



About Restorative Yoga For Athletes

Why should athletes practice restorative yoga?

Most athletes know that the recovery elements of their training regime are as important as the physical training sessions they undertake. They may also know that if they improve the quality of their recovery, their athletic performance will improve too.

Restorative yoga is a form of active recovery which is complementary to, and has a natural synergy with, the more physical aspects of an athlete's training programme. It is an excellent way to improve the quality of recovery and as such is a highly effective means to enhance athletic performance.

When to practice restorative yoga?

You can practise restorative yoga at any time in your training cycle, and can be easily integrated into your training schedule; it is an activity that won't impact greatly on, or interfere with, your other training commitments. Restorative yoga is particularly helpful when you are feeling mentally and/or physically frazzled as the practice provides you with an opportunity to reflect and recover, to relax and wind down.

What does restorative yoga 'do'?

- Sets optimum conditions for recovery of the muscular, nervous and immune systems in the body.
- Gives space to rest, reflect and refresh.
- Increases feelings of positivity, well-being, contentment and mental calm, and improves focus.

How does this work?

In a physical training session the sympathetic nervous system (the body's fight, flight, stress response) is activated. When practising restorative yoga, the parasympathetic nervous system (the body's rest, digest, recovery, relaxation response) activates and stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system reduces; the body switches into parasympathetic mode which counter-balances the effects of the sympathetic nervous system. And it is this enhanced parasympathetic activity that has a profound effect on recovery, allowing the body and mind to adapt and recuperate; in fact your body is designed to spend most of its time in the parasympathetic nervous system.

When the parasympathetic nervous system is active, ie in a restorative yoga practice:

- the body enters a naturally anabolic state, releasing energy for maintenance and growth, rebuilding damaged cells and tissue;
- the immune system becomes stronger;
- the nervous system stops constantly over-reacting;
- production of cortisol (a stress hormone) is reduced;
- the mind enters a deeper level of rest and restoration;
- your whole being becomes more relaxed and calm.

And the more you practice restorative yoga and the conscious controlled relaxation that is involved in this practice, the easier it becomes to over-ride the body's stress response when you need to, which helps to reduce mental stress and anxiety, and increase feelings of calm and well-being generally.

In Summary

Restorative yoga trains the body and mind to reduce sympathetic stimulation and maximises the benefits of parasympathetic activity, increasing the effectiveness of recovery 'time' in an athlete's training schedule and as such is a powerful tool for improving athletic performance.

