

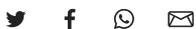
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## Endometriosis Awareness Month: Seven yoga poses to relieve painful symptoms

Yoga teacher Lara Heppell works with endometriosis sufferers to help them ease their cramps

By Alice Hall

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For the one in 10 women in the UK who [suffer from endometriosis](#), debilitating period pains are a frustrating fact of life. The condition causes tissue similar to that in the lining of the womb to grow in other places, such as the ovaries, and can lead to heavy periods, painful cramps, and pain during sex. There is no cure for endometriosis, and in severe cases, surgery is required to remove the tissue.

However, some women have found that yoga can help to alleviate their symptoms. [Lara Heppell](#), a registered Senior Yoga Teacher with [Yoga Alliance Professionals](#), has been a yoga teacher for 16 years, but it wasn't until she experienced excruciating pelvic pain after the birth of her son that she realised how beneficial yoga could be in treating womb pain, and subsequently the symptoms of endometriosis. Although Heppell says that the doctors weren't able to diagnose her condition, during a scan to check for fibroids she noticed that there was a lot of "tension" in her womb. "I could see this vibrating womb, which just didn't look relaxed," she says.

After the scan, Heppell "completely changed" her yoga practices from highly physical to include "more gentle, somatic" movements. "I shifted towards having more of an inward focus, and working with the psoas muscle, which is what keeps your pelvis balanced and in line. After I had softened everything up and released all the tension, all my issues got better," she says.

Heppell's own experiences inspired her to take an interest in [yoga for women](#), and study with Uma Dinsmore Tuli, a yoga therapist with special expertise in women's health. Although she stresses that yoga cannot fix endometriosis, some women find it can help

make the pain feel less intense, and provide them with the tools to deal with it when it happens. Heppell explains that the first way it does this is through relaxing breathing techniques, such as golden thread breathing – where you breathe in through the nose and out through gently parted lips to “naturally extend the exhalation” – which helps to relieve stress and anxiety. Another is through a breath that sounds “like a wave”, combined with a visualisation at the same time.

The second way is through a series of poses, which Heppell has shared exclusively with *The Telegraph*. She explains that the poses can be modified depending on where you are at in your cycle. “Sometimes we need to lie down and cover ourselves with blankets, and feel close to the ground. This helps to create a boundary, containment, and support. Other times, you just need to move more, shake and do some flowing yoga. It is all about knowing when movement might help your symptoms, and when you might need stillness and rest,” she says.

Heppell has shared seven poses that can help to ease painful cramps...

## 1. Restorative child's pose (Balsana)



CREDIT: <https://www.karenturner.co.uk/>

“The position is calming, grounding, brings focus inside, moving from forward-facing to back body focus. It provides containment and support for the body. Someone holding the blankets behind helps to add some feedback and resistance so the belly can relax into the support,” says Heppell. “Students can pull the blanket behind them with their own hands. They can also add weight with a bolster on the back to help feel support and containment behind. This adds a boundary so the body can feel safe, even when experiencing pain.”

## 2. Supported reclining bound angle restorative pose



“This is a favourite of one of my students when she bleeds. It is calming, grounding, and helpful for cramps. You can add blankets, sandbags, beanbags, blankets, hands and bolsters for containment and support of the body. Gentle weight provides input for the body and helps it to yield and relax. The belly is wide and spacious and can have support on top, encouraging it to relax excess tension. It’s a good pose for focusing on supportive breathing or Yoga Nidra, to help manage pain and strong sensations,” says Heppell.

### **3. Forward bends and restorative forward bends**



“No matter how you modify it, a forward bend flexion form quiets the front brain, opens the back brain and the body. It also supports your reproductive and digestive system, stimulates your liver and kidney, relieves anxiety, fatigue, headaches, menstrual cramps,” says Heppell. “You can add blankets for support, or blocks to make it more restorative. This pose is also calming because it stimulates the bladder meridian that, according to Chinese medicine, flows down the back of your body and down the backs of your legs.”

#### **4. Lying twists – still and moving variants**



CREDIT: Inga Marchuk

“This is a restorative pose that can help relieve stress. It activates the spine and the belly so helps to mobilise tight areas where there might be scar tissue. It also promotes good digestion and encourages spinal mobility. Twisting postures help tone the belly, massage internal organs and can help relieve lower back pain. It is often performed towards the end of a sequence,” says Heppell.

### 5. Seed to flower sequence



CREDIT: <https://www.karenturner.co.uk/>

Heppell's student who has endometriosis told her: "Generally I find things that open up and stretch the pelvis, abdomen, and hips helps me." When she isn't bleeding, Heppell says her student likes the seed to flower sequence.



"This helps open up and stretch the pelvis, abdomen and hips. You go from lying on your back to opening your knees out wide, arms overhead, moving with the breath between the two, and then staying in the reclined butterfly pose part for a while. Your outer thighs could be supported, if that helps."

## 6. Camel and bow poses



When she isn't bleeding, Heppell's student likes to go into the camel pose and the bow position. "There is pressure on the belly to yield into. It opens up and stretches the pelvis, abdomen and hips, and brings awareness to womb space, circulation and blood flow too," says Heppell.



"Often women with endometriosis won't be able to do camel and bow pose all the time, so they need to pick their days carefully; women are cyclical and their needs change at different times of the month. It isn't one size fits all, so a bit of trial and error

is required.”

## 7. Apanasana



“Lying on your back, bring your knees in and out in knee to chest pose. This position is helpful for comfort, and it mimics the foetal comfort pose. Incorporate rhythmic rocking, massage for the belly, while moving with breath; it should feel calming and soothing,” says Heppell.

For more information and support contact [Endometriosis UK](#)

*[Yoga Alliance Professionals](#) is the UK's leading professional body for yoga teachers and trainers, working with qualified yoga professionals to ensure that consumers practice with the best teachers the industry has to offer.*

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