



Winter

Description

## Winter Reflections

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## **INNER WORLD SLOWS DOWN**

In winter, nature slows all outward growth; the earth contracts, stops producing, and instead pauses to replenish its inner energy reserves. Our inner world also slows down with this contracting cycle of nature, and therefore we need to make extra efforts to ignite our digestive fires in order to prevent build up of toxins, enhance our immunity, and build our own inner energy reserve. During this time of year, our yoga practice should keep things warm and moving inside while encouraging relaxation and ease. We can increase our health through asana that address the organs of digestion such as the lungs, stomach, and intestines. â?? Jillian Pransky

## **AFTER WINTER SOLSTICE, THE LIGHTâ??S JOURNEY OF REEMERGENCE**



At [winter solstice](#), the darkest point of the year, light begins its journey of reemergence. This great cosmological reality synchs our biorhythms to the subtle flow of slowly increasing light. This biological and spiritual attunement to light is part of our creative legacy found in the many cosmological temples around the world linked to the solstice. â?? Shiva Rea

#### LESS ENERGY TO BURN

We naturally have less energy to burn during the winter. So when we engage in behaviors more appropriate for summerâ??staying up late and dashing around townâ??itâ??s no wonder that the forced cheer of the holiday season can wear a bit thin. â?? Carolyn Cohen

#### HARNESSING VITAL ENERGY

As we transition to Winter, Iâ??m finding it beneficial to audit the correlations of cause and effect in my life, and to assess what will (or will not) be created as a result of my current action. How might you â??pruneâ?• the tree of your life to harness your vital energy for more strategic direction and application? What would you like to cultivate? â?? Tai Hubbert

#### EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

Melina Meza notes that we might expect students to be experiencing some of these common wintertime qualities: feeling heavy or lethargic, experiencing blues, depression or [stress](#), gaining weight and/or increasingly relying on chemical stimulants and depressants.

#### WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEM

Our immune system may be weakened due to winter conditions such as drier air. In addition, spending more time indoors and in closer contact with others can lead to more colds and flus for those who have a weakened immune system.

## Theme Ideas

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- [Cycles](#) of Nature
- Igniting Digestive Fires
- Warmth & Moisture
- Movement & Routine
- Safeguarding Energy Reserves
- Relaxation & Ease
- [Darkness](#)
- After Winter Solstice, the Reemergence of Light

## Teaching Approach

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## Safeguard Energy Reserves

In Winter Wonder Yin, Carolyn Cohen explains that in order to stay balanced during winter, itâ??s necessary to conserve yang energy. Practices such as restorative yoga, tai chi, qigong, and walking are called for during the winter season in order to â??safeguard your energy reserves.â?•

## Ayurvedic Basics

If *vata* (winter) is cold, dry, and totally unpredictable, you counter and reduce its effects with warmth, moisture, and routine. â?? Chara Caruthers





## Become Aware of Body Sensations Without Judgment

Cyndi Lee suggests that students be encouraged to cultivate an interest [without judgment](#) [in bodily sensations](#) during this season. She writes, [“Rather than thinking, “Ugh, I feel so stiff and tight,” explore how you can let go of that thought and how doing so can create freedom in your joints.”](#)

## Nourishment & Self-Care

Tend to yourself sweetly and gently this season. From an Ayurvedic perspective Winter is a time to deeply nourish the body, and these basic self-care practices can help keep you grounded, healthy, and in good spirits:

- Eat warm, mildly spicy, and [“mushy”](#) foods (think warming lentil soup). If you [re a smoothie drinker](#), make them room temperature (no frozen ingredients, if possible!). In the evening, consider making warm Gold Milk [a concoction of warm milk \(goat or almond\), tsp of oil \(ghee or coconut\), turmeric, and a pinch of cinnamon and/or saffron.](#)
- The body might crave/need more rest. Consider going to bed earlier, and take short naps as needed. If possible, carve out 10-20 minutes in the morning for meditation.
- Oil your ENTIRE body. Organic sesame oil is best this time of year, as it has a warming quality. Consider massaging your feet and joints before bed (and even putting some oil in the nostrils!), and definitely before/after airplane travel. Dry skin brushing will also help boost circulation and lymphatic drainage.
- Wear a scarf. And consider wearing bright, warming colors like red & orange.
- Get plenty of vigorous exercise. If you practice yoga, a heat-building vinyasa practice is recommended. [Tai Hubbert](#), [Sword & Lotus](#)

## Universal Ways of Coping with Winter

Albert Camus wrote, [“in the midst of winter I finally learned that there is in me an invincible summer.”](#) I believe this is true of every human being. In ancient cultures, there are distinct rituals for dealing with winter [both the winter of the earth and the winter of the soul.](#) In our culture, we put on our microfleece, plug in fluorescent tubing, and pretend [winter] isn’t happening or that it isn’t hard. I suggest we go back to the ways in which thousands of generations of humans learned to get through hard times! try these nearly universal ways of coping:

- Be still. When times are difficult, many of us think we should get up and get moving. Nothing could be further from the truth. Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth century mystic wrote, [“I need to be silent for a while, worlds are forming in my heart.”](#) During the times we think we’re being [“unproductive,”](#) the seeds of new worlds are germinating within us, and they need peace to grow.
- Breathe. If only I had known during the worst times of my life how much conscious breathing can change our brains, I would have missed a lot less [sleep](#), suffered a lot less physical pain, and avoided a lot of depression. Deep steady attentive breathing, as simple as it sounds, is a cornerstone of almost all mystical traditions! Try ten minutes of lovingly observing the way your body breathes for you. Be grateful for the miracle. Gratitude for the breath takes the brain into

gratitude for everything in life. After watching someone struggle with terminal lung cancer, I am literally conscious of almost every breath I take and that consciousness has warmed my heart a great deal this [winter].

- Sleep as much as you can. Our bodies were designed to fall asleep when it gets dark. When we force them to stay awake during darkened hours it messes with our brain chemistry.

â?? Martha Beck

## Pranayama

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- [Ujjayi Pranayama](#) during Surya Namaskar, for example, can get the blood pumping, and increase body temperature.
- [Surya Bhedana \(Sun Piercing\)](#) or right nostril breathing is an energizing practice that may promote clarity and focus.
- [Kapalabhati \(Skull Shining Breath\)](#) is a cleansing practice that can bring heat, fire, clarity and alertness.

## Asana & Sequences



### Asana





- In this more stagnant season, [Surya Namaskar](#) and other rhythmic flow promote circulation and emotional well-being as well as encouraging spinal fluidity.
- If the *asana* practice is low-intensity, students may benefit from an additional 30 minutes of moderate exercise such as strength training, walking or biking.
- Jillian Pransky suggests we focus on [Twists](#), [Forward Bends](#) and [Side Bends](#), simple [Inversions](#), easy [Backbends](#) and â??of course, [Restorative Poses](#) to turn on the Rest and Digest response of the body.â?•
- In [this article](#), Karson McGinley recommends [Balasana \(Childâ??s Pose\)](#) with Belly Compression, [Utkatasana \(Fierce / Chair Pose\)](#), [Opposite Limb Extension](#), [Adho Mukha Svanasana \(Downward Facing Dog Pose\)](#) Variations, [Parivrtta Parsvakonasana \(Revolved Side Angle Pose\)](#) or Revolved Lunge Pose, [Vasisthasana \(Side Plank Pose\)](#) and [Agnistambasana \(Fire Log Pose\)](#).
- [Inversions](#) and [Arm Balances](#) are recommended to promote blood flow and increase vitality.
- [Twists](#) are advised to reduce inflammation and bring their oft-cited benefit of countering sluggish digestion.
- Lee says that winter can be a time for quiet contemplation with a focus on calming and restorative forward bends. However, she notes that for those who find the winter to be depressing, chest-openers such as [Dhanurasana \(Bow Pose\)](#) or [Ustrasana \(Camel Pose\)](#) can be helpful as can arm valances for encouraging a playful and open energy.
- Guthrieâ??s article recommends heart-openers in general and these backbends in particular: [Bhujangasana \(Cobra Pose\)](#), [Matsyasana \(Fish Pose\)](#) and [Setu Bandhasana \(Bridge Pose\)](#).

#### TAKE TIME TO WARM UP MUSCLES

Since the weather is cold, even if your yoga room is warmâ??and I hope it isâ??you will need to spend plenty of time warming up your muscles. Try doing some half Sun Salutations before going into full jumpbacks, and move into all *asanas* slowly and mindfully. â?? Cyndi Lee

#### INCREASE HEART RATE, BUT AVOID OVEREXERTION

One theory is that increasing your heart rate speeds up the circulation of white blood cells, making it more likely they will seek and destroy germs early on. Just be careful not to overdo it. Overexertion lowers the immune system, leaving you more (not less) vulnerable to illness. In other words, if someone in your family is sick with the flu, skip the three-hour Ashtanga Yoga class. â?? Catherine Guthrie

#### BACKBENDS

Heart openers stimulate blood flow to the thymus, an organ nestled behind the breastbone that is instrumental in the growth of T-cells, the immune systemâ??s front line, she says. Sundaram suggests practicing all three *asanas* (Cobra, Fish, Bridge) once daily for prevention, twice daily if you feel a cold or flu creeping on. â??Doing all three poses only takes five minutes and may make the difference between staying well and getting sick this winter,â?• she says. â?? Catherine Guthrie

#### STANDING POSES TO â??EMPHASIZE OUR ROOTSâ?• & KEEP WARM

Attending to the calm of winter cultivates the internal fire. The practice nourishes this fire under the embers, the flame that helps keep the river of life flowing. Standing positions in winter emphasize our roots and help keep us warm. When we repeat them often, they reveal their depths. They help us to adjust with the cold climate, and avoid sliding into any torpor. â?? Sandra Sabatini & Silvia Mori

## Sequences

- [Sequence Library: Seasonal Themed Classes.](#)

## Meditation





Stress is the immune system's worst enemy. Whether you're dealing with a brief bout of craziness like Christmas shopping, or a longer-lasting stressor like divorce, your body's ability to fight germs is compromised by physical and mental tension. Meditation can help. One study found that people who attended an eight-week mindfulness meditation class (a three-hour class once a week, plus daily meditation for an hour) ended up with stronger immune systems than those people who didn't meditate. Research shows that even 10 minutes of daily meditation reduces the physical symptoms of stress. — Catherine Guthrie

See [Meditation Hub](#).

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