

# The YOGA Reboot

According to weather reports, Melbourne has just experienced its coldest winter in 65 years, and the Commonwealth Department of Health & Ageing has confirmed that by late July there were a total of 19,277 laboratory notifications of influenza recorded in Australia. Our bodies are vulnerable to infection during winter, so it takes time for our systems to recover. But through the ancient practices of *asana* (posture), *pranayama* (breathing exercises) and meditation, we can give our vital organs and systems a complete reboot so we feel ready to embrace the spring and summer months ahead.

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**T**he heralding of spring confirms the end of the long cold winter. It is a sign for us to embrace the warmth of the sun on our faces and to get ready to immerse our bodies in the invigorating ocean. Our skin screams out for hydration as the layers of dead cells shake themselves off and our stricken immune systems reset from the battering of pathogens faced during winter. The yoga reboot helps us feel motivated and reawakens our vigour for life. It gives us the strength

and inspiration to overcome anything the day throws at us. With the harsh weather behind us, it's time to roll out our yoga mats and face the rising sun of spring.

### Love the skin you're in

The skin is the largest organ of the body and is responsible for a variety of physiological functions and processes including thermoregulation, protection against pathogens, sensation, waste removal, oxygen absorption, evaporation, perspiration,

storage of nutrients and water resistance. During winter, the low humidity levels draw out moisture from the skin, leaving it feeling dry, itchy and flaky. This is where the practice of *asana* such as *Surya Namaskar* (salute to the sun) can help.

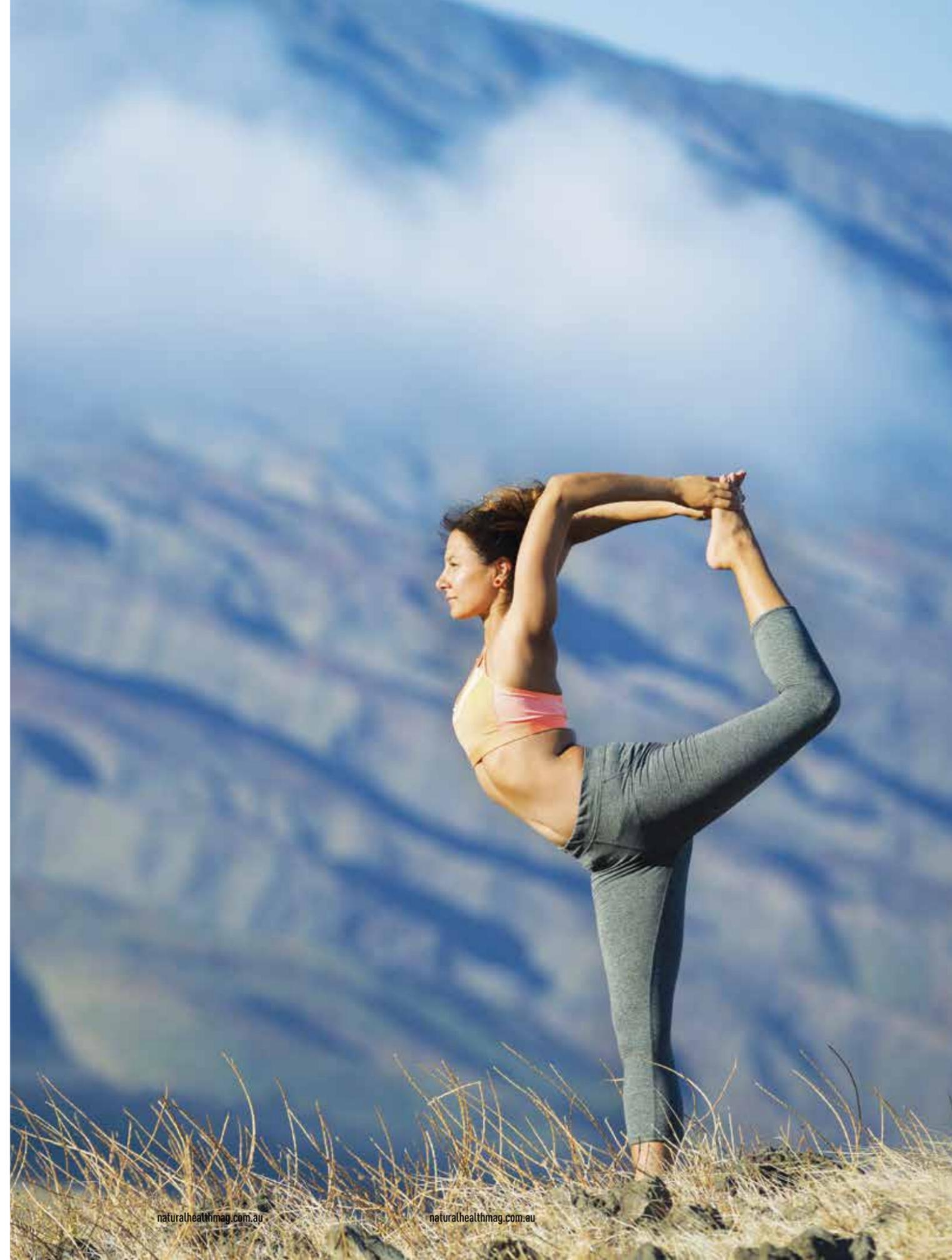
*Asanas* such as spine twists, inversions, and seated forward bends are great for boosting our natural regeneration of gut flora post infection, particularly if antibiotics were consumed to fight off the bacteria. Gut flora have a continuous and dynamic effect on our systemic immune responses, stimulating the lymphoid tissue associated with gut mucosa, as well as the production of antibodies to help fight potentially harmful pathogens.

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### Don't fret to sweat

The heat generated in a vinyasa yoga class on an energetic level is known as *tapas*. *Tapas* is the heat created through conscious physical effort, which in its traditional form is generated to burn our past karmas. On a physical level, however, this heat regenerates the skin by increasing transport of circulatory nutrients through the blood, increasing sweat production, which further detoxifies impurities from the skin, and boosting the natural endorphins that give us that blissful yoga high after a strong practice.

As the skin is the largest organ of the body, the health of this organ is vital as it is our first line of immune defence against potentially harmful microbes and pathogens. Our ability to sweat through our yoga practice comes from our major glands known as apocrine and eccrine glands, responsible for the detoxification process where the body burns impurities through a heated practice. Our bodies house over five million sweat glands, found all over the body, with 65,000 found in the



palms of the hands. This perspiration reflex is governed by the medulla oblongata, located in the brainstem. One of the major benefits of practising a strong heated vinyasa is the significant increase in perspiration, which helps to eliminate waste through the sweat glands. The maximum sweat rates of the average adult are around 10 to 14 litres a day; however, this greatly depends on the intensity of physical movement accomplished. Through perspiration, the pores within the skin begin to open and therefore remove impurities that tend to cause blockages within the skin that can lead to skin conditions such as acne, a condition commonly more prevalent in the warmer months.



As a result, cortisol levels naturally decrease and the skin begins to restore itself naturally.

**Revitalise the lungs**

As our lymphatic system has worked hard during these cold winter months to fight off infection, it is essential to rebuild this system back to a healthy balance post infection. The practice of deep yogic breathing multiplies the function of lymphatic cleansing by 15 times the normal rate. This is created through a vacuum effect that literally sucks lymph through the blood stream and accelerates the pace at which the lymph eliminates toxins.

The most profound and cleansing breathing practice in yoga is Kapalabhati, also known as the skull shining breath, which must only be practised under the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher as it does carry cautions and contraindications.

Kapalabhati includes the application of strong exhalations generated by powerful contractions of the lower belly pushing air out of the lungs. The inhalations release this contraction, drawing air back into the lungs. The rapid exhalation assists in the removal of accumulated toxins within the cells and tissues of the lungs and digestive system. The cleansing action this breathing practice has on the lungs also supports the propulsion of stale mucous from the base of the lungs left behind from a winter respiratory infection, including bronchitis.

**Hydrate! Hydrate! Hydrate!**

One of the most common prerequisites prior to attending a vinyasa yoga class is to ensure effective hydration. When we practise fully hydrated, our heart works more efficiently to pump blood throughout the body, which means oxygen and nutrient transport is delivered to the muscles during the practice. This results in having the energy you need to maintain the practice, particularly during the limbering series at the start of the class and when using the larger muscle groups in the standing

and balancing postures. Hydration helps to put back in the water we lose from increased perspiration that is a natural byproduct of a vinyasa class.

The need for a higher water intake is essential as we move into spring in order to maintain healthy skin, support digestive enzyme production, and increase detoxification through the skin, lymph, bowels, lungs and kidneys. Increased water intake in spring also stimulates metabolism, which can tend to be a little slower during winter, which further boosts the absorption of essential vitamins and minerals. When we support the health of the body on the inside, we support the skin on the outside, and boost that wonderful yoga glow post practice.

**Reboot the mind**

The mind unfurls itself from hibernation; just like the fern unfurls itself in spring. The early morning sunrise creates a wonderful canvas of inspiration for us to *carpe diem* and we become more likely to roll out our mats for a 6am practice and reset the mind into a more inspired space. We feel inspired to wake up a bit earlier, to seize the day ahead, and welcome any opportunities that come our way. In a way, we experience a sense of gratitude for our health and vitality that seems missing during winter.

The psychological reaction to winter means that we tend more towards activities that increase hibernation, which commonly lowers mood and leads to conditions such as seasonal affective disorder. There is something very special about those early days of spring, and a new zest for life begins to unfold.

The true benefits manifest through the dedication of the consistency of the practice known in yoga as *Abhyāsa*, which literally translated means dedication to the practice consistently over a long period of time. When we dedicate ourselves to our asana and pranayama practice, consistently and over a long period of time, we no longer become affected by the roller-coaster of the psychophysiological reaction to winter. We begin to journey through the changing seasons with greater ease and our practice becomes a preventative measure to managing the effects of the more challenging colder months when they next cycle through.



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**Stress less this spring**

We all know the effects that stress has on many areas of our life and health, but stress also has a negative impact on the skin. When we experience stress over a significant period of time, the nervous system constantly signals the adrenal cortex to release the stress hormone cortisol, which causes sebum production to increase and causes blockages within the pores of the skin that lead to acne. The practice of yoga postures such as forward bends tend to increase the parasympathetic aspect of the nervous system, which helps the body on a cellular level to relax and increase the assimilation of digestion, and improve the removal of waste.

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