

Divine SPIRIT

Humble yogi, counsellor, and businesswoman, Carrie-Anne Fields talks to Jessica Humphries about healing paths and the powers of unconditional love.

CARRIE-ANNE FIELDS, 40, has been practicing yoga since she was 16. At the tender age of 22 she opened My Health, a holistic health centre that has since evolved into a yoga centre offering studio classes and teacher trainings on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane. My Health Yoga, now 18 years old, has trained more than 2000 yoga teachers and healers and is the creator of Australia's first online yoga teacher training, as well as offering online classes and meditations via My Health Yoga TV. Carrie manages her successful business while maintaining the kind of grounded-ness that only the truest of yogis encompass.

Carrie-Anne is the kind of person you want as your best friend. Her easy, relaxed presence leaves me feeling grounded in her company, and I want to tell her all my secrets. Her slight self-deprecating sense of humour highlights her humble nature, and she is truly one of the most down-to-earth individuals I've ever met. She's honest and nurturing, with a genuine desire to serve those around her with love. "I've come to learn that love has many shades and I'm not afraid to be completely honest. I've learned that I need to see every client with the eyes of love and provide for them what I intuitively feel they need at that moment," she says frankly, with smiling eyes. "The students I teach in training are ready to advance spiritually. Many need unconditional love that they didn't have growing up, others need tough love to help them break through their excuses."

Carrie's introduction to yoga came through her mother. Growing up in a spiritual household and studying psychology at university left her with a strong foundation for developing a deeper relationship with yoga, and a deep curiosity for human beings and how the mind works. In her early 20s, she found herself drawn to exploring the kind of lifestyle so many of her friends were experimenting with. Dipping her toes in the waters of rebellion as she travelled overseas left her feeling emotionally overwhelmed and confused about the direction of her life. At this point, when she was just 22, Carrie "really woke up to the fact that I needed to keep my yoga practice up". She says, "I started My Health because I needed to work in this field to remain disciplined and devoted."

Since then, Carrie has worked to establish a successful yoga business while maintaining a dedicated and honest practice. To date, My Health Yoga has created five registered training

courses, opened two yoga centres, a yoga and natural therapies association (myhealthassociation.com) as well as online training and My Health TV. Carrie has spent countless hours teaching, counselling, healing, facilitating workshops and managing the business. In 2014, Carrie brought in Carlos Salazar as co-owner for online training, and early this year she partnered up with Matty McDonnell who now operates both studios and in-house teacher training and healing courses. She says, "We've been through many transitions and changes over the years. I say 'we' because even though until recently I was the sole owner of My Health Yoga, I do feel it's a community of people who have made it the success it is. I couldn't have made this business without all these divine souls. To be on a yoga and healing path takes tremendous courage. To really be with the turmoil that arises when we practice or heal is not easy."

Carrie says she owes her success to, "Being loving, honest and authentic." With a natural tendency to "keep things hidden" her journey towards being open and vulnerable felt like an incredible breakthrough. "Through my transparency as the leader of this business, it creates a ripple affect for others to be raw and authentic. Then the magic occurs ... through healing and transformation our relationships improve and our success and abundance increases – these are all the divine rewards from doing the inner work. So I feel the secret of my success is to be a guide for others to authentically heal."

When asked what her greatest challenge as a yogi has been, Carrie answers openly, "Not to buy into advanced asana as proof of being a great yogi. If we are honest, we all know this, but why then do we tell people who are doing lotus handstand transitions into arm balances that they are an inspiration? Maybe they are, maybe they did gymnastics as a child (which makes them no less inspirational) but it doesn't mean they practice the real depths of yoga. A few years ago, I abandoned my Ashtanga practice because I didn't like it. I had bought into that I 'had' to do this rigorous asana practice to be a worthy yoga teacher. I saw many friends around me go from loving and open-hearted to fanatical and mentally rigid through this practice of trying to attain a new pose or series. There is no way to peace, only *your way*."

So what's ahead for Carrie? After bringing in two co-owners to My Health Yoga, she is finding more space for dreaming. "I'm in a very creative phase, planning new online courses, writing and creating online yoga and meditation classes. After years of intense (but joyous) work, I'm revelling in this new way of wellbeing. Thank you Universe!"

A RESTORATIVE YIN SEQUENCE

to relax into the cooler months

Our winter months create natural introspection and space for deep rest. Restorative and Yin Yoga practices are wonderful for this time of year, bringing a feeling of connection to your Higher Self and a balancing for your nervous system as the parasympathetic nervous system governing your 'rest and digest' cycles is awakened. If you are over-worked, suffering adrenal fatigue or need to tap into your own inner wisdom, this sequence will be beneficial.

Practice Tips

1. The breath will be full and deep in each pose. Employ 'Maharaja Pranayama' or Royal Breath by breathing from the lower belly to the collar bones on your inhale and then reverse as you exhale. Ensure the rhythm of your in-breath is even to the rhythm of your out-breath so you are breathing evenly.
2. Restorative and Yin Yoga poses give us an opportunity to hold poses for anywhere from 3-20 minutes. As such, we need to be very comfortable, so modify any of these poses to suit how you are feeling physically and emotionally on the day.
3. As we have more time to hold poses, we can repeat affirmations and do visualisations which are wonderful accompaniments to the asanas.



Reclining Butterfly Supta Baddha Konasana

Reclining Butterfly provides a sublime release for the hips, groin, inner thighs, chest and spine, as well as creating a powerful opening for the heart chakra. Stimulates liver meridian of the inner thigh, gallbladder meridian of the outer thigh and lung meridian of the inner arm.

Set the bolster (or rolled-up blanket) lengthways on your mat, then sit in front of your bolster, placing the soles of the feet together and allow the knees to open to the side. Recline onto the bolster in a gentle back-bending motion, with the arms open to the side and the palms turned up. Take Chin Mudra by sealing together the thumb and index finger, allowing a closed circuit for the prana (life force energy) to flow back into the body. Breathe deeply.

Reclining Butterfly assists in feeling safe in a vulnerable, open-hearted space and can metaphysically remind us of the importance to unconditionally love ourselves, thereby creating ease in extending love to others. If you have time, hold for 20 minutes to make this a full Restorative Yoga pose, however, 5 minutes will suffice (Yin Yoga). Repeat this affirmation: "I am open to love."

Reclining Twist Supta Matsyendrasana

Reclining Twist realigns the spine and gives rise to the potent forces of Kundalini (spiritual energy, symbolised by the 'rainbow serpent') to move upwards through the sushumna (spinal column), awakening the chakra system. This pose also cleanses the digestive organs.

Remove the bolster from your mat and lie on your back. Draw your right knee up, placing your right foot on your left knee. Extend your right arm out to the side at shoulder level, palm turned upwards. Inhale the energy through the spine, becoming radiant at the crown chakra; exhale to draw the right knee to the left, gazing back at the right hand. If your knee does not come to the ground, place your bolster or a cushion under your knee. Hold for 3 minutes, breathing fully and deeply, then change sides.

Notice the flow of prana through the spinal column. The beauty of the longer holds of Yin Yoga is that you can often feel a tingling of energy. When this pulsation is felt, be sure to encourage it, rather than seek to control it. This is your life force!



Thread the Needle Parsva Balasana

Thread the Needle pose provides a massage for the muscles of the upper chest, shoulders, spine, neck and digestive tract.

Come onto your hands and knees, aligning shoulders over wrists, hips over knees, and knees in line with ankles. Inhale to lengthen the spine; exhale to slide your left arm under the right armpit, laying the left arm on the ground with the palm turned upwards. The right elbow will need to bend to accommodate this movement. Turn your cheek to meet Mother Earth. As an option, draw the right arm into the sky on an inhale, then exhale to wrap the arm around the lower back, threading the hand onto the left thigh. Hold for 3 minutes, breathing fully and deeply, then change sides.

Listen to the whispers from Mother Earth as you lay your ear to the ground. Ask for an answer to a question you have about your life. Higher messages can often be heard in this pose.



Melting Heart Anahatasana

Melting Heart pose deeply opens the shoulders, pectoral muscles of the chest, thoracic spine, neck and lower back. Heart and lung meridians receive a fresh burst of prana.

From hands and knees position, melt your heart towards the Earth to the degree that feels appropriate. Ultimately your chest can lay on the ground, with the chin tilting up. This will compress and massage the back on the neck and must only be done if comfortable. Hold for 3-5 minutes, breathing deeply into the shoulders, neck, spine, chest and lower back. Always remember where your attention goes, energy flows and it is important in these more challenging Yin postures to remain focused inwards.

Observe the emotions rising in this pose. Melting heart is particularly effective in releasing heavy or sad feelings, so you may have a need to cry which will create profound healing. By the end of the pose, you will feel joy and lightness.



Bridge Setu Bhandasana

Supported bridge pose will create flexibility in the lower back, assisting sciatica, restoring the kidneys, adrenal glands and awakening sacral chakra. The throat receives a gentle massage and can stimulate and balance the thyroid gland and throat chakra.

For this supported version of Bridge pose, place the bolster sideways on your mat, sitting on the bolster, laying onto your spine. Bend the knees, aligning the knee joint over your ankle joint. The lower back forms a natural arc using the bolster as a prop in this way. The formation of the body means the sternum naturally rises to meet the chin, creating a very gentle Jalandhara Bhandha (chin lock). The arms extend to the side, palms up, engaging Chin Mudra. Hold for 20 mins for a Restorative Yoga release or if you are short on time, a 5-minute Yin Yoga hold will be perfect. Breathe deeply.

Metaphysically when our lower back is tight, it can reflect a feeling of non-support, either universally, from others, financially, or not supporting your own dreams. Observe the support of this pose and allow yourself to visualise how you would like your life to look if one of your heartfelt desires was met. Know that the universe "has your back".



Pigeon Rajakapotasana



Pigeon Pose resting on a bolster creates a feeling of support and rest despite the challenging aspects of releasing the hips. Stomach and gallbladder meridians on the outer leg are stimulated deeply in this pose.

Lay the bolster lengthways on your mat and kneel facing the bolster. Draw your right knee to the side of the bolster, laying your right hip to the ground, with your right heel connecting to your left groin. You can place a cushion under your left hip if it doesn't easily come to the ground. Your left leg is outstretched behind you. Lay your torso on the bolster, hugging your bolster, and turn your head to the right. Hold for 3-5 minutes, breathing deeply, then change sides. Please note, while it is not imperative to start with the right knee forward first, it will help the flow of colon energy.

Place your awareness in your hip and allow a deep release of old stored energy. Our hips are known as our 'saddlebags' and metaphysically can be areas where we carry our emotional 'baggage'. Lighten your load by feeling deeply!

Reclining Hero Supta Virasana

Reclining Hero trains the hip and knee joints to rotate inwards, giving a full motion to our joints, just as they were intended to be used! The supported version of this pose creates a healing heart opening.

From kneeling, facing away from the bolster, widen the feet yet keep the knees together. Allow the buttocks to come to the Earth. Lay back over the bolster, with the arms opened to the side, palms turned upwards and adopt Chin Mudra. Even with the support from the bolster, this can be a challenging pose, so please take the option to do one leg at a time (ie. One leg bent, the other leg straight) for 2.5 minutes per side, or 5 minutes if doing the full pose. Breathe deeply.

Just as the name of this pose suggests, connect to where you can become the 'hero' in your own life. What part of yourself needs 'saving'? Visualise how this looks when you 'step up' for yourself.



Inverted Legs Viparita Karani

Inverted Legs provides a great lymphatic flush for the body and allows the heart to receive a fresh flow of energy. Stress and excess fluid are also released from the ankles, knees and pelvis.

For this version, as shown in the picture, lay your bolster sideways on your mat and set yourself up in the same way as Bridge Pose. This time, however, draw the legs straight up and fan the toes. When we spread our fingers and toes in our yoga poses, we allow more energy flow into the meridian lines of the body which will ultimately flush out the internal organs. There is also the option to put the legs up a nearby wall. Hold for 20 minutes for a Restorative Yoga release or if you are short on time, a 5-minutes Yin Yoga hold will be perfect. Breathe deeply.

Enjoy the deep rest of this restorative pose as you come to a place of trust within yourself. Repeat this affirmation: "All is in perfect order."

