

YOGA FOR

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USE THIS SEQUENCE  
TO FIND REFUGE  
FROM THE CLUTCHES  
OF CHRONIC ILLNESS.

BY EVAN SOROKA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARY JOBE



**ABOVE**  
People with type 1 diabetes cannot produce insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas that transports energy from food into the body's cells. They need to take insulin to avoid complications from hyper-glycemia. Insulin can be administered with a pump (left) or an injection pen (center and right).

**Resting is hard for me.** I would rather be on the go, overcoming hurdles or realizing my life vision. However, it's difficult to achieve creative goals without rest, introspection, and relaxation. The same is true in diabetes care. If you have diabetes, like me, you're constantly connected to your continuous glucose monitor, personal diabetes manager, or insulin pump. People with this condition are plugged into a monitor to stay alive, and blood glucose readings get mixed up with who we think we are and we lose our sense of self. Every arrow on the screen, every deviation up or down leaves a residue of subtle negative emotion in the landscape of the body and mind, making it impossible to relax, because every misstep can have potentially deadly consequences.

Any person facing modern technological advances suffers a great deal from similar mind spin; diabetes is just the microcosm of the macrocosm. The disease simply accentuates the detrimental distractions that people face without diabetes. Mental fluctuations are influenced by external and internal factors. For instance, a blood glucose reading of 400 mg/dL (very high!) can be a catalyst for thoughts that can spiral out of control because of past negative experiences—any number outside of normal range may cause you to remember the last time your glucose was too high and how awful you felt. Even more subtle than the thought is the impression left by the event. You may carry judgmental guilt, stew in the past, fret about what you should have done, worry about the long-term effects, or whatever the story may be. When the mind spins, we often react instead of respond. On a physiological level, the nervous system is in overdrive. A heightened state of arousal (being on guard) sends internal alarms into hyper-mode. Our brains tell our bodies that there's an emergency, pumping stress hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline, and glycogen into the bloodstream. The unintentional effect is insulin resistance (resulting in increased blood sugar), making diabetes much harder to manage. The cumulative result of this vicious cycle is distress, anxiety, and depression.

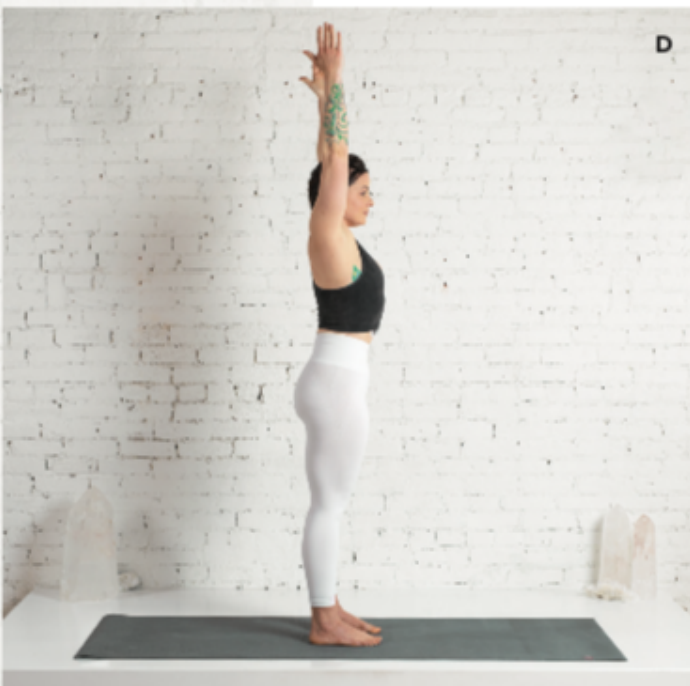
There is a saying in the diabetes community that we are greater than the sum of the highs and lows. What this means is that although you may *have* diabetes, you are not diabetes. This may make sense on a cognitive level; however, it cannot be fully understood and integrated into your life until it is realized directly through practice. The sage Patanjali writes about mind chatter in the Yoga Sutra as *chitta vritti*—fluctuations of consciousness. A goal of yoga is to nullify these fluctuations so that you can rest in your own self-essence, free of all conditions. Yoga intervention practices can stop the spinning cycle, calming the mind and promoting your natural ability to regenerate, heal, and process unwanted emotion. I have type 1 diabetes, and although, as a yoga therapist, I prescribe different exercises for different types of diabetes, the yoga therapy practice on the following pages will benefit anyone who is living with a chronic illness. It promotes an exciting mix of energies—some stimulating and some pacifying—to help you self regulate and balance out the highs and lows.

# SEQUENCE MITIGATE YOUR RESPONSE TO STRESS

## 1. START IN A SEATED POSITION.

Progressively deepen and lengthen the breath. Observe your body in space and time. Notice sensations and circulation. Detect the movement of your mind. Feel the breath: smooth, calm, and peaceful.





## 2. UTTANASANA + UTKATASANA DYNAMIC FLOW

### Standing Forward Bend + Chair Pose

**A** Start in a standing position with your feet slightly separated, arms by your sides. **B** Inhale, and extend both arms overhead. **C** Exhale, and bend forward, slightly flexing your knees and bringing your hands to the ground. **D** Inhale, and lift your arms and torso simultaneously: Lead with your heart, and return to standing with your arms overhead. **E** Exhale, and bend your knees. Sit back, lowering your abdomen toward your thighs. Place your hands on the ground under your shoulders. Your hips should be slightly higher than your knees. **F** While keeping your knees bent and your hips low, inhale, lift your arms and lean your torso back away from your thighs as far as you can. Continue straightening your legs until you are standing with arms overhead and legs straight. Rest, and observe the effect for a few breaths before moving on to the next posture.

*Chant the mantra Om So Hum on every exhale—it's an invocation to the essential You, who is greater than the sum of the highs and the lows you experience.*

### 3. ARDHA PARSVOTTANASANA

Half Intense Side Stretch variation

**A** Stand with your left foot forward, right foot back at a slight angle. Place your left hand on your sacrum, palm facing out. Extend your right arm overhead. **B** Exhale: Hinge at your hips, bending forward with a slight bend in your front knee. **C** Inhale: Lift your arm and torso to encourage length through the right side of your body. Retain your breath and silently chant *Om So Hum*. **D** Exhale: Bend forward, and relax your arm.

**E** Inhale: Lift your right arm and torso until you're standing with your right arm overhead, challenging it to straighten as your back helps to lift your torso.

🔄 Repeat 6 times. Then change sides and repeat. Observe your breath, body, mind, and the awareness that witnesses it.



### 4. SKANDASANA

Pose Dedicated to the God of War

**A** Start by standing with your feet wide and parallel. **B** Exhale, bending one knee and lowering your hips toward the heel of your bent leg while straightening the other leg and lifting the underbelly of your foot, flexing the ankle (optional). Keep your hands on the floor, or challenge your hands to lift to prayer at the heart. Be mindful, and make sure your knee is tractioning in the same direction as your toes. **C** Inhale and straighten your bent knee, shifting your torso to center. **D** Exhale, bend your opposite knee, and repeat on the other side.

🔄 Repeat 6-8 rounds.

## 5. TABLETOP + ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA FLOW

### Tabletop + Downward-Facing Dog Pose

**A** Start on all fours: wrists stacked under shoulders, knees under hips. Inhale, broaden your collarbone, and lengthen the front of your body, flattening your upper back. Stay here, chanting *Om So Hum* on the exhalation. **B** Holding the breath after your exhalation, move into Down Dog, mentally chanting *Om So Hum*: Tuck your toes, press firmly into your hands, and lift your hips. Lengthen your spine, and relax your head in between your arms. Modify with knees bent to maximize the length of your spine. **C** Inhale, return to starting position.

🔄 Repeat 6-8 times.



## 6. ARDHA SALABHASANA Half Locust Pose variation

**A** Lie on your stomach with your legs straight, hands on your sacrum, palms facing up.

**B** Inhale and lift your torso, sweeping your right arm forward and bending your right elbow. Bring your right hand into a salute, while lifting your left leg a few inches from the ground. **C** Exhale, sweeping your right arm to your sacrum. Lower your torso, leg, and right cheek to the ground.

🔄 Repeat, alternating sides, for 6-8 rounds.



## 7. SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose variation

**A** Lying on your back, bring your knees into your body, grabbing hold of your feet with your hands. Modify with your hands behind your knees if you can't touch your hands to your feet with straight legs. Press down your low back.

**B** Inhale, straighten your legs, and press your heels toward the ceiling. Keep your legs together. **C.** Exhale, open your legs wide, and bend your knees as necessary. **D.** Inhale and return your legs in the direction of perpendicular to your hips.

**E** Exhale and return to the starting position, compressing your legs against your belly.

🔄 Repeat 6 times. On the last round, keep your legs wide for 4–6 breaths, breathing into your hips and pelvis.



## 8. MARICHYASANA I Pose Dedicated to the Sage Marichi I

**A** Sit tall in Dandasana (Staff Pose). **B** Bend your right knee with your foot on the ground. Keep your left leg straight. To modify, prop a blanket under your right hip. **C** Lengthen forward, then sweep your right arm wide and back around your bent right leg, wrapping your arm around your left leg, internally rotating your right shoulder. With your left arm, reach behind your torso, linking your hands. Lengthen the front of your body from your sternum to your navel. On the inhalation, breathe into your upper back. On the exhalation, draw in your abdomen even deeper. Stay here for up to 8 breaths.

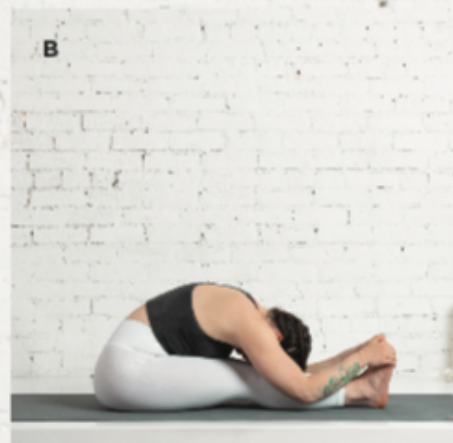
🔄 Repeat on the other side.

## 9. PASCHIMOTTANASANA

### Seated Forward Bend variation

**A** Extend your legs forward, slightly bending your knees with your back straight. Inhale, and lift your arms overhead. **B** Exhale and bend forward, hinging at your hips and lengthening your torso. Grab hold of the tops of your feet, or use a strap around your feet. **C** Inhale, keep the hand-to-foot connection, and lift your torso away from your thighs, leaning back until your upper back is flat and your low back is long. Pull your chin in. **D** Exhale and return to the forward bend. **E** Inhale, lift your arms and torso, and then return to the starting position.


🔄 Repeat 4 times. On the last round, stay in the halfway-up position with your hands holding onto your feet or using a strap. Mentally chant *Om So Hum* on your inhalations and exhalations for up to 8 breaths.





## 10. DVIPADA PITHAM

### Two-Footed Pose

**A** Lie on your back with knees bent, feet hip-width apart, arms by your sides. **B** Inhale, press into your feet, lift your hips, and move your arms up and behind you. **C** Exhale and lower your hips and arms simultaneously.  Repeat 6-8 times.



## 11. SAVASANA

### Corpse Pose

Rest on your back, palms facing up, for 5-10 minutes. Relax your body, and watch the natural rhythm of your breath. Be effortless.



## 12. PRANAYAMA

**A** Sit in a comfortable position.

**B** Begin to consciously and smoothly shape your breath. Feel or sense the inhalations descending from the crown of your head to the base of your spine. Exhale from the base of your spine to the crown of your head.

🕒 Repeat 4 times.

**C** Maintain the continuous flow of breath from the crown of your head to the base of your spine and back to the crown. Begin to mentally chant *Om So Hum* on both the inhalations and exhalations.

🕒 Repeat 4 times.

**D** Keep going and add a pause after the inhalations, retaining your breath at the base of your spine. Mentally chant *Om So Hum* with the retention.

🕒 Repeat 4 times.

**E** Now, add another pause after your exhalations, suspending the breath at the crown of your head. Mentally chant *Om So Hum* as you suspend your breath.

🕒 Continue with this breath ratio for 4-12 rounds.

## 13. MEDITATION

Establish a completely effortless, natural breath. Let your mind follow your breath.

As your body inhales, feel the mantra *So*. On the exhalations, feel the mantra *Hum* at your heart. Hold this awareness for several breaths. Continue to relax your effort. Feel the meaning of the chant: *So Hum* (I Am).

Feel the part of you that is separate from your illness. Remain in contemplation for as long as you can. ✨

### TEACHER AND MODEL

**EVAN SOROKA** is a yoga therapist living with type 1 diabetes in Aspen, Colorado. She is the owner of Evan Soroka Yoga Therapy, founder of the Rise Above Diabetes Program, and a contributor to *Yoga Journal* and *Yoga International*. She received her extensive credentials from Gary Kraftsow and the American Viniyoga Institute. Evan continues to study under the guidance and mentorship of Yogarupa Rod Stryker. Learn more at [evansoroka.com](http://evansoroka.com).

