

June 28
Yin & Release Practice Outline
and
Self-Myofascial Release Prop Guide

Yin & Release Practice Outline

June 28 Workshop

Focus: Spine & Lower Body Release

This sequence integrates self-myofascial release (SMFR) and Yin yoga to support spinal decompression, leg mobility, fascial hydration, and nervous system downregulation. Each section targets a specific area of the body to invite tension release, improved mobility, and integration.

Target Area: NECK RELEASE

5 minutes per side – Suboccipitals Compression

Two therapy balls placed at the base of the skull on a block. Nod gently or stay still. Add towel between head and balls for comfort.

Alternate – Suboccipital Rolling on edge of a Block

Gently nod and roll ear-to-ear with a block beneath area where the skull and spine meet.

Why we do this: Calms the nervous system and relieves screen-related or postural tension.

SPINAL DECOMPRESSION

3 min – Thoracic and Lumbar Spine Rolling

Roll twin balls along either side of the mid-to-low back. Avoid rolling directly over spine unless you are using the larger, softer semi-deflated Pilates ball (alt. option).

Why we do this: Hydrates spinal fascia and encourages decompression, especially in areas that often feel stiff or overworked.

GLUTES + OUTER HIPS

3 min/side – Glute Release with Therapy Ball

Sit with legs extended and place a therapy ball under one glute. Gently rock side to side, or explore slow, mindful movements like windshield wipers or half-butterfly with the leg on the same side. Use a single ball, twin balls, or a Pilates ball—choose the option that gives you the sensation you're looking for.

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A NOTE ABOUT ASYMMETRICAL SMFR

I recommend focusing on one side at a time. This allows you to better modulate the amount of pressure using your body weight, and helps you tune in to the experience through your nervous system. Research suggests that interoceptive awareness—your ability to feel and respond to internal body sensations—is enhanced when practices are slowed down and attention is directed to a single region. Working one side at a time may also help promote greater parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) activity, which is linked to downregulation of stress and improved tissue recovery.

GLUTES + OUTER HIPS continued

3 min/side – Shoelace (Lower half of Gomukhasana)

Primary Targets: Glutes & IT Band (outer hip and thigh)

- Cross one knee over the other, feet out to the sides.
- Sit on a folded blanket if knees lift or spine rounds.
- Keep spine tall or gently fold forward for added sensation.

Shape Variations:

- Square – ankle over opposite knee
- Open Shoelace – top leg more open across the body
- Tight Shoelace – knees stacked
- Supine version: Reclining Figure 4 (lie back, cross ankle over thigh, hug knees in)
- Can also be practiced against a wall

Props & Variations:

Blanket or bolster under hips

Block or bolster to rest arms on while folding

1 min – Rebound / Stillness

Sit or recline in a supported position. Close your eyes and notice any shifts.

Why we do this: A moment of stillness helps the nervous system absorb the work and allows fluids, energy, and awareness to reorganize.

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OUTER HIPS, SPINE, SIDE BODY

2 min/side – Outer Thigh / IT Band Rolling

Roll outer thigh using a ball or roller. Control pressure with your arms.

Why we do this: Frees fascial tension around hips and knees.

3 min/side – QL Release (Quadratus Lumborum)

Lie on back, knees bent, feet on the floor, with therapy ball between lowest rib and pelvis. Relax into the pressure, or roll across area gently, staying to one side of the spine.

Why we do this: These areas often hold tension from asymmetrical movement patterns or postural habits.

3 min/side – Seated Twist

Cross-legged seated twist, using one hand on the opposite knee, the other behind for support.

Optional refinement: to massage your vagal nerve, turn head toward the front shoulder and lower chin.

Alternate: Reclining Twist

1 minute – Rebound / Rest

Sit or recline in a supported position. Close your eyes and notice any shifts.

Why we do this: A moment of stillness helps the nervous system absorb the work and allows fluids, energy and awareness to reorganize.

LOWER LEGS

3 min/side – Calf Rolling

Roll the back and sides of the calves using a ball, or ball elevated by a block. Sit with leg extended for back of the calf, bend leg into half-butterfly or a 90/90 to access sides.

3 min/side – Short Log Lunge (Calf Stretch)

In a low lunge, allow the front knee to move over the toes. Let the heel rest on the floor or be slightly lifted.

1 minute – Rebound / Rest

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Optional Yang Movement for the feet, calves, and ankles.

In summer, our calves are working hard—physically and energetically. They support the body's need to move heat and fluid, but often get stiff, tired, or overworked in the process. That's why practices that support the feet, ankles, and calves—through gentle MFR, stretching, or even active engagement—can feel so nourishing and necessary during the hotter months.

In Chinese Medicine, summer is associated with the Fire element and the Heart system, which governs circulation. Heat naturally rises, drawing energy upward and leaving the lower body more prone to stagnation. The calves, rich in energetic channels like the Spleen, Kidney, Bladder, and Liver, are key zones where dampness and heat can accumulate—especially in hot or humid weather. This can show up as swelling, cramping, or fatigue in the legs and feet.

From a sports medicine perspective, the calves play a vital role in circulation, balance, and movement efficiency. They're responsible for absorbing shock, powering gait, and pumping blood and lymph back toward the heart. In summer, factors like increased activity, sweat-related fluid loss, and hot environments can lead to muscle fatigue, dehydration, or electrolyte imbalances—making the calves more vulnerable to tightness and cramping.

That's why I offer a blend of Yin postures, self-myofascial release, and light active movements to tend to this area. These practices support circulation, elasticity, and grounding—helping your lower body stay responsive and resilient throughout the season.

Optional Yang Add-On – 90 sec or longer – Downward Dog

Pedal the heels to actively engage and stretch the calves and the entire back of the legs.

Optional Pilates Footwork Series

Try slow heel lifts and lowers with feet in:

- Parallel stance (feet together or hips-width, whatever you find comfortable)
- V-stance (heels together, toes apart)
- Practice 10 reps per stance or hold with heels lifted for 10 seconds. To integrate this into daily practice, try pairing with everyday tasks like brushing teeth or use as a movement break between meetings.

Why we do this: Supports fascial spring and strength in the feet, calves, and ankles.

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Target Area: HAMSTRINGS + POSTERIOR CHAIN

3 min/side – Hamstring Rolling

Sit with a therapy ball under one thigh. Slowly roll or tilt leg side to side.

Why we do this: Targets fascial tightness in the back of the legs, supporting hip hinge and forward fold mobility.

NECK + TRAPEZIUS RELEASE

3 min/side – Graceful Bow Neck Stretch

Stand or sit comfortably. Let one arm rest behind your back or extend it at a 45° angle. Drop your ear toward the opposite shoulder. Slightly tilt your head forward or back to refine the stretch (moving sensation to the front or back of the neck).

Why we do this: Targets the sides and back of the neck, helping to release tension in the upper traps, jaw, and shoulders. The angle variation allows you to find what your body needs.

SPINE + HAMSTRING RELEASE

5 min – Dangling Forward Fold

In our class, we stood with our hips resting against the wall, for balance, completed Graceful Bow, and then centered the head, letting the chin drop and slowly (take forever!) let the head gently pull the spine forward as you round into a forward fold. Slowly roll down from standing, folding over your legs. Arms can dangle, rest on blocks, or blocks supporting a bolster.

Why we do this: Gently lengthens the spine and entire back body while encouraging nervous system regulation.

1 minute – Rebound / Rest

Lie in stillness and notice the sensations across the front body.

Why we do this: Stillness helps the body register change, restore balance, and re-integrate.

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Target Area: Front of Shins + Sides of Calves

2 min/side – MFR Front of the Shins / Sides of the Calves

Use a therapy ball or roller to compress and gently roll the front of the shin and outer lower leg.

Why we do this: Releases the tibialis anterior and peroneal muscles, which often hold hidden tension from walking and balance strategies.

1.5–3 min – Ankle Stretch Pose

Sit in a low kneeling position with the tops of the feet on the floor. Sit back toward your heels and observe sensation in the ankles and shins.

To intensify: fold your mat or add a rolled blanket or bolster beneath your shins to elevate the angle.

Why we do this: Gently stretches the fascia and connective tissue of the ankles, shins, and foot tops—areas rarely moved into end range in daily life.

Inner Thighs / Adductors

2 min/side – MFR for Inner Thighs

Lie on your side and place a block with a ball on the floor beneath the top leg's inner thigh. Gently roll the leg over the ball.

Alternate: Rest a block between the thighs with the ball between block and top leg to compress.

Why we do this: Targets the adductors and inner thigh fascia—key contributors to hip, pelvic, and low back health.

4 min – Supported Frog, Wide-Leg Child's Pose, or Dragonfly

- Frog: Knees wide, shins resting on the floor, torso draped over a bolster. Let your hips settle forward of your knees or back toward your heels—whichever position feels most supportive. Rather than alignment, focus on finding a version of the pose that feels sustainable and offers a gentle, spacious sensation through the inner thighs and groin.
- Wide-Leg Child's Pose: Knees wide, forehead supported. Try using a block to rest a bolster at an incline and rest forward over this propping.
- Dragonfly: Seated, legs extended wide, option to fold forward. Dragonfly may give you the benefit of lengthening the stretch into the lower legs and back of legs, furthering the SMRF work we did earlier.
- Use bolsters or blankets for support.

Why we do this: Deep Yin hold to release the inner thigh fascia and groin, areas often neglected in traditional mobility routines.

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Target Area: Quads / Hip Flexors

2 min/side – SMFR Front of the Thighs

Lie on your belly with a therapy ball or roller beneath one quad. Roll slowly or pause on areas of density.

Why we do this: Releases quadriceps and hip flexors—often tight from prolonged sitting or bracing patterns.

5 min – Supported Bridge or Prone Quad Stretch

- Supported Bridge: Block or bolster under sacrum, knees bent, feet flat.
- Prone Quad Stretch: Lie face down and bend one knee to bring heel toward glute. Hold foot or use a strap. Or bend and hold both legs towards backside for the full version of this stretch. Full or half-version doesn't imply one version is more or better than another, take whatever feels right in your body.

Why we do this: Gently opens the front body, balances the hip flexors, and invites parasympathetic tone.

Closing

5+ min – Savasana

Lie down in a comfortable, supported position. Use a bolster under the knees or a blanket over the body if helpful.

Variation: Rest calves on a bolster supported by two blocks to elevate the legs—offering a restorative alternative to legs-up-the-wall.

Why we do this: Allows the body to integrate the physical, mental, and energetic effects of practice in a deeply restful state.

Self-Myofascial Release Prop Guide

SMFR Props Guide:

What You'll Need (and What You Might Already Have)

Self-myofascial release (SMFR) doesn't require fancy equipment. You can start with what you have at home—and explore over time to find what feels best for your body. Below are some of the most useful props we work with in class, along with options for improvising and recommendations based on what I personally use in my own practice.

Yoga blocks help support the body, elevate therapy balls, and create angles that enhance release.

- **Foam Blocks:** Come in a range of densities. Some are soft and forgiving; others are firm and supportive.
- **Cork Blocks:** Denser and more grounded than foam. Offer a firmer surface, which can be helpful for certain releases.
- **Wooden Blocks:** Very firm and not usually necessary for SMFR.

What I use: I prefer denser foam or cork blocks. My current favorite brand is Manduka (for both cork and recycled foam blocks). I also like Bean Products (Chicago-based) and 42 Birds for high-quality cork props.

Therapy Balls are the main tools for targeted myofascial release. You can buy specialty therapy balls—or get creative with household items.

- **RAD Roller balls** are what I use in class:
 - **Rounds (Single Balls):** Soft medical-grade silicone, available in different sizes and densities.
 - **Everywhere Multitool (Twin Balls):** Designed to cradle either side of the spine.
- **Cork Therapy Balls:** A popular and eco-friendly option, cork balls tend to be firmer than silicone and offer a more grounded feel. They're a great choice if you prefer solid feedback with less “give.” Brands like 42 Birds offer quality cork options in various sizes.
- **DIY Alternatives:**
 - Tennis balls are a great starting point.
 - Tie two together inside a sock to create twin balls.
 - Lacrosse balls are smaller and firmer.

Self-Myofascial Release Prop Guide (continued)

Tip: Explore before you invest. Your body will tell you what it responds to best. Also, if you live with a dog, store your DIY tools accordingly!

A soft, inflatable ball / Pilates Ball is incredibly versatile—useful for the neck, front of the body, and gentle pressure points.

- Size: I currently use a 9" diameter ball for versatility. Though I also like a slightly smaller diameter for self-myofascial release.
- Material: Look for a soft-density, latex-free ball.

What I use: I use the Franklin Method® Air Ball™ because of its quality and durability. But I've also used many other brands, and the more affordable versions often work just as well for casual home use.

Remember:

There's no one perfect prop—only what works for you. The best tools are the ones that invite curiosity, comfort, and effectiveness in your own body. You can build your collection slowly, or use what you have on hand to begin exploring today.

Thank You for Practicing

Thank you for joining Yin & Release, this weekend.

We're excited to offer two more workshop classes this summer at Chi-Town Shakti. To explore more practices or stay connected, visit lakesideyin.com or feel free to reach out with any questions or reflections.

Warmly,
Kathryn