



Beautiful
Beginnings

Yoga for Winter Wellness

With Clare Cooper

Winter is the time of year for us to slow down, to rest and to allow our focus to move within. By slowing down we are able to rest and nurture ourselves, letting our inner selves become replenished and nourished before we begin new creative projects.

Yet for so many of us, rather than a time of rest, reduced activity and self nurturing, Winter becomes a time of rushing and stress. We carry on with our activities enduring the cold weather and long dark nights, rates of depression are higher in the Winter months, as are colds and flu, and our bodies can feel stiff and sluggish with the cold. The build up to Christmas is, for many of us, a time of pressure and busyness, leaving little time to listen to ourselves and meet our own needs. Then once Christmas is over, we find ourselves approaching the New Year thinking we should be beginning new things, yet often feeling depleted, down and exhausted rather than rested and replenished.

Yet it doesn't have to be this way.

We can look to Nature to learn how we can make the most of the Winter season and apply this natural Earth wisdom to our own lives and families.

Earth Wisdom

Autumn sees the trees directing their energy inwards causing the leaves to change colour and begin to fall. As Winter arrives, the leaves have fallen and the trees seem skeletal and bare. To survive the cold weather and lack of sunlight, they slow down, moving their energy inwards and down to the roots and move into a state of dormancy. The nutrients from the fallen leaves are returned to the soil and begin to be absorbed by the roots. Through slowing down, the trees survive the Winter cold, holding their energy deep inside, resting and replenishing in this period of dormancy before they begin a cycle of new growth in the coming spring.

A Time for Stillness and Nurture

If we carry on still giving and working at the same level all year, not paying attention to the cycles of nature and our body, we can become depleted, worn down, stressed and depressed. We can start to lose the joy and pleasure we feel from our work and families, and instead begin to feel disconnected, anxious, resentful and tired.

As part of the Natural world, we are designed to ebb and flow with the energies of the Earth. When we allow ourselves to rest and replenish our inner resources, we realise where our own needs may have been overlooked and we can meet them. So too do we realise that when we slow, meet these needs and give our body, mind and heart the rest we need, we become so much more joyful and connected in our relationships and creative and productive in our work.

Resolving to build some time for stillness and self care into your Winter routine nourishes you on a deep level. It allows you to replenish yourself so you can become more creative, connected and joyful in your family, work and relationships.

Steps to Self Nurture

♥ Take an Energy Audit

Look at the way your days unfold and where your energy goes. Become aware of times you are feeling connected and joyful, and the times you feel frayed and stressed. Become aware of what nurtures you, and what depletes you.

♥ Ask yourself *What Nurtures Me?*

Sit quietly and connect with your breath, follow the inhale and watch how it makes space, and follow the exhale and allow yourself to soften your shoulders and relax.

Ask yourself the question 'What Nurtures Me?' then listen to what comes up for you.

In workshops interestingly it is not the big things, but the small, simple ways of meeting our basic needs which arise. Some time of peace and stillness (a

definite for parents of little children!), time in our homes, time not rushing from place to place, slow food, warmth and unhurried time with our children and partner.

Interestingly it is living life at high speed which can deplete us greatly. Rushing from place to place with a full schedule of family activities and after school clubs feels important and valuable, yet so too can it take its toll on our energy, wellbeing and relationships especially during the Winter months.

Listen to what comes up for you, write it down, and take small steps to include these simple gifts of self nurture into your day.

♥ **Create Nurturing Space in your Home**

Embrace the energy of Hygge and allow your home to nurture you. Create areas of space where you can retreat to feel safe, cosy, comfortable and warm. Pile blankets on your sofa, create an area for meditation and yoga, clear a windowsill and fill with plants and inspirational objects.

♥ **Give Yourself Permission to Rest**

As women especially, we have internalised the message that we must keep going, keep busy and continue to do everything we can. And for the most part, we want to do this, we want to do the best we can for our children, as well as putting our energy and creativity into our work, our homes and relationships.

Whilst we would like to slow down, there is such little opportunity to do so, and there are always so many other tasks requiring our attention. We can feel guilty for taking time out for ourselves. If our body wants to lie down, to sit or rest, we can feel guilty and lazy and worry what others will think of us. Yet if we continue to deny ourselves the rest and time for replenishment we require, we become less able to sustain the love, creativity, energy and connection we hope to share. Similarly, we increase the stress on our system, leading to anxiety, depression, pain, digestive problems and PMS.

Give yourself permission to rest. And know that in doing so you replenish your inner resources and invest in your health, wellbeing, family and relationships.

♥ Affirmations for Rest and Nurture

Affirmations plant new seeds within our consciousness and help to create changes in our thoughts and behaviour. Introducing an affirmation to rest, nurture and replenish ourselves helps break down old beliefs that we must keep going, helps us to grow in awareness of our own needs and encourages us to take greater responsibility for our own health and wellbeing.

Use the affirmation *It is okay for me to be still, rest and nurture myself*

Sit or lie quietly and tune into your breathing. Follow the inhale and watch how it makes space. Exhale and relax your shoulders, eyes and jaw, soften your belly, back, arms and legs, hands and feet. Watch the ebb and flow of your breath.

Connect with the quiet space within and say to yourself *It is okay for me to be still, rest and nurture myself.*

Repeat this 3 times, then ask yourself the question *What nurture me?*

Listen to what comes up for you and resolve to create more self nurture each day.

♥ Build Self Nurture into your Life

Slowing down and looking after ourselves in Winter is paramount to our health, yet it is important to build an attitude of self care into our life rhythm. Explore how you can include your small times of self nurture in your regular days, and watch how doing so transforms your energy, awareness and relationships.

Our menstrual cycle offers an inbuilt system for flowing with our times of creativity and high energy, and resting at our times of slowness and letting go. By letting yourself have some quiet time around your time of bleeding, with a reduced schedule and time for resting, reading, yoga and stillness, we truly learn how to work with, rather than against our natural flow of energy.

♥ Create Intentions for the Future

When we allow ourselves to truly rest, like the trees, we allow ourselves a period of deep replenishment from which we can emerge with a deeper sense of energy and creativity.

After some time of rest, relaxation and nurture, connect to your breathing and ask yourself *What brings Me Joy?*

Listen to what arises. Spend time thinking about what you would like to create and change in your life. At this stage, don't worry about how this will come to be, but rather seek out those activities, projects and endeavours which bring you joy, and resolve to welcome them into your life.

When we allow ourselves to rest and become deeply restored, so too are we able to access deeper aspects of wisdom and creativity. Continue to practice nurturing relaxation alongside your manifestations of joy, and watch as these begin to unfold in your life.

Nourishment for Mind & Body, Heart & Soul

Caring for ourselves and slowing down is radical at a time where we are expected to consume, produce, give and earn constantly. Yet such ways are not bringing us a deep sense of wellbeing, connection and joy. We only find such things when we ourselves are connected, relaxed and nurtured on a deep level.

- ♥ Resolve to committing love and care for yourself into your life, knowing that caring for ourselves allows us to give, love, share and create as well as we would like to. We can only give to others when our own cup is full.
- ♥ Weave self care into your family life, spend time in nature, walking, talking, playing and climbing, collect shells, pebbles and pine cones and encourage your children to explore the natural treasures at their fingertips. Research from Japan into Forest Bathing shows that our stress hormone levels decrease just from being amongst the trees.
- ♥ Take time to be rather than do, and encourage your children to feel this quality too. Don't be afraid to unplug from screens and social media from time to time, it will all still be there when we return, and we will be surprised at what a difference this makes to our mind and wellbeing.
- ♥ Nourish your body with nutrient rich food and water, yoga, relaxation and exercise and create friendships and relationships which feel nurturing, supportive and joyful.
- ♥ Realise that rather than feeling guilty for doing less and caring for ourselves, rather we are modelling to our sons and daughters the value of self care, gifting them with the permission to care for themselves, know themselves and love themselves also.