

# Anxiety- BUSTING asanas

Calm your nerves and give stress the heave-ho with these poses from top yoga teacher **Sue Fuller**

**A racing heart, trembling hands and a feeling of panic – sound familiar? Anxiety is recognised as one of the most prevalent mental health problems in the UK.** According to the Mental Health Foundation, it is under-reported, under-diagnosed and maybe even under-treated.

It is the body's natural response to danger; an automatic alarm that goes off when we feel threatened, under pressure, or when we are faced with a stressful situation. In a negative sense anxiety can be extremely debilitating, it can prevent us from performing regular daily tasks, it can send our emotions soaring out of control and continues to be a destructive force in our lives and relationships.

But it isn't always a bad thing. It can help us stay focused and aware, and it also

## **SUE FULLER**

*is the creator of the Yoga 2 Hear range of audio yoga classes. Sue has a range of over 50 different audio yoga classes available on CD or to download, the range includes classes for the absolute beginner right through to strong and advanced classes. You can now claim a free relaxation MP3 from Sue Fuller, just visit [yoga2hear.co.uk](http://yoga2hear.co.uk)*

encourages motivation and action. Anxiety allows us to evaluate a situation; it speeds up our reflexes and helps us to make sound choices for our safety or for our greater good. However, if the anxiety is constant or overwhelming or it interferes with our relationships, work or

regular day-to-day activities, it stops being functional and becomes a problem.

Regular yoga practice can help you manage feelings of anxiety and identify if the feelings are positive, negative or destructive. Yoga calms both body and mind and relieves unnecessary stress and tension, helping us

maintain physical and emotional balance. It enables you to step back from distressing situations and gain a clear perspective.

When anxiety is experienced the body, mind and spirit are unbalanced. The following yoga postures will help to rebalance the body and mind and induce a state of calmness.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

*In a 2007 study researchers in Boston found that doing yoga increases the levels of GABA, or gamma-amino butyric acid, a neurotransmitter that may help reduce anxiety*

## **SUKHASANA AND ANJALI MUDRA**

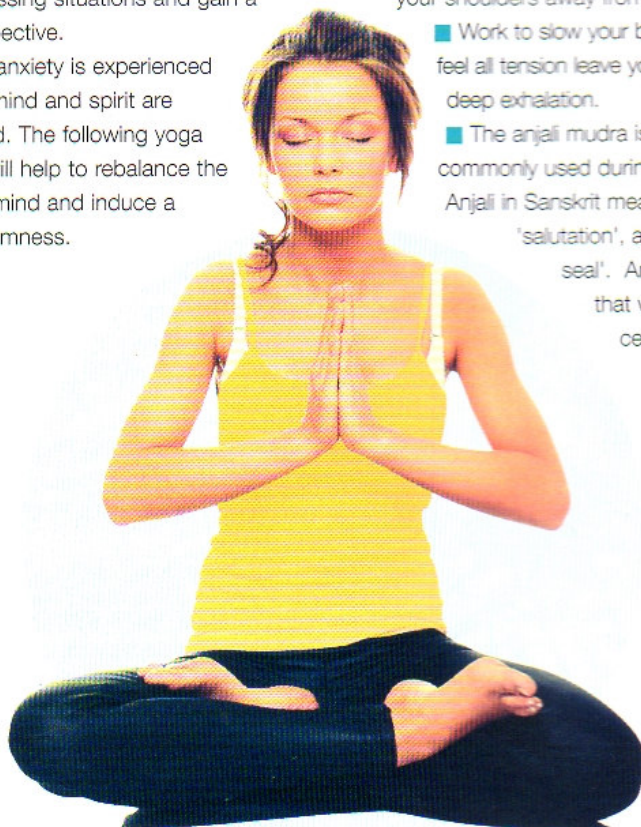
### *The easy pose*

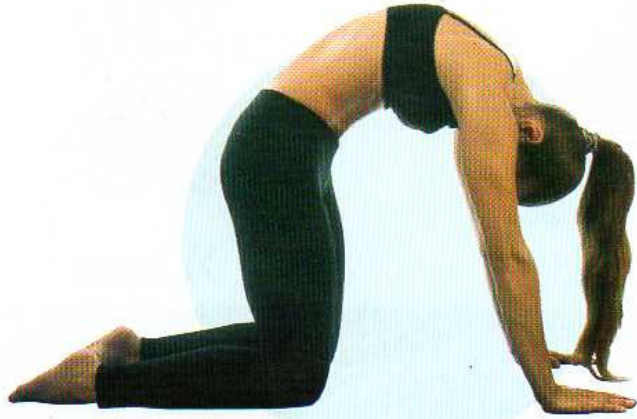
Practicing this while performing the anjali mudra (hands in prayer position) is an excellent way to induce a meditative state of awareness.

■ Begin in sukhasana, sitting with the ankles crossed and a straight spine.  
■ Join your palms into a prayer position and bring the thumbs to your sternum. Drop your chin a little and breathe slowly through your nose, feel that you are growing out of the crown of your head, drawing up your lower abdominal muscles, broaden your upper back and release your shoulders away from your ears.

■ Work to slow your breath down and feel all tension leave your body with each deep exhalation.

■ The anjali mudra is a hand posture commonly used during the practice of yoga. Anjali in Sanskrit means, 'to offer' or 'salutation', and mudra means 'to seal'. Anjali mudra symbolises that we are honouring and celebrating this moment.





## MARJARYASANA

### Cat pose

This posture is fantastic to help relieve stress and anxiety. Often, when feeling anxious, being still can be challenging. As this posture involves movement it can help to calm a restless mind without requiring the body to be still. The breath provides a focus.

■ Begin on all fours with your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips.

- Exhale and as you do so look through your legs and round your spine up towards the ceiling, drawing up your lower abdominal muscles and pulling your navel towards your spine.
- When you inhale, lengthen your torso, moving through your starting position and then tilt your pelvis up and lift your chest and head.
- Continue to roll through cat coordinating your breath to your movement for ten or more complete breaths.

## BALASANA

### Extended child

This posture helps to still the mind and allows the body to rest.

■ From cat, release your bottom back on to your heels and slowly extend the arms in front of you, then release your forearms and relax your forehead to the ground.

■ Remain in this posture breathing slowly in and out through the nose for at least 20 complete breaths.

■ Watch your breath and become aware of all of the movement through the back of your rib cage as you breathe slowly.



## MATSYASANA

### The fish

Matsyasana will open the chest and the heart centre. Opening your chest makes it easier to breathe fully into the lungs and increases the amount of oxygen drawn in. As oxygen is our main source of fuel the more received the better the body functions.

■ Lay on your back with your arms

alongside your body, and keep them there as you bend your elbows, lifting your upper body so that you are resting on your forearms.

■ Lift your sternum so you are looking up and opening your chest, now lower the top of your head towards the ground.

Breathe slowly in and out through your nose.

If support is required you may place a bolster under your upper back and just look up, you do not have to take the top of your head to the floor.



## VIPARITA KARANI

### Legs up the wall

This posture has both a soothing and energising effect. Often called the fountain of youth pose, it can be performed by everyone.

■ Lie flat on your back with your legs extended up a wall and your arms beside the side of your body with your palms up.

■ Breathe slowly in and out through your nose for as long as you feel necessary, working to release tension with each exhalation.

## FURTHER WAYS TO REDUCE ANXIETY

- Learn to relax!
- Take time out to breathe slowly
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet
- Always start the day with a good breakfast
- Reduce your alcohol, nicotine and caffeine consumption
- Exercise regularly
- Share your worries and talk to someone
- Make sure that you get enough sleep.

For more information about anxiety visit [mentalhealth.org.uk](http://mentalhealth.org.uk)