

Excerpts from  
***Relax and Renew***  
By Judith Lasater, Ph.D., P.T.

**HOW RESTORATIVE YOGA WORKS** ~ Restorative poses help relieve the effects of chronic stress in several ways. First, the use of props as described in this book provides a completely supportive environment for total relaxation.

Second, each restorative sequence is designed to move the spine in all directions. These movements illustrate the age-old wisdom of yoga that teaches well-being is enhanced by a healthy spine. Some of the restorative poses are backbends, while others are forward bends. Additional poses gently twist the column both left and right.

Third, a well-sequenced restorative practice also includes an inverted pose, which reverses the effects of gravity. This can be as simple as putting the legs on a bolster or pillow, but the effects are quite dramatic. Because we stand or sit most of the day, blood and lymph fluid accumulate in the lower extremities. By changing the relationship of the legs to gravity, fluids are returned to the upper body and heart function is enhanced.

Psychobiologist and yoga teacher Roger Cole, Ph.D., consultant to the University of California, San Diego, in sleep research and biological rhythms, has done preliminary research on the effects of inverted poses. He found that they dramatically alter hormone levels, thus reducing brain arousal, blood pressure, and fluid retention. He attributes these benefits to a slowing of the heart rate and dilation of the blood vessels in the upper body that comes from reversing the effects of gravity.

Fourth, restorative yoga alternately stimulates and soothes the organs. For example, by closing the abdomen with a forward bend and then opening it with a backbend, the abdominal organs are squeezed, forcing the blood out, and then opened, so that fresh blood returns to soak the organs. With this movement of blood comes the enhanced exchange of oxygen and waste products across the cell membrane.

Finally, yoga teaches that the body is permeated with energy. *Prana*, the masculine energy, resides above the diaphragm, moves upward, and controls respiration and heart rate. *Apana*, the feminine energy, resides below the diaphragm, moves upward and controls the function of the abdominal organs. Restorative yoga balances these two aspects of energy so that the practitioner is neither over-stimulated nor depleted.