

A Few Gentle Practices for Hard Days

Small reiki, breath, and yoga practices for when everything is too much

You may have opened this on a day when opening anything felt like a lot. If so, this is for you. Not the rested, curious version of you. The version who is here right now, holding whatever you are holding.

These are a few small practices for hard days, drawn from the book I am writing. Breath. Your own hands on your own body. A restorative shape to rest in. A rhythm you can shrink or grow to fit the day. None of them ask much. You can do the first one in the time it takes to brush your teeth.

On the days you do none of this, you have not failed.

Some days the body needs to do nothing. The practice is offered, not required. Use it the way a friend offers a meal, not the way a coach prescribes a regimen. If you find yourself feeling guilty for missing days, you have missed the point of it.

Two minutes, when nothing else is possible

This is the version for the days when getting out of bed felt like enough. Your only commitment is two minutes.

One minute of breath. Sitting, lying, or standing, hands wherever they want to be. Breathe in through the nose, into the belly. Breathe out, a little longer than the inhale. If counting is too much, do not count. Just breathe.

One minute of self-reiki. Place one or both hands on your heart, in the centre of your chest. Take a few slow breaths. Smile, if you can, gently, at the inside of your own chest.

That is the whole thing. Two minutes. No setup. No equipment.

Breath, the medicine that is always with you

Breath is the most accessible medicine you have. It is free, it asks no permission, and it goes everywhere you go. Slow, gentle breathing, especially through the nose with a longer exhale, quietly tells your nervous system that it is safe to stand down. In burnout, that system has been braced for a long time. The breath is how you begin to unbrace it.

Awareness breath

For the days you can barely sit up, this is enough. Find any position that does not hurt. Breathe in and out through your nose, into your belly if you can. Do not change anything. Just notice. The slight cool of the air on the way in, the slight warm on the way out. When your attention wanders, and it will, gently bring it back. Sixty seconds is enough. Five minutes is plenty.

The long exhale

When you have a little more, use the exhale as the door. Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, letting the belly rise. Breathe out, slowly, for a count of six, letting the belly fall. The longer exhale is the part that settles you. Repeat for a few rounds, or a few minutes. Five minutes a day is enough to begin changing where your nervous system rests.

The bee breath, for a day that needs something lighter

Breathe in through your nose, then, with your mouth closed, hum on the way out. Low and steady, until the exhale is done. The sound vibrates through your throat and skull and settles the busy mind. You will feel a little silly the first few times. On the right day, the small absurdity of humming to yourself, like a content bee, is part of the medicine.

If any breath practice ever leaves you light-headed, stop and return to normal breathing. The breath is here to support your body, never to override it.

Your own hands on your own body

This is the heart of it. Laying your own hands on your own body, with attention, as an act of care. It asks for nothing but you, a few minutes, and your willingness to begin. And it is not only maintenance. Every time you do it, you are returning to yourself something a demanding life may have taken. You are not asking to be cared for. You are giving the care directly, by hand, in the time that is yours.

Yes, this is really reiki

What you are about to do has a name. It is self-reiki. The same energy, the same intention, the same laying-on of hands that a practitioner offers a client, turned toward your own body. You do not need to be certified to care for yourself this way. The teachers I trained with are unanimous on it. Self-care with intention works, with or without formal training. Attunement deepens the practice. It is not the gate.

How is this different from working with a practitioner? Mostly in who is holding whom. When I work with a client, I bring my attunements, years of practice, and a trained intuition that reads the field and reflects back what I sense, the intuitive debrief my clients often remember the longest. And the client gets to do the one thing that is hardest to do for yourself: fully let go and receive, while someone else holds the space. Self-reiki is the daily tending you can always give yourself. A session is being met and held by another. They are the same current, met from two directions. Most people who come to value one come to value the other.

Begin with your smile

Bring your palms together in front of your heart, fingertips pointing up, and take a few slow breaths. Then, with your eyes gently closed, let a real smile come, the kind that reaches the corners of your eyes. Bring the feeling of it down into your heart, and smile there for a few breaths. If you would like words, the tradition I trained in offers these: I completely open my whole heart and being to true source. Use them, or your own, or none. Hold the smile as you go. My teacher calls this the single most important practice, and I have come to agree.

Eyes, heart, belly

Now the simplest practice, for the days you have nothing. Place both hands gently over your eyes, palms cupping without pressing. Stay a minute or two, and breathe. Move your hands to your heart, one over the other in the centre of your chest. Stay, and breathe. Move them to your belly, one hand above the navel and one below. Stay, and breathe. Eyes, heart, belly. That is the whole practice on a hard day. It succeeds the moment your hands meet your body.

You cannot fail this

You may wonder whether you are doing it right, or whether anything is happening at all. Here is the honest answer. Feeling the flow of energy clearly, sensing where it moves and what it is doing, is a skill that trained practitioners develop over years of practice and attunement. As a beginner working on yourself, you may notice very little in the moment, and that is completely normal. It is not a sign the practice is failing. What you can rely on, every time, is your body's response to slow breath, warm hands, and steady attention. Your nervous system registers that care whether or not your mind perceives anything dramatic. It settles toward rest and repair. The shoulders drop. The breath deepens on its own. The finer perception, if it comes, tends to come later, with time and repetition. You do not need to feel it, or believe in it, for it to help you now. You only need to show up and let your hands rest.

Where to put your hands

A small map for particular kinds of hard. Three to five minutes at each is enough. Longer if it asks.

When you need it most

When you cannot sleep. Hands over the eyes, then the heart, then the solar plexus.

When you are crying. Hands over the heart, one over the other. Stay until the wave passes.

When your chest is tight. Hands over the heart and the upper belly. Breathe slowly.

When your stomach is in knots. Hands over the solar plexus and the lower belly.

When your jaw is clenched. Palms over the jaw, fingertips reaching to the temples.

When you are afraid. Hands over the heart and the base of the spine. Fear often lives in the root.

A little restorative yoga, for when the body wants holding

Yoga is the other half of my practice, and restorative yoga in particular is made for days like the hard ones. These are not poses you achieve. They are shapes you rest in, held by the floor and a few cushions, while your nervous system remembers how to let go. Move slowly. Use whatever props you have, a pillow, a folded blanket, a rolled towel. If anything pinches or strains, ease out of it. Comfort is the whole point. Stay in each shape for a few minutes, breathing slowly, and let gravity do the work.

Legs up the wall

Perhaps the kindest pose there is for a tired body. Sit sideways against a wall, then swing your legs up it as you lie back, so your legs rest up the wall and your back rests on the floor. A folded blanket under your hips is lovely if you have one. Let your arms fall open. Stay five to ten minutes. This one quietly eases tired legs, a busy mind, and a wired nervous system.

Supported child's pose

Kneel, bring your big toes together, and let your knees fall wide. Place a pillow or bolster between your thighs and fold forward to rest your chest and one cheek on it. Turn your head to the other side halfway through, so the neck stays easy. Let your whole front be held. If your hips do not reach your heels, tuck another cushion under your seat. Breathe into your back.

Reclining butterfly

Lie back, and if you have a pillow or rolled blanket, place it lengthwise under your spine so your chest can open gently. Bring the soles of your feet together and let your knees fall out to the sides. Tuck a cushion under each thigh so your legs are fully supported and can soften completely. Rest your hands on your belly or by your sides. This one opens the heart and slows the breath.

A simple rest to close

When you are done, lie flat on your back, or stay just as you are. Let your arms rest a little away from your body, palms turned up. Let the floor take your full weight. There is nothing to do here and nowhere to be. A few minutes of this, called savasana, lets everything you have done land in the body. This is not the lazy part of the practice. It is the practice.

A rhythm for whatever the day holds

The same care comes in three sizes, and each one can weave together breath, reiki, and a restorative shape. Choose the size that fits the day you actually have, not the day you think you should have. You can begin small and grow if the capacity is there, or begin large and stop when the body asks.

Two minutes

for the worst days

- One minute of breath. Belly breath, exhale slightly longer than the inhale.
- One minute of self-reiki. A hand on the heart. A smile if you can.

Fifteen minutes

for the moderate days

- One minute. Palms together at the heart, a smile, set your intention.
- Three minutes. Long-exhale breath, in for four, out for six.
- Six minutes. Self-reiki. Hands over the eyes, then the heart, then the belly.
- Four minutes. A restorative pose. Legs up the wall, or reclining butterfly, breathing slow.
- One minute. Palms together to close. Thank your body.

Thirty minutes

for the days with capacity

- Two minutes. Palms together, a smile, an intention.
- Five minutes. The breath of your choice.
- Ten minutes. Self-reiki, moving slowly over the head and neck, then the heart and belly.
- Eight minutes. One or two restorative poses, held and breathing.
- Three minutes. A quiet moment of wonder, or simply rest.
- Two minutes. Palms together to close, and let it all land.

A last word

A daily rhythm, of any size, is one of the quiet things that turns burnout recovery from burnout repetition. The body trusts repetition. It begins to expect the tending, and to soften in anticipation. On the days you can offer nothing, the two minutes still counts. And on the days you can offer nothing at all, that too is information, not failure.

Underneath all of it is something simple. For a long time you may have been offering everyone else the care you could not quite find your way to giving yourself. This is the small daily act that begins to turn that around. The hands are yours. The warmth comes from you. The intention is yours. It is one of the most concrete ways I know to come home to yourself.

If these meet something in you, there is more where they came from. My book, *When Everything Is Too Much*, is a fuller companion for burnout, anxiety, and the days you can barely get up. And if you would like to be met in person, I offer reiki and yoga in Nepean on Fridays, and reiki at a distance most days, wherever you are in the world.

With care,
Maria

Book a session: lightandbalance.ca/book