dense ordinary connective tissue	Forms tendons, ligaments, and strong support structures that resist force.	A major Yin focus because tendons, ligaments, and joint capsules respond slowly to low-load stress.
Cartilage	Cushions joints, supports structure, and allows smooth movement between bones.	Encourages respect for joint health, gradual loading, and avoiding sharp or compressive pain.
Bone	Provides structure, protects organs, stores minerals, and remodels in response to load.	Helps explain anatomical variation, compression, and why some ranges of motion cannot be changed by stretching.

Connective tissue



In Yin Yoga, these tissues get “stretched,” meaning they respond to the position we place the body in and to the gentle stress applied over time. However, as we have seen and will continue to see, they do not respond in the same manner as muscles and other tissues commonly

emphasized in a Yang style of yoga. Connective tissues tend to respond more slowly, and they require patience, appropriate loading, stillness, and time.

With this foundation in mind, we can now look more closely at the connective structures most relevant to Yin Yoga: joints, tendons, and fascia. These tissues help explain why Yin postures are held with patience, stillness, and low-load stress rather than muscular effort. Understanding how they respond will clarify why Yin Yoga is not simply “stretching,” but a method of intelligently influencing the deeper support systems of the body.

Fascia

The word *fascia* means “to band” or “to bandage.” In simple terms, fascia refers to fibrous connective structures that vary in thickness and density depending on where they are located in the body. Fascia is made primarily of collagen and may also include elastic fibers and extracellular fluid. It is found throughout the entire body, forming a continuous web that surrounds, supports, separates, and connects tissues.

A practical way to understand fascia is this: fascia is connective tissue that does not have a more specific name, such as ligament or tendon. It tends to be moist and slippery in nature, allowing tissues to glide along one another. When fascia sustains damage, develops scar tissue, or forms an adhesion, this glide may be reduced. Adhesions can slow, restrict, or stop muscles and tissues from moving freely. A person may feel tension directly in the restricted area, but because the body is interconnected through fascia, restriction in one place may also be felt somewhere else.

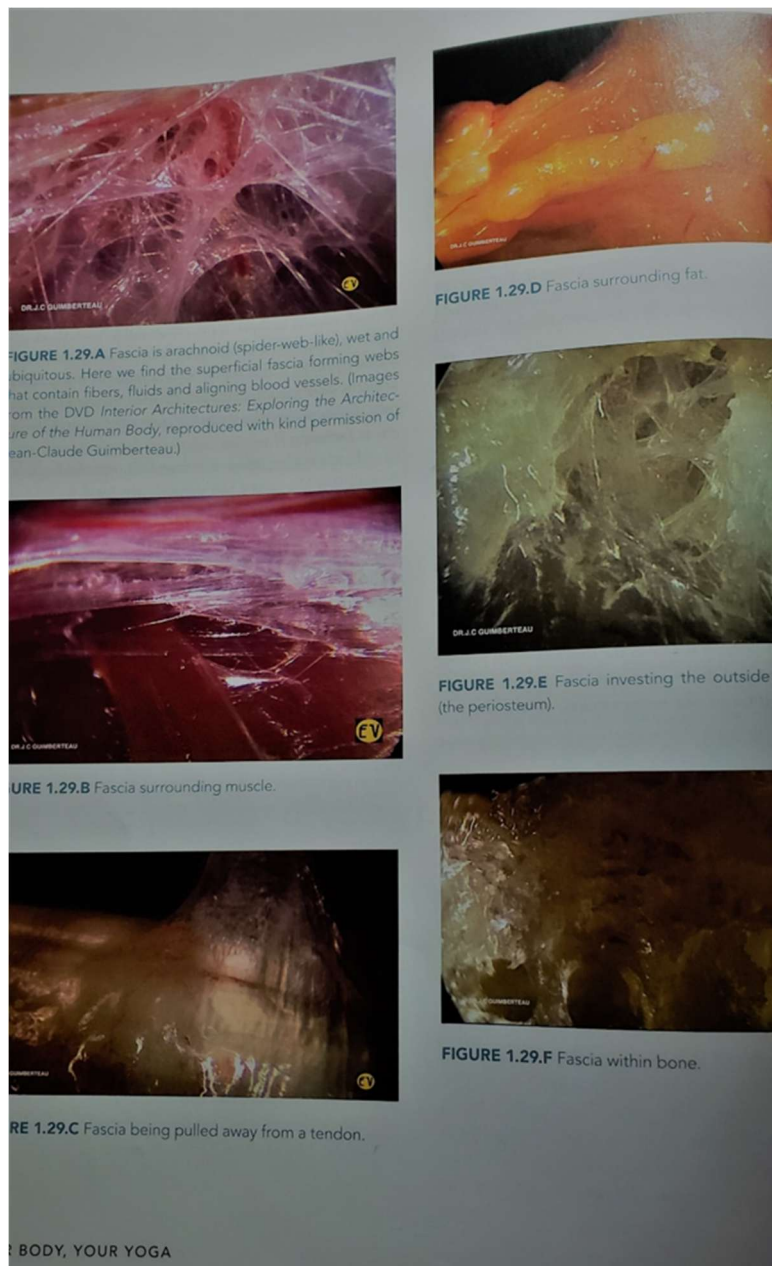
A significant portion of muscle tissue is fascia, which is why muscles are often described as *myofascial*. This term simply means muscle tissue together with the connective tissue that surrounds and permeates it. Fascia gives muscles the ability to transmit force to tendons, and from tendons to bones, creating movement around joints. In this way, fascia is not passive wrapping; it is part of the communication and force-transmission system of the body.

Deep fascia is tougher and tighter tissue embedded within and around muscles. It also surrounds and merges with structures such as nerves, blood vessels, organs, and other tissues. Fascia binds muscles together, helps maintain proper alignment of muscle fibers, distributes force through the whole muscle rather than one isolated area, allows muscles to change shape and

lengthen, provides tensile resistance, and lubricates surfaces that need to slide across one another. Fascia also helps keep the bones connected and the body upright.

Because fascia is continuous throughout the body, there is no clean separation from one region to another. A small movement or restriction in one area may influence sensation, movement, or tension elsewhere. Fascia can be considered a type of connective tissue, but connective tissue as a whole is even more pervasive. In Yin Yoga, fascia is especially important because it responds to gentle, sustained stress over time, making it one of the key tissues addressed through long-held, passive postures.

Healthy fascia is supple, hydrated, and resilient. It glides, transmits force efficiently, and supports the full range of the body's movement. Fascia that has become dehydrated, densified, or restricted — through injury, repetitive strain, chronic postural patterns, or prolonged immobility — can limit mobility, generate chronic pain, and impair the body's capacity for full, integrated movement. Current fascial research continues to explore its relationship to proprioception, pain processing, and nervous system regulation.



Source: YOUR BODY, YOUR YOGA by Bernie Clark

Yin Yoga's long holds create a sustained, gentle load on the fascial matrix — a stimulus that encourages fascial hydration, gentle remodeling, and the release of adhesions and densified areas. The "creep" phenomenon in connective tissue biology is the physiological mechanism that explains why three minutes in a posture produces changes that thirty seconds cannot. Fascia responds to time.

When discussing joints, it is necessary to address fixations as well. Fixations are common, and all joints are susceptible to them. Most people have moved at some point and heard a distinctive snap, crack, or pop. Similar sounds may occur during chiropractic manipulation or when a joint suddenly regains movement. When there is no pain, the sensation that follows can feel relieving because the joint may move more freely, and from an energetic perspective, Qi or prana may also feel less obstructed.

A fixation is, in essence, a temporary vacuum seal created when two smooth surfaces stick together. In the case of joints, smooth surfaces are continually pressed together by gravity, posture, and muscle contraction. Over time, this pressure may cause one part of a joint to adhere temporarily to another. When we “break a fixation,” we break this seal and allow the joint to move more freely again.

Fixations may be related to cartilage or ligaments rubbing against one another, or they may indicate a temporary misalignment or restriction in the joint or the ligaments that help hold the joint together. The snap or crack sound may reflect the release of the fixation itself. A pop, however, is often explained by gas bubbles being released in the synovial fluid found within synovial joints. This viscous, egg-white-like fluid reduces friction between articular cartilage during movement. When bubbles are released, a popping sound may be heard.

Fixations tend to occur when three conditions are present:

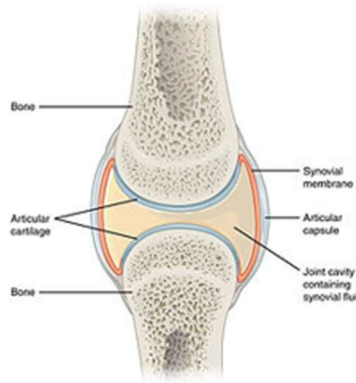
- Two smooth surfaces are stuck together.
- A liquid lubricant exists between the surfaces.
- The two surfaces are under pressure that pushes them together.

Fixation Concept	Meaning	Teaching Reminder
What it is	A temporary vacuum seal created when two smooth joint surfaces stick together.	Painless release can be normal and may feel relieving.
Why it happens	Smooth surfaces, lubrication, and pressure combine so joint surfaces temporarily adhere.	Explain that the sound itself is not automatically a problem.
Snap or crack	May reflect the release of a fixation or temporary joint restriction.	If painless, students can usually continue with awareness.
Pop	Often associated with gas bubbles releasing within synovial fluid.	Reassure students when there is no pain, swelling, or instability.
When to stop	Any sound paired with sharp pain, swelling, numbness, instability, or alarm is a warning.	Cue the student to exit the pose and seek appropriate guidance if needed.

Breaking a fixation can be a healthy response of the body and often feels good when it happens. Restoring movement may help prevent a joint from becoming increasingly restricted over time. When joints lose mobility and remain restricted, movement patterns may become more limited and uncomfortable. Prolonged sitting, for example, can contribute to low-back stiffness and restricted movement in many people.

In Yin Yoga, it is common for students to hear or experience the release of fixations as the body settles, softens, and regains movement after stillness. It is helpful to reassure students that painless snapping, cracking, or popping can be normal. However, any sound accompanied by sharp pain, instability, swelling, numbness, or alarm should be treated as a warning. In those cases, the student should stop, come out of the posture, and seek appropriate professional guidance if needed.

Ligaments and Joint Capsules



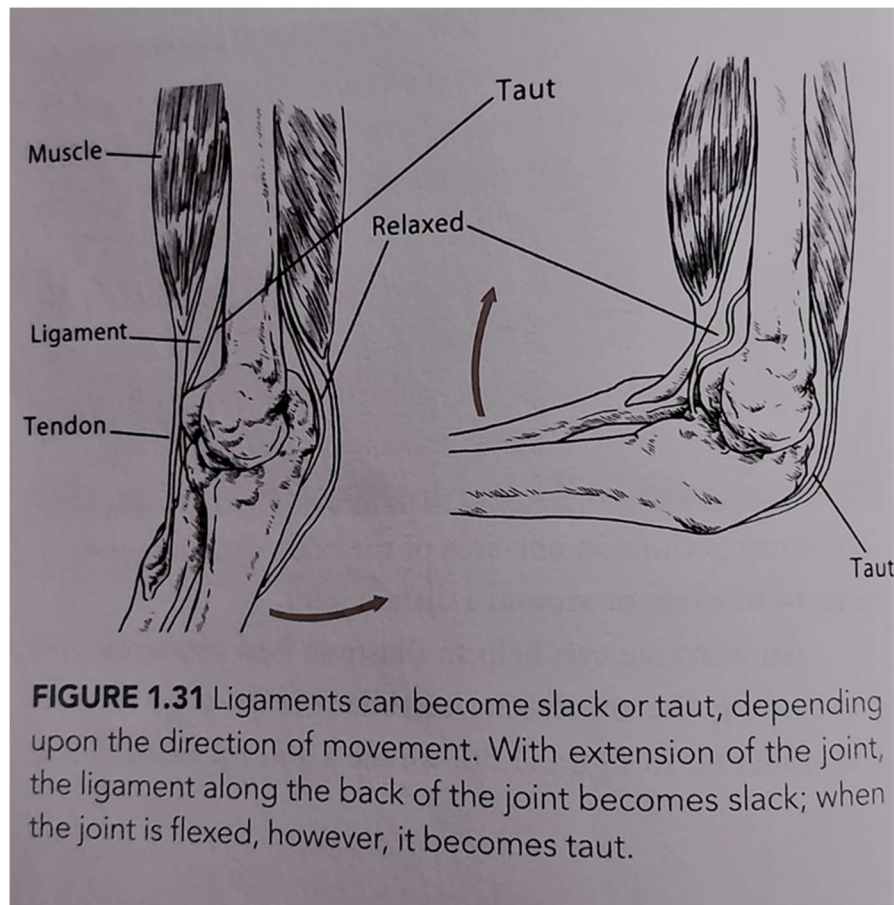
Source: Wikipedia

A joint is the place in the body where two bones meet, including the connective tissues that support, bind, separate, and organize that meeting place. In Yin Yoga, we are especially interested in these deeper, slower-responding tissues because they are among the primary targets of the practice. These tissues include fascia, ligaments, tendons, joint capsules, cartilage, nerves, and even parts of the vascular system such as veins and arteries. They are often more plastic and rigid than muscle, meaning they respond best to appropriate stress applied with patience, stillness, and time.

Now that we understand what joints are, we can better understand what restricts their movement. The primary restriction is often bony compression: the point at which bone meets bone and no further movement is possible. A joint is also restricted and restrained by ligaments, the short bands of tough, flexible fibrous connective tissue that connect bones, support cartilage, and help hold a joint together. The joint capsule also plays an important role. It is the ligamentous sac surrounding the articular cavity of a freely movable joint, attaching to the bones, enclosing the joint, and containing both an outer fibrous membrane and an inner synovial membrane.

Other structures that can restrict joint movement include muscles, fascia, cartilage, swelling, injury history, and individual skeletal variation. This means there may be many reasons a joint stops, restricts, or restrains movement. For teachers, this is essential to understand. A student who cannot move farther may not be resisting, lazy, or tight; their body may simply be meeting a real anatomical boundary.

According to the theory of exercise, the best way to safely stress a joint is when it is relaxed and not bearing excessive weight load. This is one reason Yin Yoga can be so beneficial: the practice is passive in nature, often floor-based, and designed to allow the muscles around a joint to soften while the deeper tissues receive gentle, sustained stress. When practiced intelligently, Yin Yoga allows the joints to relax as they are being appropriately stimulated.



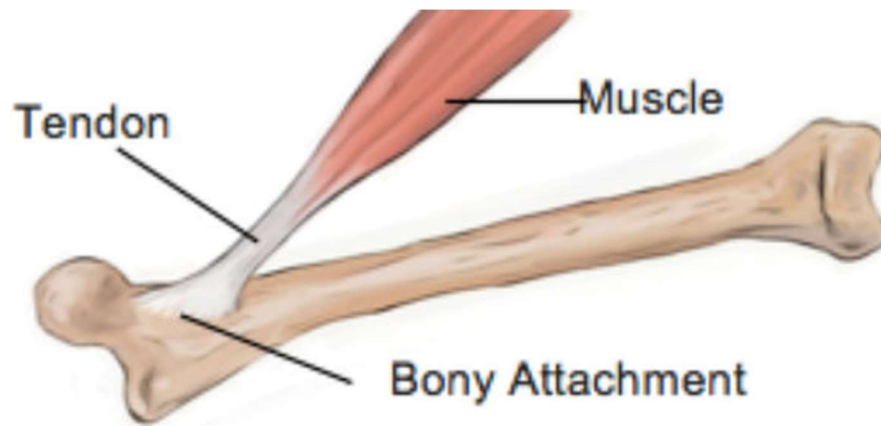
Source: Your Body, Your Yoga by Bernie Clark

Ligaments are bands of dense connective tissue that connect bone to bone, providing the passive stability of our joints. Joint capsules are the fibrous sleeves that surround and enclose each synovial joint, containing the joint fluid and contributing to proprioception and stability. Both ligaments and joint capsules have a relatively limited blood supply, which explains why joint injuries heal more slowly than muscle injuries, and why they require a different therapeutic approach.

In a Yin Yoga practice, gentle, sustained stress on ligaments and joint capsules — within appropriate, safe ranges — is understood to support the maintenance of joint mobility and the

health of these structures over time. Areas of the body particularly prone to stiffness and restriction in the ligamentous and capsular tissues include the hips, the lumbar spine, the thoracic spine, and the shoulders: precisely the areas most addressed in a well-designed Yin sequence.

Tendons



Source: Gippsland Physiotherapy Group

When we talk about joints and connective tissues, we also need to talk about tendons. Tendons are tough cords or bands of dense white fibrous connective tissue that unite a muscle with another structure, usually bone. They transmit the force that a muscle exerts, allowing muscular action to move and stabilize the skeleton.

Tendons are stressed and stretched in both styles of yoga: Yang or active styles, as well as Yin or passive styles. In active practice, tendons respond to repeated muscular contraction, movement, and load. In Yin practice, tendons may receive a gentler, more sustained stress through posture, stillness, time, and the gradual release of muscular effort.

It is important to understand that we stress tendons in order to build resilience and dynamic flexibility in the body. At the same time, tendon tissue must be respected. A healthy sensation may feel like firm resistance, dull intensity, or a clear boundary that invites patience. An unhealthy sensation may feel sharp, tearing, electrical, sudden, or located directly in a joint or tendon attachment. Damage to tendons is to be avoided, and students should never be encouraged to push through tendon pain.

As yoga teachers, we need to recognize when a student may be pushing beyond their body's edges and limitations. This requires careful observation, clear cueing, and an ongoing reminder that sensation is useful information, but pain is a warning. Tendons benefit from intelligent stress over time; they do not benefit from force.

Tension, Compression & Range of Motion

Before we explore how tension and compression affect a yogic practice, we first need to understand what they are, how they differ, and why they matter. Two primary experiences limit range of motion in yoga: tension and compression. **Tension**, as we are using the word here, is the state of tissue being stretched tight. It may feel like tightness, tautness, tenseness, rigidity, resistance, or a pulling sensation that prevents further movement. **Compression** comes from the Latin *compressare*, meaning “to press together.” In the Yin Yoga context, a useful synonym is constriction. Compression occurs when two parts of the body come into contact and physically prevent further movement.

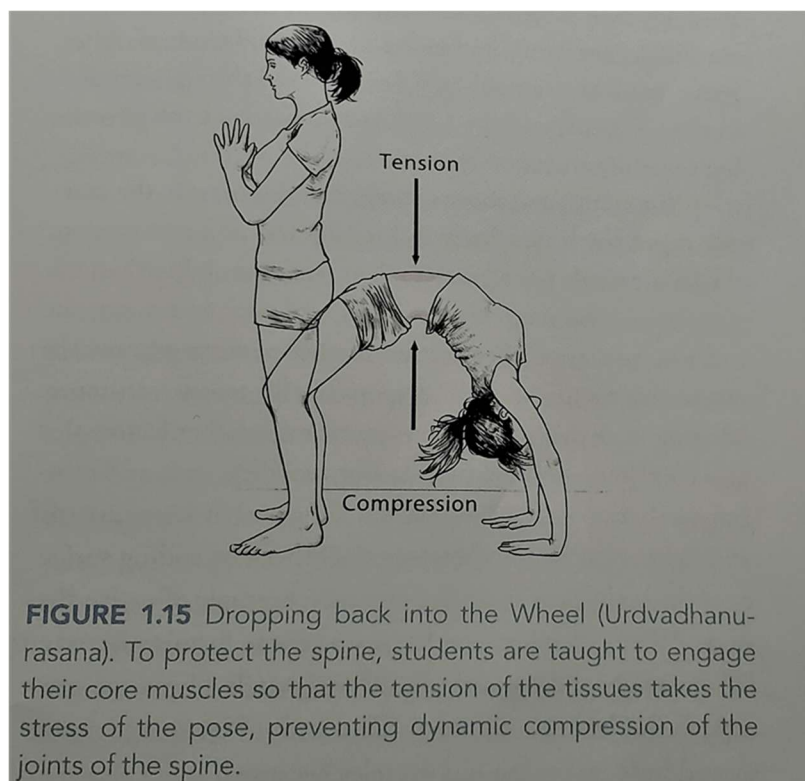


FIGURE 1.15 Dropping back into the Wheel (Urdhva Dhanurasana). To protect the spine, students are taught to engage their core muscles so that the tension of the tissues takes the stress of the pose, preventing dynamic compression of the joints of the spine.

Source: *Your Body, Your Yoga* by Bernie Clark

Tension and compression are important in all yoga, not only Yin Yoga, because both affect flexibility limitation and range of motion, or ROM. When a student reaches a particular point in a pose—their edge—and can go no farther, the limitation is usually related to either tension or compression. If range of motion is limited by tension, the tissue may gradually adapt through practice, breath, time, and appropriate loading. If range of motion is limited by compression, no amount of stretching will create more movement in that direction. Bone shape, joint architecture, and structural contact set a natural boundary. This is why anatomical variation matters so deeply: two students may reach entirely different endpoints in a posture for structural reasons, not because one is disciplined and the other is not. As teachers, it is important to observe carefully, remembering that it is not always easy to determine whether tension or compression is limiting a student's range of motion.

Keeping in mind that there is no true separation of tissues within the body, everything is connected—we can identify several primary areas where tissues may limit range of motion. These include the skin, the tendons of a particular muscle or group of muscles, the muscle tissue itself, fascia, and the joint capsule. These distinctions matter because they help us understand how to work intelligently with ROM, and why limitations caused by tension and compression must be approached differently.

If a body's ROM is limited by tension, that range may gradually increase through appropriate asana, other forms of exercise, breathwork, rest, and supportive lifestyle or dietary changes. If ROM is limited by compression, no amount of yoga or exercise will create more movement in that particular direction. Compression limits may be affected by factors such as injury, surgery, tissue change, inflammation, or other interventions, but the structural reality of compression does not simply disappear. These influences may change the point at which compression is felt, but they do not remove the basic boundary created when two structures meet.

A simple way to understand the difference is this: tension is a form of stress that tries to pull tissues apart or elongate them, while compression pushes two parts of the body together until they can move no farther. In practice, both experiences are valuable information. Tension may invite patient, sustained work over time. Compression invites respect, modification, and acceptance of the body's natural structure.

What Stops Me?

When a student reaches a stopping point in a posture, the question becomes: what is actually stopping me? The answer is not always simple. Sometimes the limitation is tension in muscles, fascia, tendons, skin, or the joint capsule. Sometimes it is compression, where bones or other structures meet and prevent further movement. Sometimes it is joint shape, skeletal variation, fascial restriction, adhesion, or the body's protective response to previous injury or instability.

For this reason, "What stops me?" is one of the most important questions in Yin Yoga. If the stopping point is tension, the body may gradually adapt through appropriate stress, breath, time, and rest. If the stopping point is compression, the wise response is not to push harder, but to respect the boundary and modify the posture. If the stopping point is emotional, psychological, or spiritual, the student may need patience, safety, and permission to remain exactly where they are.

This question helps teachers avoid forcing students into a shape that their body may not be designed to make. It also helps students develop curiosity instead of judgment. Rather than asking, "Why can't I do this pose?" Yin Yoga invites the more compassionate question: "What is stopping me today, and how can I meet that boundary with awareness?"

TABLE 1.1 The sensations arising in a posture can give us a clue as to the cause of resistance to further movement

WSM? SPECTRUM	RESISTANCE SENSATION	PAIN
Surface Tensions	• Spread out • Mild • Stretchy or tugging	• Like a mild burn • Localized • Tolerable
Myofascial Meridian	• Spread out—multiple areas sensed at once • Linear or rope-like • Tugging or pulling • Dull	• Scratchy • Swirly • Circling • Achy
Muscles & Tendons	• Localized • Tugging • Tightness • Follows the shape of the muscle • Broad • Flat • Muscle: sensation found in the belly of the muscle • Tendon: sensation found in the attachments closer to the bone	• Sharp • Burning
Ligaments & Joint Capsule	• Stuckness • Deep • Mysterious (vague)	• Radiating • Sparkly • Electrical • Zingers (shocks)
Soft Compression	• Soft • Squishy • Bouncy • Spread out over a large area	
Medium Compression	• Stuck or blocked • Impinging • Localized	• Pinching • Uncomfortable
Hard Compression	• Stuck • Hard • Heavy • Very localized	• Dull • Achy⁶³ • Boring • Risky

Source: YOUR BODY, YOUR YOGA by Bernie Clark

Before continuing, it is worth reviewing what we mean by *stress* in this context. As discussed in the Theory of Exercise, stress here does not refer to the chronic fight-or-flight stress that many people experience in daily modern life. Instead, it refers to appropriate mechanical tension placed on the tissues of the body for the purpose of healthy adaptation. When we exercise, we intentionally apply stress to parts of the body so they may become healthier, stronger, more mobile, more resilient, or more balanced.

This kind of stress is healthy when it is appropriate, intentional, and followed by rest. It can make the body stronger and more functional, including the joints, which are often overlooked as tissues that benefit from safe and intelligent loading. Chronic fight-or-flight stress is different. That stress is rooted in survival: the body senses danger and prepares to fight, flee, or defend itself. In modern society, many people live with some level of this stress almost constantly, which creates an unhealthy internal environment. Yin Yoga asks us to understand the difference. Safe mechanical stress can nourish tissue; chronic survival stress depletes the body.

Type of Stress	How It Appears in Yoga	Effect on the Body
Healthy mechanical stress	Gentle, intentional load applied safely through posture, breath, time, and appropriate rest.	Supports adaptation, resilience, mobility, strength, joint health, and tissue nourishment.
Chronic survival stress	Ongoing fight-or-flight activation caused by pressure, urgency, fear, overload, or perceived danger.	Depletes energy, increases tension, disrupts rest and repair, and keeps the body in a defensive state.

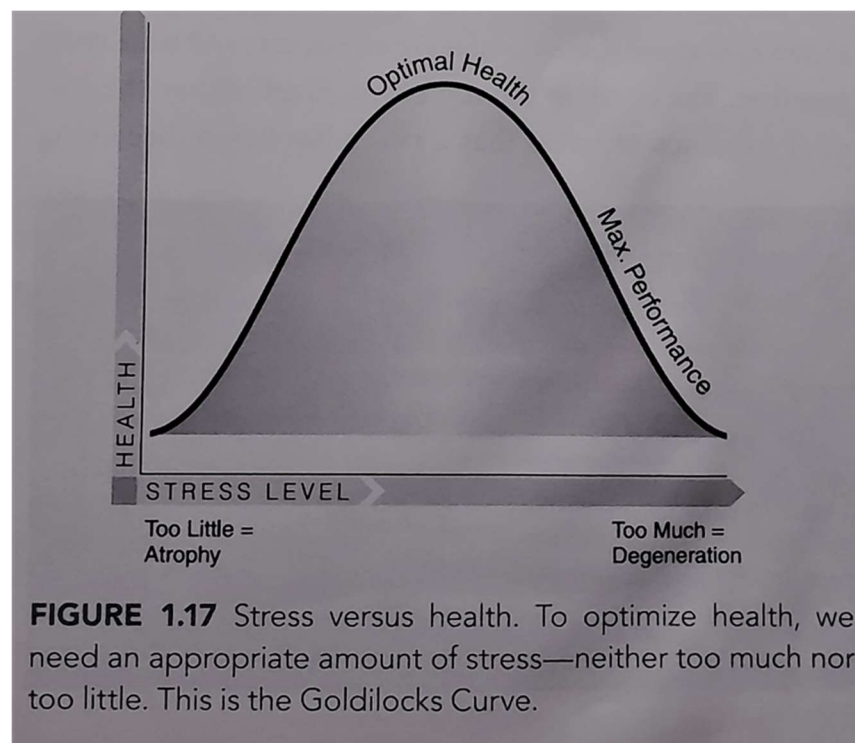


FIGURE 1.17 Stress versus health. To optimize health, we need an appropriate amount of stress—neither too much nor too little. This is the Goldilocks Curve.

Source: *Your Body, Your Yoga* by Bernie Clark

This is also why yoga students and teachers must understand the value of the edge in a pose. The edge is the furthest place a student can go while remaining safe, present, and able to breathe. Although we often speak of “the edge” as if it were only physical, there are actually four edges in a pose: physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

- **Physical edge:** Is the body physically able to move further, or has tissue tension or structural compression created a boundary?
- **Emotional edge:** Is the practitioner emotionally ready to remain with or move deeper into the experience, knowing that deep postures can release stored emotion?
- **Psychological edge:** Is the mind ready to stay present, soften resistance, and meet the intensity without forcing or fleeing?
- **Spiritual edge:** Is the yogi willing to trust the practice, surrender into stillness, and connect at a deeper level?

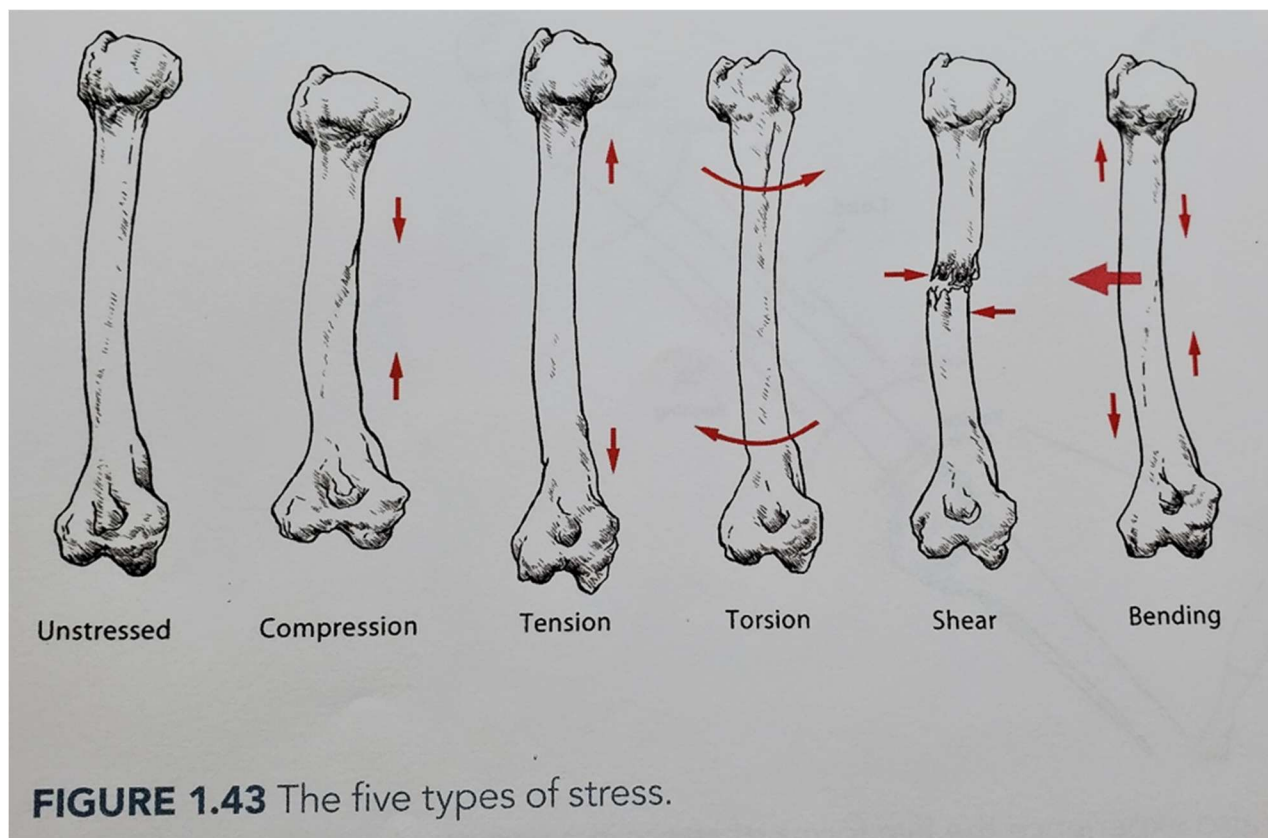
Edge	What It Asks	Teacher Awareness
Physical	Can the body safely move further, or has tension or compression created a boundary?	Look for breath, facial tension, joint pain, and whether sensation is diffuse or sharp.
Emotional	Is the student emotionally ready to stay with what the posture may bring up?	Hold space without rushing to fix; offer permission to soften, pause, or come out.
Psychological	Can the mind remain present without forcing, fleeing, or judging the experience?	Use invitational language and remind students that staying aware is the practice.
Spiritual	Is the practitioner willing to trust, surrender, and connect more deeply?	Support quiet, non-forcing inquiry; avoid imposing meaning on the student's experience.

Edges are important because they teach students how to work with sensation safely, honestly, and consciously. The edge is not the place where the body is forced to its maximum; it is the place where meaningful sensation is present, the breath can remain steady, and the student can stay aware. In Yin Yoga, understanding the edge helps students distinguish between productive discomfort and pain, and it helps teachers recognize when a student's range may be limited by tension, which may gradually change, or compression, which reflects a structural boundary that should not be forced.

Five Forms of Stress

- **Tension** attempts to pull tissue apart or elongate it.
- **Compression** presses tissues or bones together until movement is limited.
- **Shear** compresses tissues that are offset rather than directly aligned.
- **Torsion** twists tissue around an axis, often with opposing forces at each end.
- **Bending** combines tension on the outer side of a curve with compression on the inner side.

It is important to note that the goal is never to overstretch or destabilize ligaments. The principle is gentle, sustained loading — enough to stimulate and maintain, not enough to damage. Sharp pain in a joint is always a signal to ease out of a posture. Appropriate Yin sensation is felt in the belly of the connective tissue — a deep, diffuse, sometimes achy sensation — not as a sharp or electrical signal in or around a joint.



The Role of Bones

Bone is not an inert scaffold. It is living tissue, richly supplied with cells that are constantly breaking down old bone and building new bone — a process called remodeling. According to *Wolff's Law*, bone remodels in response to the mechanical loads placed upon it: bones that experience regular, appropriate stress become denser and stronger; bones that are not loaded lose density over time. Certain Yin postures — particularly those involving gentle compressive loading of the spine or weight-bearing through specific joint angles — may support bone health when practiced appropriately and with medical guidance when needed.

Anatomical Variation

Among Paul Grilley's most significant contributions to the teaching of yoga is his rigorous exploration of skeletal variation: the reality that human bones vary enormously in shape, angle, depth, and proportion. This variation is not a matter of degree of flexibility or years of practice — it is structural, and it is permanent. The angle and depth of a person's hip sockets, for instance, varies so dramatically from individual to individual that two people making identical efforts in a hip-opening posture may look almost nothing alike — not because one is "better" at the pose, but because their bones are shaped differently.

For Yin Yoga teachers, this understanding is not merely interesting — it is transformative. It means that the image of a "correct" posture must be released entirely. There is no universal template for what Butterfly or Sleeping Swan or Dragon should look like. There is only the question: is this student receiving meaningful sensation in the appropriate target area, safely and sustainably? A student who cannot bring their knees close to the floor in Butterfly may have wide femoral angles that simply will not allow it — and no amount of practice will change that. Their version of Butterfly is correct for them. Honoring anatomical variation is one of the deepest forms of respect a teacher can offer.

Teacher's Note

"Your job is never to make students look like the picture in the book. Your job is to help them find the appropriate sensation in their own unique body. Release the template. Release the aesthetic. Meet the person in front of you."

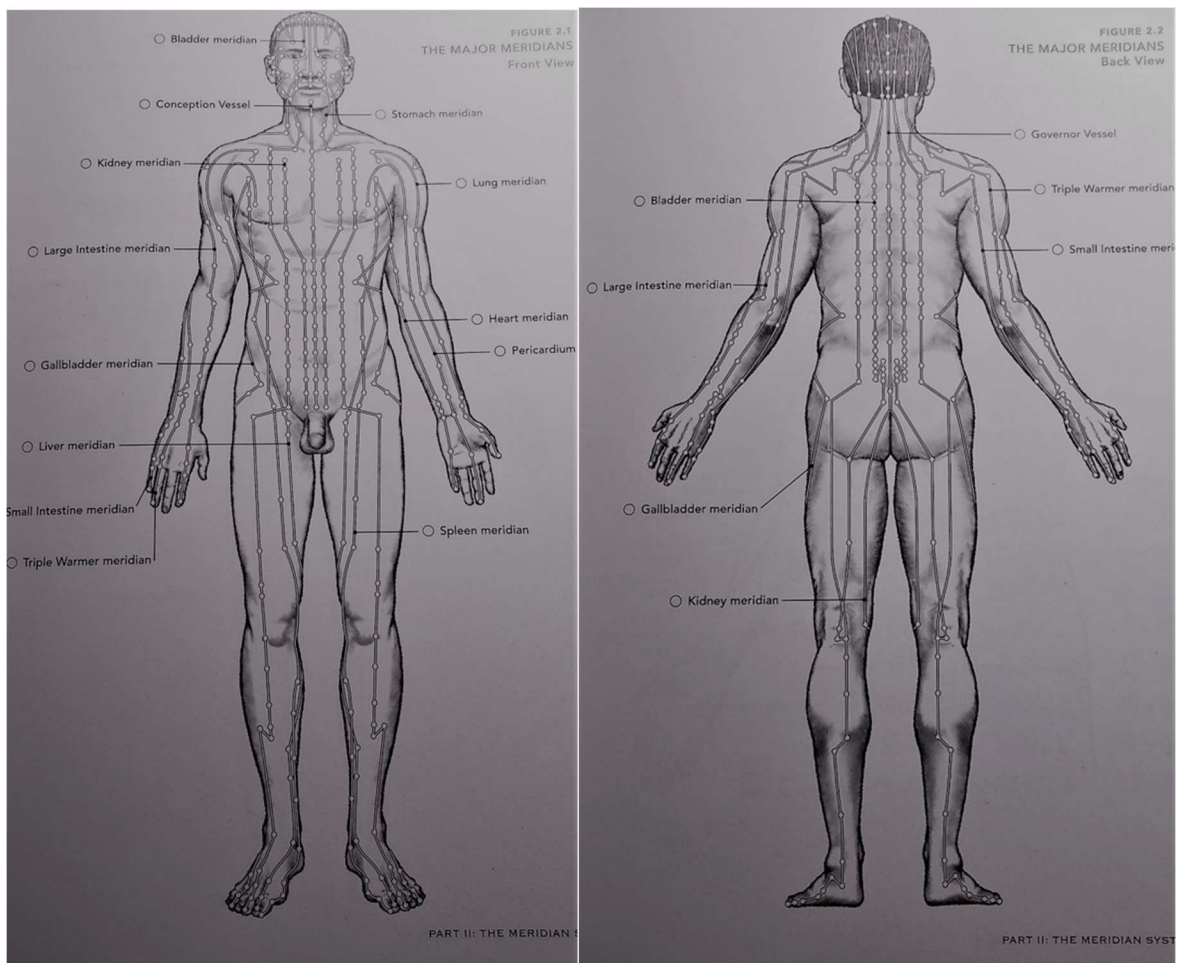
Traditional Chinese Medicine & the Meridian System

What You'll Learn: The role of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Yin Yoga, the concept of Qi, the twelve primary meridians, and how meridian theory can support thoughtful sequencing and self-inquiry.

Introduction to TCM in the Yin Context

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is one of the world's oldest and most comprehensive systems of healing, with a recorded history spanning more than two thousand years. Its foundational premise — that health is a state of dynamic balance and free flow within the body's energetic systems — offers a rich complement to the anatomical framework we have already explored. Paul Grilley and Sarah Powers integrated the meridian system of TCM into Yin Yoga not as a replacement for anatomical understanding, but as an additional, equally valuable lens: a map of the body's interior terrain that is centuries older than Western anatomy and carries its own profound wisdom.

It is important to approach this material with both openness and discernment. The meridian system is a traditional framework — a map, not the territory itself. It is offered here, as Grilley and Powers offer it, as a time-tested and deeply practical tool for enriching students' understanding of their practice, their bodies, and their inner lives. It is not a substitute for medical diagnosis, treatment, or individualized healthcare advice, and teachers should avoid presenting meridian theory as a clinical promise or medical intervention.



Source: *The Subtle Body Coloring Book* by Cyndi Dale

What Is a Meridian?

Before we can discuss modern meridian theory, we must first ask: what is a meridian? In acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine, a meridian is commonly defined as one of a set of pathways in the body along which vital energy is said to flow. Classical teaching recognizes twelve primary organ-related pathways, with additional extraordinary vessels and branching channels that complete the larger energetic network.

Yoga offers a similar subtle-body model through the concept of *nadis*: channels or pathways through which prana, or life force, is understood to move. While meridians and nadis come from different cultural and medical-philosophical systems, both describe subtle energy pathways throughout the body. Both are traditionally understood as part of the subtle energy body and are often discussed alongside chakras, breath, and the movement of life force.

Traditional Chinese Medicine Meridian Theory

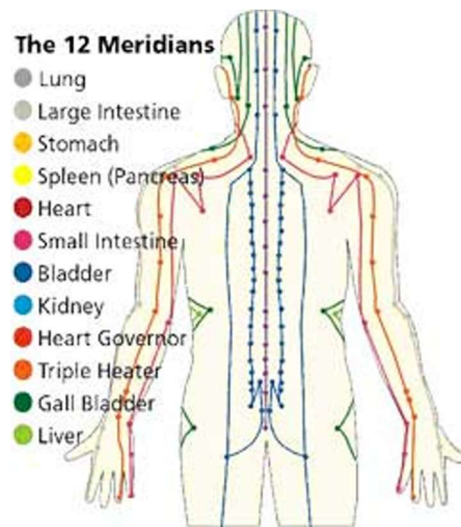
To understand modern meridian theory, we first need a basic orientation to the traditional TCM model. In this model, the body contains a hierarchical network often called the meridian system. It includes main meridians, collaterals, and smaller sub-collaterals. The word *meridian* is often used internationally as a general term for the whole system, but technically the system includes channels of different sizes and functions.

The main channels are distributed longitudinally through the body. Many systems describe twelve primary meridians associated with organ systems, while other classifications count fourteen main channels by including the Governing Vessel and Conception Vessel. Smaller collateral and sub-collateral channels branch outward from the main pathways, creating a more extensive network that links the organs, limbs, joints, surface tissues, and interior body into one integrated energetic whole.

Qi and Its Movement

At the heart of TCM is the concept of Qi — the vital force or life energy that animates all living beings and flows through the body via a network of pathways called *meridians*. Within this traditional framework, the health, vitality, and emotional balance of a person are understood to reflect the state of their Qi: its abundance, its quality, and its freedom of movement through the meridian network.

When Qi flows freely through the meridians, the organs and systems it serves are understood to be nourished and supported. When Qi becomes blocked — through injury, emotional suppression, chronic stress, poor diet, or energetic imbalance — stagnation may occur, and discomfort, illness, or emotional turbulence may follow within the TCM model. Yin Yoga, through its sustained load on the connective tissue pathways through which meridians are understood to run, is thought to support the free, balanced movement of Qi — clearing stagnation and supporting abundance.



The Twelve Primary Meridians

The TCM meridian system includes twelve primary meridians, organized in six pairs. Each pair is associated with two organs (one Yin and one Yang organ), an element, a season, and a set of emotional and psychological qualities. The following table presents the primary meridian pairs as they apply to Yin Yoga practice.

Meridian Pair	Element	Season	Emotional Resonance	Key Qualities
Lung & Large Intestine	Metal	Autumn	Grief & Letting Go	Boundaries, release, the capacity to receive and relinquish
Kidney & Urinary Bladder	Water	Winter	Fear & Wisdom	Reserves, deep rest, the root of constitutional vitality
Liver & Gallbladder	Wood	Spring	Anger & Clarity	Vision, decision, the upward and outward movement of new growth
Heart & Small Intestine	Fire	Summer	Joy & Discernment	Connection, warmth, the capacity to give and receive love
Spleen & Stomach	Earth	Late Summer / Transition	Worry & Nourishment	Digestion (literal and metaphorical), centeredness, groundedness
Pericardium & Triple Warmer	Fire (supplementary)	Summer / Transitions	Protection & Relationships	The heart's guardian; regulation of warmth and emotional boundaries

Meridians in Posture

Different families of Yin Yoga postures are understood to stress the connective tissue along the pathways of specific meridians, encouraging Qi flow in those channels. The following provides a general orientation — not a rigid prescription, but a map for intentional sequencing.

- **Hip-opening postures** (Dragon, Sleeping Swan, Shoelace, Square) — primarily address the Kidney, Urinary Bladder, Gallbladder, Liver, Stomach, and Spleen meridians along the inner thighs, outer hips, and groin.
- **Spinal flexion postures** (Caterpillar, Butterfly, Snail) — primarily address the Kidney and Urinary Bladder meridians along the entire back body.
- **Spinal extension postures** (Sphinx, Seal, Saddle) — primarily address the Kidney, Stomach, and Spleen meridians along the front body and lumbar spine.
- **Side body stretches** (Banana) — primarily address the Gallbladder and Stomach meridians running along the lateral body.
- **Shoulder and chest openers** (Melting Heart, Supported Fish) — primarily address the Heart, Lung, Pericardium, and Small Intestine meridians running through the chest, arms, and hands.

When designing a meridian-based Yin class, teachers choose postures that cluster along one or two meridian pathways, creating a coherent energetic theme. A winter Water-element class, for example, would foreground postures that address the Kidney and Urinary Bladder lines — spinal folds, forward bends, and hip openers along the back of the legs — and might close with a reflection on rest, reserves, and the wisdom held in quiet.

Key Concept

"The meridian system gives us a poetic and functional vocabulary for the inner body. Whether or not students adopt TCM as a personal framework, the language of seasons, elements, and Qi opens a door to self-inquiry that purely anatomical language sometimes cannot. Both maps are valuable. Neither is the whole territory."

The Three Tattvas: Principles of Yin Practice

How We Practice Yin Yoga

Now that we understand the concept of Yin Yoga and have explored the anatomy of the body as it applies to and is affected by Yin Yoga, it is time to discuss how we practice Yin Yoga. Most students are more familiar with active Yang styles of yoga. These are the styles most often seen in studios, online classes, magazines, and social media. Yin Yoga has gained more attention in recent years, but many students, and even some teachers, are still unfamiliar with how a Yin practice is actually approached.

First and foremost, before discussing a Yin Yoga practice, it is important to remember that the general guidelines for practicing yoga still apply. The same safety awareness, respect for the body, appropriate use of props, attention to contraindications, and teacher responsibility that apply in a more active Yang practice also apply in Yin. Yin Yoga may be passive in nature, but passivity does not remove the need for care, discernment, or precaution.

With a greater understanding of Yin and Yang, students may ask when the ideal time is to practice Yin Yoga. There is no single best answer. Yin Yoga is meant to balance more Yang practices, activities, seasons, and times of day, so timing depends on what is needed to create balance. Sometimes the purpose of a Yin practice is physical; at other times, the deeper benefit may be psychological, emotional, or energetic.

Two things are especially helpful to consider when deciding when to practice Yin Yoga. First, Yin is most effective when the muscles are relaxed enough for the deeper connective tissues to receive the stress of the posture. Second, one should be mindful of practicing Yin after being in a

long passive state, such as sitting for many hours. In that situation, a more active practice may be more balancing. The goal is not simply to do Yin because it is quiet; the goal is to seek Tao, or balance, in the overall practice.

One note regarding Yin Yoga asanas: many of them may look similar to Yang yoga postures, but they often have different names. This was intentional in the modern Yin Yoga movement, helping distinguish the Yin version of a posture from the Yang version because the intention, method, muscular engagement, and energetic quality are quite different. This can sometimes be confusing for students. As teachers, we should be clear when using Yin pose names and, when helpful, explain how the Yin approach differs from the more familiar Yang expression.

Playing the Edge

As yoga teachers and practitioners, we know what an edge is: it is the point where the body allows us to go in a pose, and no farther. As we have already stated, Yin Yoga, like all yoga, is a practice, and our edges change. Sometimes we can go a little deeper; sometimes we cannot. This is one reason we practice physical yoga in the first place: to better understand our bodies, to listen to what the body is telling us, and to meet that information in the present moment.

We must remember not to push the body beyond its edge. To compete with ourselves or others, or to judge ourselves based on a previous practice or another person's shape, is to allow ego to guide the practice. This is true whether we are practicing Yin or Yang styles of yoga. We use poses, or asanas, to "get into the body"; we do not use the body to chase a perfect pose.

There is no perfect yoga pose. All asanas have a general form, but no two bodies express a pose in exactly the same way, just as no two humans, even twins, are exactly alike. We also need to remember that every posture has more than a physical edge. Mental and emotional edges also exist. As teachers, we remind students to find *their* pose for today, to allow themselves to be in the pose as it is in this present moment, and to feel the changes in the body as it settles.

In Yin Yoga, poses are held longer so practitioners have time to truly feel the pose, breathe into it, and move through their various edges with awareness. The practice invites students to explore what lies just beyond the comfort zone, while remaining safely outside of pain. When discomfort

is workable and the breath remains steady, the student may remain in the posture for the intended holding time, allowing the release benefits of Yin Yoga to unfold.

As instructors say in every style of yoga: listen to the body. Accept it as it is today. Remember, yielding is Yin.

A *tattva* is the reality of a thing, its category, or its principal nature. In the context of Yin Yoga, the Three Tattvas describe the essential nature of the practice. Sarah Powers, who helped popularize the name Yin Yoga for this passive style of practice, offers three simple and effective principles: come into the pose to an appropriate depth or edge, resolve to remain still in the pose, and hold the pose for time. These principles are not stylistic preferences; they are the structural pillars of Yin Yoga. Without them, a long-held floor-based pose is simply a long-held floor-based pose. With them, it becomes Yin Yoga.

The second and third tattvas are often the greatest challenges of a Yin Yoga practice. Our “monkey minds” can make stillness and time difficult. Modern society is very Yang in nature: we spend much of our lives in perpetual motion, physically and mentally. Our worlds are in the palms of our hands, and we quickly jump from one task to the next in an effort to get as much done as possible in a short period of time. We have created a culture of short attention spans, and being still for a long period of time can feel unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or even confronting.

We are also often taught to push ourselves, our abilities, and our bodies. Our culture tends to equate pushing harder with success, even when the body may not be able to achieve what the mind demands. Yin Yoga offers a necessary counterbalance. It reminds us that accepting ourselves, our abilities, and our bodies is just as important as effort. Not everyone can be the best at everything, and not every day asks for more. Sometimes the practice is to yield to the truth that this is as far as we are going to go today.

Yin Yoga, like Yang Yoga, is not competitive and it is not judging. It is personal, and it is a practice. As a teacher, your ability to understand and communicate these principles clearly is among the most important skills you will develop.

Tattva	Principle	Practice Reminder
1	Come into the pose to an appropriate depth or edge.	Find meaningful sensation without forcing, pain, or comparison.
2	Resolve to remain still in the pose.	Let stillness become the container for awareness, breath, and self-study.
3	Hold the pose for time.	Allow sustained time to reach the deeper tissues and train patience.

1. Come to Your Appropriate Edge

The first principle asks the student to find a depth of sensation in the posture that is meaningful but sustainable — what we call the "appropriate edge." This edge is not the outer limit of what the body can physically be forced into; it is the inner limit of what the mind and body can remain present with, in stillness, for the full duration of the hold. The appropriate edge invites attention without demanding endurance of pain.

Practically, this means entering a posture slowly and intentionally, pausing when a genuine sensation is felt, and choosing to stop there rather than pushing further. The sensation should be felt in the belly of the muscle or connective tissue — deep, diffuse, and dull, not sharp, electrical, or located in or around a joint. If the sensation sharpens or intensifies beyond what feels workable, the student eases out, even slightly. The appropriate edge is a living threshold, not a fixed destination: it will be different in every body, on every side, on every day.

2. Resolve to Be Still

Once the appropriate edge is found, the second principle invites the student to make an inner commitment to remain still. This is the principle that transforms a stretch into a meditation. Stillness, in this context, does not mean rigidity — micro-adjustments for safety, comfort, and breath are always permitted and appropriate. But the general orientation of the practice is one of settling rather than fidgeting: choosing to remain with the sensation and the stillness, rather than habitually seeking relief through movement.

The second tattva is stillness: resolving to remain in the pose after the appropriate edge has been found. Once the student settles into that edge, the invitation is to soften unnecessary muscular effort so the deeper connective tissues and joints can receive the gentle stress of the posture. This is not forced immobility; it is conscious settling.

When we move, we naturally engage muscles. In Yin Yoga, stillness gives those muscles time to soften so the deeper tissues can receive the gentle stress of the posture. The aim is not to freeze the body, but to let the pose become steady enough that the student can listen, breathe, and settle without constantly adjusting or reaching for more.

Stillness can be difficult, especially when the mind wants to jump from one thing to the next and asks the body to follow. This is common for students first experiencing Yin Yoga, and it can also arise for experienced practitioners when the nervous system is unsettled. Stillness cannot be forced; the effort to force it often creates the very tension the practice is asking us to soften.

The doorway into stillness in a Yin Yoga class is the breath: calm, natural breath. Rather than forcing the breath to become slow or deep, students are invited to notice it as it is. Following the natural breath helps calm the mind, and a calmer mind helps the body find stillness. In this way, stillness is not simply the absence of movement; it is a pathway into awareness.

The main challenges of stillness in Yin practice include the “monkey mind,” the urge to move when sensation becomes uncomfortable, and the conditioning of a Yang-oriented culture that values motion, productivity, effort, and doing. Students may also feel discomfort with quiet, especially when there is less external distraction. Stillness becomes more difficult when students try to force it, because forced stillness creates more tension rather than release. Muscle guarding, fidgeting, and restless breath may all signal that the body and mind are still learning how to settle. In short, stillness is challenging because it asks students to stop performing, stop escaping, and remain present with what is happening in the body, breath, and mind.

The practice of resolving to be still trains the mind in a profoundly valuable capacity: the ability to remain present with discomfort rather than immediately flee from it. This capacity is not only useful on the yoga mat. It is one of the foundational skills of emotional maturity, of mindful communication, of the capacity to be a calm and grounded presence for others — including for

the students in your future classes. When we teach Yin, we teach this. We must have practiced it ourselves.

3. Hold the Posture for Time

The third principle is perhaps the most distinctive feature of Yin Yoga: duration. Holding postures for three to five minutes — and, for experienced practitioners, sometimes seven, ten, or even longer — is what allows the mechanical load to penetrate the deep, slow-responding connective tissues. A thirty-second stretch, no matter how deep, will not reach fascia. A brief hold engages the elastic, reflex-driven response of muscle. Only sustained time allows the "creep" of connective tissue deformation, the deep rehydration of fascial layers, and the kind of change in joint mobility and tissue health that is the promise of a consistent Yin practice.

As we have learned, it is important to stretch and stress not only the more elastic tissues of the body, but also the more plastic and rigid tissues. We have also learned that these tissues cannot be stretched in the same way, or for the same reasons. Yin tissues of the body require a different approach in order to be effectively exercised or stimulated. Muscles can often respond fairly quickly to breath, attention, and conscious relaxation; if we focus on a tense muscle and breathe, we may notice it gradually begin to soften. The deeper connective tissues do not respond in that same immediate way.

Because connective tissues and fascia respond slowly, Yin Yoga uses gentle traction, stillness, and time. Rather than asking these tissues to release on command, we hold them in a reasonable, sustainable position long enough for gradual response. In most general Yin Yoga classes, the average hold is three to five minutes, which is long enough to invite change while remaining accessible and safe for most students. Longer holds may be appropriate only in advanced, carefully guided contexts.

For students new to Yin, three minutes can feel like an eternity. Part of your role as a teacher is to hold the time and the space with enough steadiness and warmth that students can trust the process, even when the mind is protesting. A calm voice at the two-minute mark — "You're about halfway there; see if you can soften just a little more around the edges of the sensation" — can

be the difference between a student who stays and grows, and one who gives up and avoids the practice.

Reflection Prompt

"Where in your life do you tend to move quickly past discomfort — to reach for your phone, to fill the silence, to find something else to do? What might it look like to practice the second tattva off the mat? To stay, for just a little longer, with what is?"

Yin Yoga Postures

The following posture library provides detailed guidance for the core postures of a Yin Yoga practice. For each posture, you will find entry instructions, target areas, meridians addressed, modifications, contraindications, and a suggested teacher cue. Memorize not only the form, but also the intention of each pose — the why behind the how.

Use this posture library as a teaching reference rather than a script. Each posture entry names common target areas, meridian associations, variations, contraindications, and sample cues, but the student in front of you remains the final authority. Before teaching any shape, ask what the posture is intended to offer, what risks it may carry, and what variation would make the practice safe, sustainable, and meaningful for the body practicing it.

Before practicing or teaching any posture in this chapter, remember that the shape is never the goal. Each posture description offers a general pathway into the pose, but the student's body determines the final expression. Move slowly, use props generously, avoid sharp or joint-based pain, and come out of any posture that creates numbness, tingling, instability, or a sense of alarm. When in doubt, reduce the intensity, support the body, or choose a different variation.

Hip-Opening Postures

Dragon (Low Lunge Variation / Anjaneyasana Variation)

Hold: 3–5 minutes each side | Meridians: Stomach, Spleen, Kidney, Urinary Bladder

Entry: From all fours (Tabletop), step one foot forward between the hands so the front knee is stacked over or slightly behind the ankle. Allow the back knee to rest on the floor. Walk the hands to either side of the front foot and allow the hips to gradually sink toward the floor. Find your appropriate edge and settle.

Target areas: Hip flexors, psoas, ilio-femoral ligament, front of the thigh (quadriceps, rectus femoris), groins.

Variations: *Dragon Flying Low* — lower the forearms to blocks or the floor for greater hip opening. *Dragon with Twist* — bring the same-side hand as the front foot to the hip and open the chest toward the ceiling. *High Dragon* — place the hands or fists on the front thigh, allowing a more upright torso and deeper psoas release.

Contraindications: Acute knee injury on either leg; acute hip flexor strain. Always offer a folded blanket under the back knee.

Teacher cue: *"Let the weight of your pelvis surrender toward the earth. You don't need to push — gravity is already doing the work. Simply allow."*

Sleeping Swan (Yin Pigeon)

Hold: 3–5 minutes each side | Meridians: Gallbladder, Urinary Bladder

Entry: From all-fours, bring one shin forward toward the front of the mat — the more parallel the shin to the mat edge, the more intense the external rotation. Allow the back leg to extend long behind. Gradually fold the torso forward over the front shin, allowing the spine to soften and round. Use stacked fists or a block under the forehead.

Target areas: Outer hip, gluteus medius and minimus, piriformis, deep hip rotators, sacrotuberous ligament.

Variations: Blanket under the front hip for support; Reclined Figure-4 (Supta Kapotasana) as a fully accessible alternative — lie on the back, cross one ankle over the opposite thigh, flex the lower foot, and either remain here or draw the legs toward the chest.

Contraindications: Acute knee injury (any internal rotation of the knee joint must be avoided); acute hip pathology or recent hip surgery. Always offer the Reclined Figure-4 variation proactively, without singling anyone out.

Teacher cue: *"There is nothing to do here but breathe and release. Let the floor hold you. Let the pose do its quiet work."*

Butterfly (Baddha Konasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Kidney, Urinary Bladder, Liver

Entry: Sit with the soles of the feet together, drawing the feet further away from the body than in a Yang Baddha Konasana — this allows more length in the inner groin lines. Fold forward with a fully rounded spine, allowing the head to drop toward the feet or a block. The emphasis is on surrender, not on reaching toward the feet.

Target areas: Inner groins (adductor lines), lower back, entire posterior spine.

Variations: Seated on a folded blanket to tilt the pelvis forward. Block under the forehead. Bolster lengthwise under the torso for a supported version.

Teacher cue: *"Round and release. There is no destination here. Let the spine be heavy, like a string of pearls dropped gently forward."*

Shoelace (Gomukhasana Legs)

Hold: 3–5 minutes each side | Meridians: Gallbladder, Kidney

Entry: From seated, cross one leg over the other so the knees are stacked. Both feet rest to either side of the hips. Sit tall, or fold forward with a rounded spine for greater intensity in

the outer hips. If the sit bones are uneven or one knee floats high, use a folded blanket under the higher sit bone.

Target areas: Outer hips, gluteals, IT band, lateral knee (with care), tensor fascia latae.

Contraindications: Acute knee pain. If sensation is felt at the knee rather than the outer hip, ease out and use support.

Teacher cue: *"Notice where you feel this — not where you think you should feel it. Trust your body's report."*

Square Pose

Hold: 3–5 minutes each side | Meridians: Gallbladder

Entry: From seated, arrange the shins so they stack horizontally — one shin in front of the other, both parallel to the front edge of the mat. The ankles align beneath the opposite knee. Sit tall or fold forward. This posture produces more intense hip external rotation than Shoelace and is not appropriate for all bodies.

Target areas: Deep hip rotators, outer hips, sacroiliac joint region.

Contraindications: Acute knee or hip injury; any sensation of pain at the knee (as opposed to the hip). Always offer Shoelace as an alternative.

Teacher cue: *"If you feel this at the knee, we've missed the target — ease back and try Shoelace instead. We're always aiming for the hip."*

Happy Baby (Ananda Balasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Kidney, Urinary Bladder

Entry: Lie supine. Draw the knees wide apart toward the armpits and flex the feet, reaching to hold the outer edges of the feet, the ankles, or the backs of the thighs. Allow the spine to soften into the floor. Gentle rocking side to side is optional in a Yang class; in Yin, the invitation is to be still.

Target areas: Inner groins, adductor lines, sacrum, lumbar spine.

Teacher cue: *"Let yourself be heavy. Let the floor absorb your weight completely. This is the practice of receiving."*

Spinal Postures

Caterpillar (Yin Paschimottanasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Urinary Bladder, Kidney

Entry: Seated with legs extended long in front. Allow the spine to round completely forward — this is not a hamstring stretch in the Yang sense. There is no reaching for the feet, no flattening of the back. The entire back body surrenders into a long, gentle, rounded fold. Head drops. Hands rest wherever they land comfortably.

Target areas: Entire posterior fascial chain — the spine, the hamstring tendons, the thoracolumbar fascia, the plantar fascia of the feet.

Variations: Seated on a blanket; bolster across the thighs for the torso to rest on; knees slightly bent if hamstrings are tight.

Teacher cue: *"This is a back pose, not a hamstring pose. Let go of any reaching. Let the weight of your head and spine do the work."*

Snail (Halasana Variation)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Urinary Bladder, Kidney

Entry: From supine, draw the knees into the chest, then slowly roll the hips up and over the head, lowering the feet toward the floor behind the head. Support the back with the hands or allow the arms to rest on the floor. The neck receives considerable flexion here; students should not turn the head to either side in the pose.

Target areas: Cervical and thoracic spine (deep flexion), hamstrings, lower back.

Contraindications: Neck injury or disc issues; high blood pressure or glaucoma; pregnancy; recent spinal surgery. This posture is appropriate only for experienced practitioners with appropriate contraindication screening.

Teacher cue: *"Move slowly into and out of this one. The neck is precious. Once settled, find absolute stillness — let the weight do the work."*

Saddle (Supta Virasana Variation)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Stomach, Spleen, Kidney

Entry: From kneeling with the knees together (or hip-width apart), sit back between the heels — or on a block between the feet if the sit bones do not reach the floor comfortably. From here, lean back to the forearms, or recline fully supine with arms alongside the body or overhead.

Target areas: Quadriceps, rectus femoris, hip flexors, lumbar spine (extension), ankles and knee joints.

Variations: Half Saddle (one leg extended, one bent); bolster or folded blankets under the back for support; remaining upright (seated Virasana) for those for whom any reclining is not appropriate.

Contraindications: Acute knee pain; recent knee surgery; herniated lumbar discs in acute phase; sacroiliac instability.

Teacher cue: *"Support yourself generously here. More props mean more time — and time is what creates change in Yin."*

Sphinx and Seal (Bhujangasana Variations)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Kidney, Stomach

Entry — Sphinx: Lie prone. Place the forearms on the floor with elbows beneath or slightly forward of the shoulders. Allow the lumbar spine to extend gently. The abdomen rests on

the floor. This is a mild, accessible backbend; the effort is in releasing, not in lifting. **Seal:** From Sphinx, straighten the arms — pressing the hands into the floor — for greater lumbar extension. The pelvis may or may not lift from the floor depending on arm length and spinal mobility.

Target areas: Lumbar spine (gentle compression and extension), abdominals, anterior hip capsule.

Contraindications: Pregnancy; herniated lumbar discs (particularly in the acute phase); sacroiliac instability. For those with mild lumbar sensitivity, Sphinx at a reduced height (fists under chin) is often well-tolerated.

Teacher cue: *"Let the lower back compress and soften simultaneously. You are not pushing into the pose — you are melting into it."*

Child's Pose (Balasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes (frequently used as a counterpose) | Meridians: Kidney, Urinary Bladder, Spleen

Entry: From kneeling, draw the sit bones toward the heels and fold the torso forward. Knees may be together (narrow Child's Pose, deeper hip and lumbar flexion) or wide apart (wide Child's Pose, gentler). Arms extend forward (*Melting Heart variation*, targeting thoracic spine) or alongside the body (restorative variation).

Target areas: Lower back, hips, ankles, and — in the extended-arm variation — the thoracic spine and shoulder girdle.

Contraindications: Acute knee injury; pregnancy (use wide-knee variation); high blood pressure in the folded position (rest head on stacked fists or a block).

Teacher cue: *"Child's Pose is not a resting pose in Yin — it is its own complete practice. Allow yourself to arrive here fully."*

Side Body & Twists

Banana (Bananasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes each side | Meridians: Gallbladder, Stomach

Entry: From supine with legs together, walk the feet to one side of the mat. Walk the arms overhead and toward the same side, creating a crescent or banana shape through the entire body. Cross the ankles if desired for increased lateral stretch. Arms may be clasped or one hand holds the opposite wrist.

Target areas: The entire lateral chain — IT band, lateral quadriceps, lateral obliques, intercostals, lateral neck and arm fascia.

Teacher cue: *"Feel the entire side of the body become one long, continuous line of sensation. Breathe into the spaces between the ribs."*

Reclining Twist (Supta Matsyendrasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes each side | Meridians: Gallbladder, Urinary Bladder

Entry: From supine, draw one knee into the chest and allow it to fall across the midline of the body. The arms extend wide. The gaze may go opposite to the bent knee for a cervical component, or remain neutral. The emphasis is on the thoracic and lumbar rotation — not forcing the shoulder to the floor.

Target areas: Spinal rotators, obliques, outer hip, thoracolumbar fascia, intercostal region.

Variations: Block under the bent knee for a supported variation; both knees bent and crossed for a gentler version.

Teacher cue: *"Let gravity do the rotating. No forcing the shoulder down. Simply allow the body to unwind at its own pace."*

Dragonfly (Upavistha Konasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Liver, Kidney, Urinary Bladder

Entry: From seated, extend the legs wide apart. The degree of width is individual — there is no correct angle. Fold forward from the hips with a rounded spine, allowing the hands to rest wherever they land. The torso surrenders toward the floor without reaching.

Target areas: Inner groins, adductors, hamstrings, lumbar spine, sacrum.

Variations: Seated on a folded blanket to tip the pelvis forward; bolster lengthwise under the torso for a supported version; slight bend in the knees if hamstring tendons are tight.

Contraindications: Sciatic nerve sensitivity — if shooting pain is felt down either leg, ease back until only a dull, diffuse sensation remains.

Teacher cue: *"Wide and soft. Let the earth call the body down. You are not trying to reach anywhere. You are simply arriving."*

Shoulder & Chest Openers

Melting Heart (Anahatasana)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Heart, Lung

Entry: From all fours (Tabletop), walk the hands forward while keeping the hips directly over the knees. Allow the chest to melt toward the floor — the forehead or chin may rest on the mat. Arms are extended with palms flat. The spine forms a deep arc of thoracic extension.

Target areas: Thoracic spine (extension), anterior shoulder capsule, pectoral fascia, bicipital groove.

Variations: Block under the forehead; arms to one side for an asymmetrical shoulder opener.

Contraindications: Acute shoulder injury; rotator cuff pathology in acute phase.

Teacher cue: *"Let the heart be heavy, like honey dripping toward the floor. Breathe into the center of the chest and feel it soften with each exhale."*

Supported Fish (Matsyasana Variation)

Hold: 3–5 minutes | Meridians: Lung, Heart

Entry: Place a bolster or rolled blanket crosswise on the mat. Sit in front of it and recline backward so that the bolster or blanket supports the mid-thoracic spine. Allow the arms to rest wide, palms up. The head may rest on a block or folded blanket. The chest opens naturally toward the ceiling.

Target areas: Anterior chest, intercostals, anterior shoulder capsule, cervical spine (gentle extension).

Variations: Two blocks in a T-shape (one under the mid-back, one under the head) for a fully supported variation; legs in Butterfly for an added inner groin component.

Teacher cue: *"The chest opens not by effort but by surrender. With every exhale, feel the front body soften a little more toward openness."*

Sequencing a Yin Yoga Class

The Art of Intelligent Sequencing

A well-crafted Yin sequence is not a random collection of long-held postures. It is a carefully considered journey through the body — one that balances flexion with extension, addresses complementary meridian pathways, and moves students from outer awareness to deep inner stillness by the end of the practice. Intelligent sequencing is the difference between a class that feels cohesive and meaningful and one that feels arbitrary or incomplete.

Unlike Yang yoga, in which counterposes are often used immediately after a posture, Yin Yoga relies on gentler recovery: neutral positions. Between postures, students are invited to spend a few breaths in Tabletop, lying supine, or in a gentle Savasana — allowing the tissues to reorganize, the Qi to settle, and the nervous system to integrate before moving on. These transitional moments are not dead time; they are part of the practice. Teach students to honor them.

Common Sequencing Frameworks

Meridian-Based Sequencing

Design the class around one or two meridian pairs, choosing postures that stress the connective tissue along those pathways. Seasonal and thematically resonant classes emerge naturally from this framework. A spring Liver/Gallbladder class invites postures targeting the inner and outer legs; a winter Kidney/Urinary Bladder class foregrounds postures along the back body. Pair the physical theme with philosophical context, reflections, and closing intentions drawn from the associated elemental qualities.

Anatomical Sequencing

Target a specific region of the body — the hips and lower back, the thoracic spine and shoulders, the inner groins — and move through multiple complementary angles of approach to that region. This framework is intuitive and accessible for students who are not yet fluent in meridian theory, and ensures thorough, balanced attention to the target area.

Chakra-Based Sequencing

Organize postures around the seven chakra centers, working from the root upward, or focusing on one or two chakras per class. This framework pairs beautifully with meditation practices, intention-setting, and the use of mantra or affirmation during holds.

Class Timing

Class Length	Number of Postures	Hold Duration	Savasana
60 minutes	8–10 postures	3–5 minutes each	5–7 minutes
75 minutes	10–12 postures	4–5 minutes each	7–10 minutes
90 minutes	12–15 postures	5–7 minutes each	10–12 minutes

Sample Sequence: Full Body Meridian Balance (60 minutes)

#	Posture	Duration	Meridians / Notes
1	Child's Pose	3 minutes	Kidney, Urinary Bladder — arriving, centering
2	Melting Heart	3 minutes	Heart, Lung — thoracic opening, transition from day

#	Posture	Duration	Meridians / Notes
3	Sphinx	4 minutes	Kidney, Stomach — lumbar extension, front body opening
4	Dragon (right side)	4 minutes	Stomach, Spleen, Kidney — deep hip flexor and psoas
5	Dragon (left side)	4 minutes	Balance — always offer the same to both sides
6	Butterfly	5 minutes	Kidney, Urinary Bladder, Liver — full back body release
7	Sleeping Swan (right)	5 minutes	Gallbladder, Urinary Bladder — outer hip, deep rotators
8	Sleeping Swan (left)	5 minutes	Balance
9	Dragonfly	5 minutes	Liver, Kidney — inner groin, adductor lines
10	Banana (right, then left)	3 minutes each side	Gallbladder, Stomach — lateral chain
11	Reclining Twist (right, then left)	3 minutes each side	Gallbladder, Urinary Bladder — spinal rotation
12	Savasana	7 minutes	Full integration — body scan, loving-kindness, or open silence

Teacher's Note

"Silence is one of the most powerful teaching tools available to you in a Yin class. Resist the urge to fill every moment with words. Once your students are settled in a pose, trust the practice to do its work. You don't need to narrate the experience — you need to hold the space for it."

The Role of the Yin Yoga Teacher

Holding Space

Teaching Yin Yoga requires a particular quality of presence that is distinct from other forms of yoga instruction. In a dynamic class, the teacher's energy is a significant part of the container — the flow of their voice, the rhythm of their cueing, the physicality of their demonstration all contribute to the experience. In Yin, the teacher's primary task is different: it is to create and maintain a container of safety, clarity, and stillness in which the practice can unfold.

You are not the performer of the class. You are the guardian of its atmosphere. Your calm, grounded presence — the steadiness of your voice, the unhurried pace of your transitions, the spaciousness you create with silence — is the most important thing you bring to the room. Students will unconsciously entrain to your nervous system state. If you are unsettled, hurried, or anxious, they will feel it. If you are deeply grounded, they will feel that too — and they will go deeper.

Holding space also means holding the unexpected. Students sometimes cry in Yin. Old emotions surface. Physical discomfort can give rise to psychological discomfort. Breathe. Stay present. Resist the impulse to rush in and fix. A steady, warm, non-reactive presence communicates the most important thing: whatever is arising is safe to be here.

The Art of Cueing

Yin cueing language is distinctly different from the language of more active yoga teaching. Where Yang cueing is often instructional and directive — "Press the floor away, engage your core, reach through the crown" — Yin cueing is invitational, exploratory, and internal. The shift in language is

not merely stylistic; it reflects a fundamentally different relationship between teacher and student, one in which the student's inner experience is the authority, not the teacher's instruction.

Invitational language supports the autonomy and self-trust that Yin Yoga cultivates. Phrases like "notice," "observe," "perhaps," "you might explore," and "if it feels appropriate" invite students to make their own choices and trust their own bodies. This is not passive teaching — it is deeply intentional guidance that honors the intelligence of the student and the fundamental unpredictability of inner experience.

Working with Discomfort

Discomfort is inherent to Yin Yoga, and a skilled teacher must be fluent in working with it — in themselves and in their students. The first and most essential skill is the ability to distinguish between appropriate sensation (productive discomfort: the dull, diffuse, workable intensity of connective tissue being gently stressed) and pain (a sharp, electrical, joint-based, or rapidly intensifying signal that requires immediate response). Teach this distinction to your students clearly, and remind them of it regularly.

When a student is experiencing difficulty, resist the impulse to immediately offer a modification or to offer reassurance that takes them out of their experience. Often, the most powerful response is a steady, warm voice acknowledging what is happening: "This is the work of Yin — staying with what is." Offer modifications when they serve safety or accessibility, not as a reflexive response to any sign of discomfort.

Hold your own discomfort in the room as a teacher. The collective energy of a Yin class — the silence, the emotion, the intensity — can be challenging to hold. Develop your capacity to sit with it by regularly sitting with it in your own practice.

Therapeutic or Not: Using Props in Yin Yoga

Search for a Yin Yoga pose online and you will often see it demonstrated in one of two ways: with props or without props. Propping a Yin Yoga pose is commonly understood as a more therapeutic approach because it allows the body to be supported enough to release more deeply. When the body is comfortably supported, the practitioner can relax more fully into the pose, become still more easily, and remain without unnecessary strain.

Props also make it easier to hold poses for an extended period of time. As with all yoga postures, some shapes are easier for certain practitioners to enter than others. Bolsters, blankets, blocks, straps, and other supports can help the body settle comfortably enough for the muscles to relax and the deeper Yin tissues to receive the gentle stress of the posture.

This does not mean that practicing Yin Yoga without props is wrong. An unpropped approach is often what students see first, followed by a supported variation. The choice is a matter of intention, accessibility, and preference. Some practitioners may need little or no support to enter a pose safely, while others may find that even light propping allows them to relax, breathe, and remain for the full holding time with greater ease.

When using props, it is important not to confuse Yin Yoga with Restorative Yoga. Some of the same tools may appear in both practices, but the intention is different. Restorative Yoga generally uses props to remove effort, reduce sensation, and create deep rest. Yin Yoga uses props to support the body at an appropriate edge so the student can remain safely with time, stillness, and gentle stress. In Yin, props do not erase sensation; they make the sensation sustainable.

Teacher Self-Practice

Your personal Yin practice is not optional. It is the foundation of everything you teach. You cannot guide students into stillness you have not visited yourself. You cannot hold space for discomfort you have not learned to meet in your own body. You cannot speak authentically about surrender if you are only familiar with it conceptually.

Commit to a regular personal practice — not to perfect your postures or deepen your holds, but to deepen your understanding. Let your mat be a place of honest inquiry. Notice what arises for you in stillness. Notice what you avoid. Notice when the impulse to exit a pose is driven by safety and when it is driven by discomfort-aversion. That noticing — honest, curious, compassionate — is the core of everything this manual points toward.

Reflection Prompt

"What has your Yin practice taught you about yourself that no other practice has? What arises for you in stillness — and how do you work with it? How might the lessons of your own mat inform the quality of presence you bring to your students?"

Props, Modifications & Contraindications

The Essential Yin Toolkit

Props in Yin Yoga are not concessions to limitation — they are tools of access and intelligence. A well-propped student can hold a posture longer, settle more deeply, and experience the full benefit of the pose. A student holding an unsupported posture at the edge of their tolerance will exit the pose long before the connective tissues have had time to respond. Props allow more time, and time is what creates change. Make this clear to every student who enters your class.

- **Bolsters** — the workhorse of Yin; supports the torso, spine, and hips in supine, prone, and seated postures
- **Foam blocks** — versatile support for the head, hands, sit-bones, and under the knees
- **Cork blocks** — firmer support; useful for compression-based poses and as a firm alternative to foam
- **Folded blankets** — used under the sit-bones, knees, hips, and head; also for warmth in Savasana
- **Straps** — extend the reach in Caterpillar and other forward folds when hands cannot reach the feet
- **Eye pillows** — support sensory withdrawal and deepen the parasympathetic response in Savasana and supine holds

Before every class, set up props generously and visibly — multiple blankets, several blocks, bolsters within easy reach. The setup of the room communicates your philosophy before you speak a single word. A room that says "there are props available for everyone" is a room that says "every body is welcome here."

When to Modify

Pregnancy

In the second and third trimester particularly, avoid deep twists, prone postures (Sphinx, Seal), inversions (Snail), and postures that compress the abdomen. Offer supported side-lying positions, reclined postures with appropriate elevation, gentle hip openers in seated or reclined positions, and supported Butterfly. Always recommend that pregnant students consult with their healthcare provider before attending and inform the teacher before class begins.

Lower Back Issues

Reduce the depth of forward folds; support the pelvis with a folded blanket to reduce posterior tilt. Avoid deep spinal flexion (Caterpillar, Snail) in the acute phase of a lower back episode. Sphinx at reduced height may be therapeutically appropriate. Encourage students to work below their pain threshold at all times.

Knee Issues

Avoid Saddle and Square Pose without generous prop support. Place folded blankets behind the knee in Sleeping Swan and Dragon. Offer Reclined Figure-4 as an alternative to Sleeping Swan. Never push through knee discomfort — the knee is a hinge joint and does not respond well to torquing forces.

Hip Replacements

Students with hip replacements must work with their surgeon's and physiotherapist's specific guidelines. Generally, deep hip adduction and internal rotation should be avoided. Always obtain medical clearance information before working with a student post-joint replacement.

Osteoporosis

Absolute Contraindications

Posture	Contraindications
Snail / Halasana	High blood pressure, glaucoma, pregnancy, acute neck or cervical disc injury, recent spinal surgery
Saddle	Acute knee injury, recent knee surgery, herniated lumbar discs (acute phase), recent hip surgery
Seal (full arm extension)	Herniated lumbar discs (acute), sacroiliac instability (acute), pregnancy (second/third trimester)
Sleeping Swan	Acute knee pain or injury (offer Reclined Figure-4 instead); acute hip pathology or recent hip surgery
Square Pose	Knee pain during the posture (redirect to Shoelace); acute sacroiliac injury

Teacher's Note

"Every student who walks into your class carries a body with a history — surgeries, injuries, grief, chronic tension held for years. Props are how we honor that history. Set up your prop offerings before class with care and abundance. Let the room itself communicate: 'Whatever you bring here is welcome.'"

Pranayama & Meditation in Yin

Breath as an Anchor

In the long, quiet holds of Yin Yoga, the breath is the student's most immediate and reliable companion. When sensation becomes intense, when the mind begins to spiral, when the impulse to exit the pose grows loud — the breath is always available. It is the thread that connects the student to the present moment when the mind would prefer to be anywhere else.

One of the most important things you can teach in a Yin class is this: the breath is observed, not managed. In many yoga traditions, the breath is shaped, directed, and controlled as part of the practice. In Yin, the primary invitation is simpler and, in some ways, more challenging: to notice the breath as it is, without altering it. To feel the rise and fall of the chest and belly as a natural phenomenon, as intimate and impersonal as the tide. This quality of observation — curious, non-interfering, present — is itself a meditation.

Suggested Pranayama Practices for Yin

Natural Breath Awareness

Observing the natural breath without alteration — noticing where in the body the breath moves, the quality of the inhale and exhale, the natural pause at the top and bottom of each breath cycle. This is ideal for the opening of a class and for settling students into each posture. No technique; simply attention.

Three-Part Breath (Dirga Pranayama)

A sequential filling of the three chambers of the torso: first the belly, then the lateral ribcage, then the upper chest. The exhale releases in reverse. This practice is deeply calming and grounding, activating the diaphragm fully and downregulating the nervous system. Particularly useful at the beginning of class or during anxious energy in the room.

Box Breathing (Equal Ratio Breathing)

Inhale for a count of four, hold for four, exhale for four, hold for four. The equal ratio creates a sense of balance and suspension. Box breathing is particularly effective for nervous system regulation in students who are experiencing anxiety or activation. Introduce it gently — never force breath retention on students who are uncomfortable.

Ujjayi Breath

The gentle constriction of the glottis creates a soft, audible ocean sound on both the inhale and exhale. Ujjayi provides an auditory anchor — students can listen to their own breath — and creates a mild warming effect in the body. It is the bridge between a more active Yang practice and the deeper stillness of Yin, and can be especially useful for practitioners transitioning from a dynamic class.

Meditation Integration

Yin postures are, in their nature, meditations conducted in the body. The long holds create an extended window of relative stillness in which the practices of formal meditation integrate seamlessly and naturally. As a teacher, you may choose to guide explicit meditation practices during class, or simply hold the space in a quality of attention that supports students' own inner inquiry.

Body scan meditation during or after postures invites students to move awareness systematically through the body — noticing sensation, temperature, and quality of aliveness in each area without judgment. This is both a deepening of the physical practice and a classic vipassana technique for cultivating embodied mindfulness.

Loving-kindness (Metta) practice during Savasana — offering phrases of compassion and goodwill first to oneself, then to loved ones, then to neutral people, then to all beings — brings the heart quality of Buddhist practice into the closing of the class. This can be offered as a guided practice or suggested as a silent personal inquiry.

Open awareness — resting in a quality of wide, non-specific attention without object — is available to students with meditation experience. Simply invite awareness to rest in the field of sensation, sound, and breath, without fixing on any one point.

Meridian visualization — inviting students to imagine Qi or warm, luminous light flowing through the meridian pathways being targeted in a posture — is both a classical TCM practice and a powerful tool for deepening students' relationship with the energetic dimension of the practice.

Closing the Practice

Every Yin class should close with an extended Savasana — a minimum of five to seven minutes, and longer whenever class time allows. Savasana in Yin is not a formality; it is the integration period, the moment when all that the practice has opened and reorganized begins to settle into lasting change. Rush Savasana in a Yin class and you deprive students of the most important part.

After Savasana, invite students to transition gently to a comfortable seat. Offer a brief closing intention, reflection prompt, or simple expression of gratitude that ties the practice together and helps students carry something of its quality into the rest of their day. The closing moments of a Yin class are not logistical; they are the last gift of the session. Offer them with care.

Key Concept

"The breath is not a technique in Yin Yoga — it is a presence. When we teach students to observe the breath rather than control it, we teach them a fundamental skill: the capacity to be with what is, without immediately trying to change it. This is, perhaps, the most transferable lesson Yin Yoga offers."

Teaching Cues, Language & Classroom Management

Invitational Language Examples

The language a Yin teacher uses is one of their most powerful tools. Every word choice communicates something about the relationship between teacher and student, and between the student and their own body. The following examples illustrate the shift from directive to invitational language — a shift that is subtle in form but profound in effect.

Instead of (Directive)	Try This (Invitational)
"Go deeper."	"If it feels appropriate, you might explore a little more depth here — or stay exactly where you are."
"Relax."	"See if you can soften just a little around the edges of this sensation."
"This should feel..."	"You may notice..." or "Some students experience..."
"Good." (evaluative)	"Stay with it." or "You're here — that's the practice."
"Put your foot here."	"Find a place where the foot can rest comfortably and sustainably."
"Don't fidget."	"Notice the impulse to move — and see if you can stay, just for a breath or two longer."
"Push through it."	"This sensation is workable. See if you can breathe into it rather than bracing against it."
"You're almost done."	"One more breath here. You're practicing exactly as you should be."

Entering and Exiting Poses

Transitions in Yin Yoga require as much care as the postures themselves. After three to five minutes of sustained hold, the connective tissues are in a temporarily altered state — more pliable, rehydrated, and reorganized. Moving quickly or carelessly out of a posture after a long hold risks straining the very tissues that were just therapeutically stressed. Always cue the exit of each pose clearly and slowly.

A standard exit cue for most Yin postures might sound like this: "As you begin to come out, move slowly and with awareness. Feel what it is like to come back into a more neutral position. Give yourself a breath or two to notice the after-effects of this pose before we move on." That pause — those one or two breaths in a neutral position — is the Yin counterpose. It is not nothing. It is integration.

Managing the Room

The physical environment of a Yin class is itself a teaching tool. Create the conditions for stillness and inward focus intentionally:

- **Move quietly.** Soft footsteps, gentle handling of props, no sudden sounds. Your physical presence in the room should not disturb the interior quiet of the practice.
- **Dim the lights** where possible. Reduced light naturally supports the parasympathetic nervous system and signals the body that it is safe to rest.
- **Music.** Use thoughtfully. Soft, wordless instrumental music can support the atmosphere without distracting the mind; long silences serve the practice equally well. Never play music that competes with the students' ability to listen inward. When in doubt, silence is always appropriate.
- **Touch.** In Yin Yoga, physical adjustments are rarely necessary and should never be assumed. Always establish a verbal consent protocol at the beginning of class — a simple check-in that allows students to indicate whether they are open to hands-on guidance. Never touch a student without established consent, and always make it easy for students to opt out without explanation.
- **Read the room.** A skilled Yin teacher develops sensitivity to the collective energy of the class. Some sessions call for more verbal guidance; others, for extended silence. Some groups need permission to stay; others need permission to ease out. Trust your attunement. Let the room inform your teaching as much as your plan does.

Teacher's Note

"The most dangerous assumption a teacher can make is that they know what the room needs. Show up prepared — and then listen. Your students, and the practice itself, will tell you what is needed. Your job is to be present enough to hear it."

Integration & Continuing Practice

Your Journey as a Yin Teacher

Teacher training is not an endpoint. It is a threshold — the beginning of a journey that will unfold over years and decades of practice, teaching, reflection, and return. The information in this manual will serve you well; the wisdom it points toward will come slowly, incrementally, through the accumulated experience of time on your mat and time in front of students.

Remain a student. Return to this material as you grow, and notice how your relationship to it changes. Concepts that felt abstract in the early days of training will suddenly become obvious after a year of teaching. Postures that challenged you will become portals of understanding. Students will teach you things about Yin Yoga that no book or training ever could — because the practice lives in bodies, not in pages.

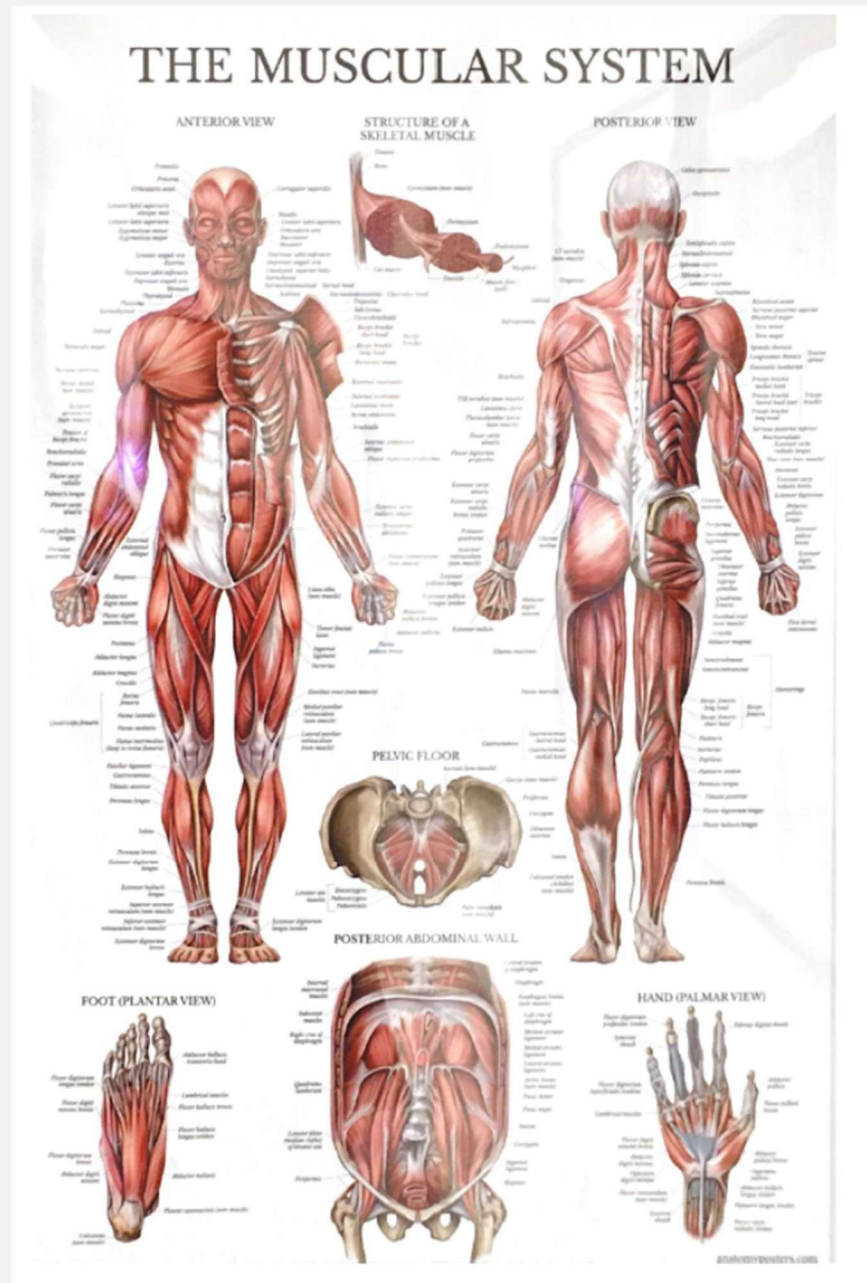
Seek out continuing education. Attend workshops and trainings with teachers who challenge and inspire you. Develop a relationship with mentors. Maintain your personal practice not as a professional obligation but as a genuine act of self-care and self-inquiry. The depth of your teaching will always reflect the depth of your own going inward.

And when the practice feels difficult — when a class doesn't go as planned, when a student pushes back, when your own mat feels like the last place you want to be — remember the Three Tattvas. Come to your appropriate edge. Resolve to be still. Hold the posture for time. The practice, and the teaching of it, will ask you to embody what you offer. Trust that you are capable of exactly that.

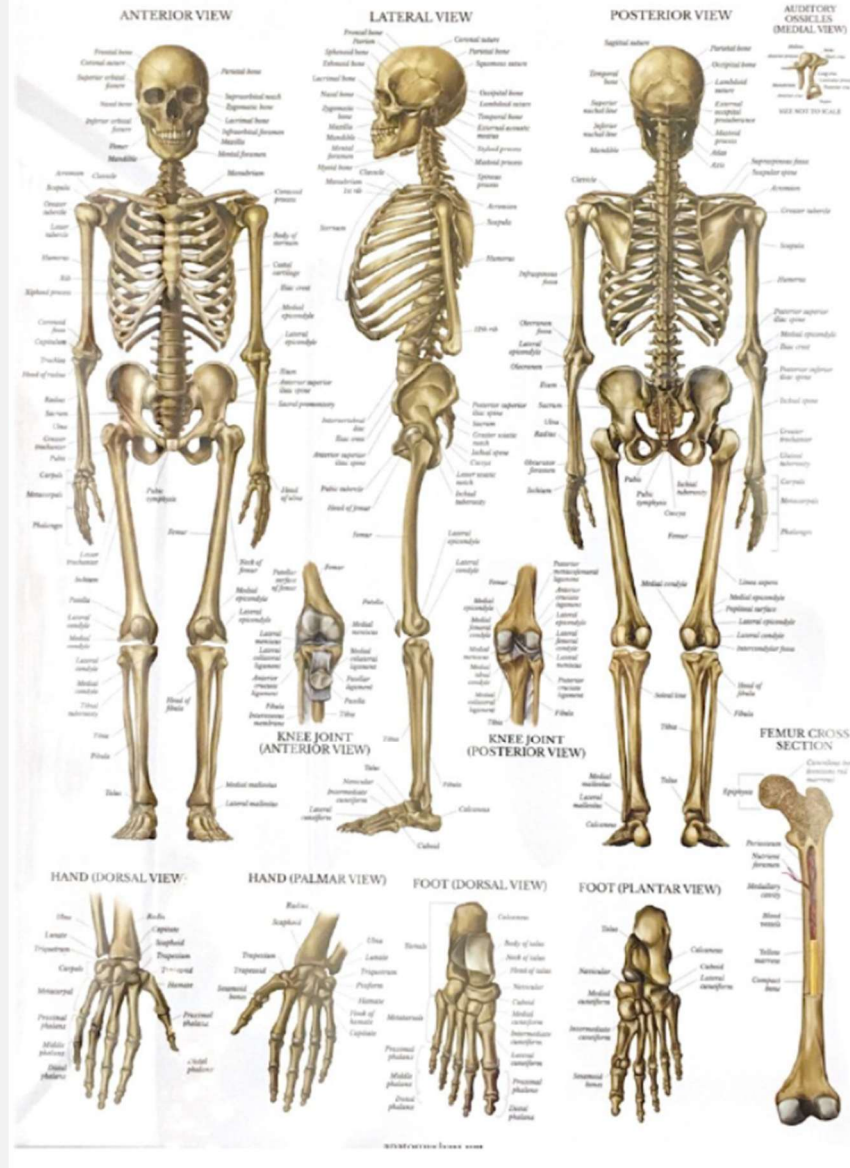
Recommended Reading & Resources

- Yin Yoga: Principles and Practice — Paul Grilley. A core resource for understanding the foundational principles, posture families, and energetic framework of Yin Yoga.
- Your Body, Your Yoga — Bernie Clark. The essential anatomical text for Yin Yoga teachers; foundational for understanding skeletal variation and individual differences.
- The Complete Guide to Yin Yoga — Bernie Clark. A comprehensive and accessible overview of the practice, postures, and philosophy.
- Insight Yoga — Sarah Powers. Powers' integration of Yin Yoga, Buddhist mindfulness, and TCM; beautifully written and deeply contemplative.
- **Yin Yoga: Outline of a Quiet Practice** — *Paul Grilley*
The foundational text by Yin Yoga's primary systematizer; essential reading for any serious student or teacher.
- **The Tao Te Ching** — *Lao Tzu (any translation)*
The source text of Taoist philosophy; brief, inexhaustible, and endlessly applicable to the practice and the life of a teacher.
- **YinSights: A Journey into the Philosophy & Practice of Yin Yoga** — *Bernie Clark*
A philosophical and practical exploration of Yin Yoga, Taoist thought, and the inner dimensions of the practice.
- **The Yin Yoga Kit** — *Biff Mithoefer*
A practical teaching resource for class development, contemplation, and embodied study.
- **The Complete Book of Chakras** — *Cyndi Dale*
A useful reference for subtle body study, chakra theory, and energetic anatomy.

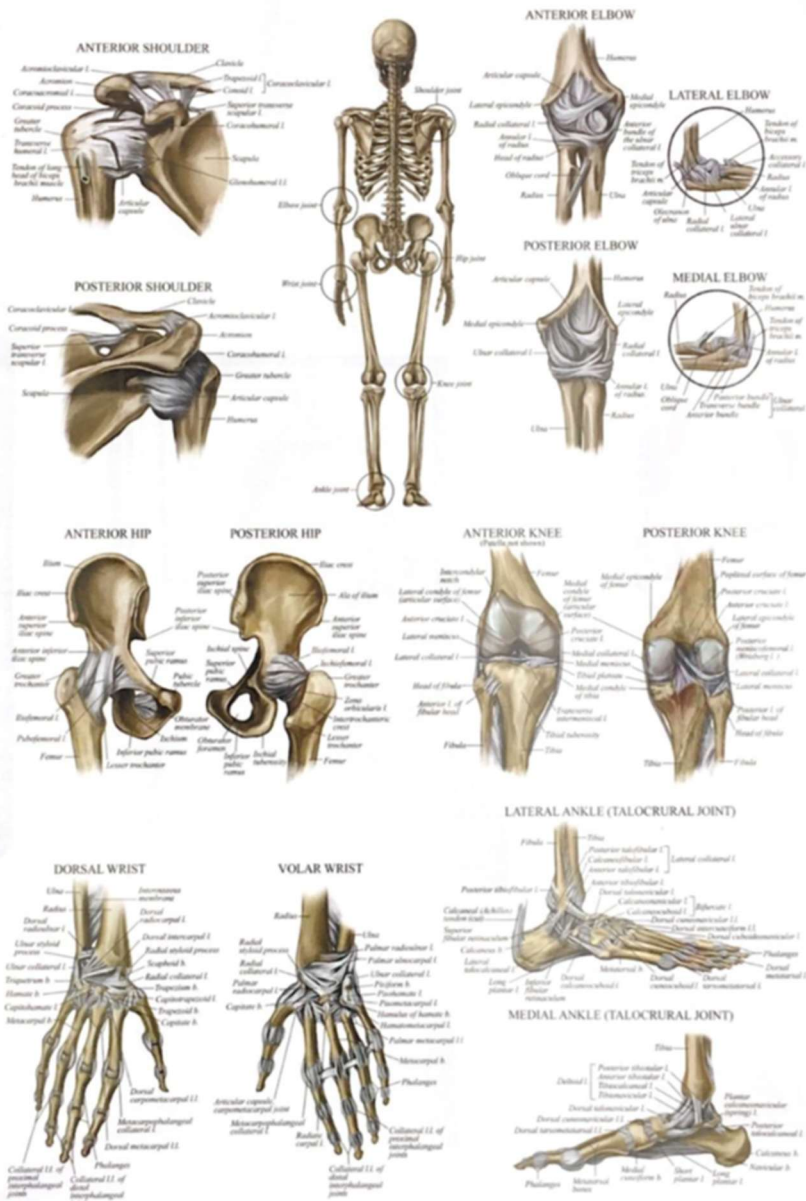
Resource Images



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Closing Reflection Prompt

"What drew you to Yin Yoga — as a student, and now as a teacher? Hold that answer close. When the practice feels difficult, when the teaching feels uncertain, return to that original impulse. It is your compass. It will not fail you."

Glossary of Key Terms

Anatomical Variation — The natural, permanent differences in bone shape, depth, and angle between individuals. Skeletal variation means that no two bodies will express a Yin posture identically, and that aesthetic uniformity is neither possible nor appropriate as a teaching goal.

Appropriate Edge — The depth of sensation in a Yin posture that is meaningful, sustained, and workable without crossing into pain. The first of the Three Tattvas.

Dukkha — A Pali/Sanskrit term often translated as "suffering" or "unsatisfactoriness." In Buddhist teaching, the suffering that arises from resistance to impermanent experience. In Yin Yoga, the discomfort that intensifies when we resist sensation rather than allowing it.

Fascia — The continuous three-dimensional matrix of connective tissue that envelops every structure in the body. Richly innervated and responsive to sustained, gentle mechanical load. The primary Yin tissue target alongside ligaments and joint capsules.

Five Elements — A framework within Taoist philosophy and TCM that describes five fundamental energetic qualities (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water) and their correspondences with seasons, organs, meridians, and emotional patterns.

Meridians — Pathways through which Qi (life force energy) is understood to flow in the body, according to traditional Chinese medicine. Twelve primary meridians correspond to twelve organ systems. Yin Yoga postures are thought to support Qi flow through specific meridians by gently stressing the connective tissue along those pathways.

Metta — A Pali term for loving-kindness; a Buddhist meditation practice of cultivating goodwill toward oneself and all beings through the silent or verbal offering of compassionate phrases.

Mindfulness (Sati) — Clear, non-reactive, present-moment awareness. In Yin Yoga, the quality of attention brought to sensation during posture holds; the experiential heart of the contemplative dimension of the practice.

Qi (Chi) — The vital life force or energy that, in Taoist and TCM traditions, animates all living beings and flows through the meridian network. Health is understood as the free, balanced flow of Qi; illness or discomfort may reflect Qi stagnation, deficiency, or excess.

Sati — See Mindfulness.

Tattvas — Literally "principles" or "truths" in Sanskrit. In the Yin Yoga context, the Three Tattvas are the foundational guidelines articulated by Sarah Powers: Come to Your Appropriate Edge, Resolve to Be Still, and Hold the Posture for Time.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) — A comprehensive system of medicine developed in China over more than two thousand years, encompassing acupuncture, herbal medicine, dietary therapy, and movement practices. Its theory of Qi and meridians forms a foundational framework for the energetic dimension of Yin Yoga.

Wolff's Law — The physiological principle that bone remodels in response to the mechanical loads placed upon it. Bones that experience appropriate load become denser; those that do not may lose density over time. Relevant to the practice of Yin Yoga in the context of bone health.

Wu Wei — A core Taoist concept meaning "non-doing" or "effortless action." The practice of moving in harmony with the natural flow of things — yielding rather than forcing. The philosophical heart of the Yin approach to posture and to life.

Yang Tissues — The more elastic, vascular, dynamic tissues of the body — primarily muscles and blood — that respond well to repetitive, rhythmic movement and warm quickly with activity.

Yin Tissues — The relatively inelastic, avascular, slow-responding tissues of the body — fascia, ligaments, tendons, joint capsules, and bones — that require sustained, gentle, passive loading to be safely stressed and stimulated.

Notes

*Use this page to record your reflections, questions, and insights as you move through this training.
Your inner experience is a text worth studying.*