



TEARS OF RELEASE

Tears that come from peeling onions are a lot different than the ones that come from a 4:45 A.M. I've-had-enough meltdown. Emotionally charged tears seem to be a physiological sign—and form—of relaxation. When you're stressed, your muscles are tense, but when the stress passes, you get hit with a wave of relaxation. "During that neurological relaxation—your brain says, 'Okay, let's react or relax now because the danger has passed,'" says Sarah G. Garber, Ph.D., a physiology professor at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in North Chicago. "Your smooth muscle relaxes, which includes your tear ducts, and to some extent the skeletal muscles, which are mostly involuntarily controlled, relax and then the tears can flow." A long-time devotee of Iyengar yoga, Dr. Garber adds that standing poses, headstands, and handstands tend to energize you by bringing a lot of blood and circulation to the central nervous system. So if you feel on-the-mat tears coming on, that's okay—open the floodgates. The relaxation and stress-relief benefits of the release will far outweigh your self-conscious feelings in savasana.

—Vanessa Geneva Ahern