

Fifteenth Breathing Theme - The Sponge

The Sponge is a visualization that slows down your breathing and helps you become deeply relaxed. During poses, it's going to help you relax muscles that are stretching and working.

Doing *The Sponge*

- This is best done lying down – but you can do it sitting or standing.
- You also get more out of it if your eyes are closed.

The Sponge

Imagine you are a sponge, lying in a pool of warm water.
Imagine yourself bobbing at the surface, gently supported by the water.

Imagine the pores of your body are like pores of *The Sponge*.
As you breathe in, feel yourself drawing in this warm water through every pore in your body.

As you breathe out, feel the water soaking into your whole body. Soon the water bathes each cell in warmth.

As the water soaks into your body, you begin to feel heavy and your weight sinks down.

Each time you breathe in, you are drawing in more of this warm water through your pores.

Each time you breathe out, the water is soaking into your bones, your muscles, your cells, until your whole body is warm and heavy.

(If you don't like the water in the visualization, you can imagine lying in a cloud of light. Pick any colour of light you like.)

The idea is that a sponge does nothing quickly. It absorbs water slowly and evenly. Similarly, when you practice *The Sponge* your breathing becomes slow and even. Your body deeply relaxes, feeling heavier.

Working with the Fifteenth Breathing Theme

The Sponge will help you relax muscles that you are using during a yoga stretch. To use it, start by picking any stretch... Then, once you're in the stretch, do *The Sponge*.

When you're in your yoga pose, you do *The Sponge*, imagining the warm water is soaking into the muscles that are stretching.

As you breathe out, feel your breath "carrying the water to the stretching muscles". As your breath flows out, your body is sinking down. Imagine the breath is following your body's movement, until it reaches the muscles that are stretching.

- Notice the stretching muscles as the warm water soaks into them.
- Notice them feeling heavier.
- Notice them dissolving.

Can you feel the water traveling along the full length of the muscles?
Can you feel the muscles flattening as the "water" soaks into them?

This may feel like your muscles are flattening, dissolving, the way they did during the Discovery Exercise where you tightened your fist. As your muscles "warm and flatten", they are relaxing. As they let go, you can feel them getting longer. They're ready to stretch more.

Once you're used to doing the *Sponge* when you're in your pose, notice if the stretch is increasing. Don't force it. Don't push it. See what is naturally ready to happen as you imagine warm water soaking along the length of those muscles.

This exercise seems leisurely while you're doing it, but many people find that it is also a very good work out! It's a great muscle builder and releases tension out of the body very quickly.

The *Sponge* visualization is deeply relaxing while giving you a strong work-out. It's a great muscle builder and relieves tension very quickly.

It works best with certain poses that naturally lend themselves to the visualization. These include:

Back Stretch	Leg Stretch
Back Bend	Lunge
Balance Posture	Neck Stretch
Bow	Pelvic Push
Half Bow	Pelvic Lift
Bust Expansion	Pigeon
Child Pose	Plow
Cobra	Puppy
Chest Expansion	Rabbit
Downward Dog	Reclining Butterfly (Dead Bug)
Forward Bend Standing	Side to Sides
Happy Baby	Shoulder Stand
Leg Clasp	Spider 1
Leg Fold	Standing Leg Stretch
Leg Over	Wide Angle Pose