



Simple Yoga for Stress Relief

Yoga is great for relieving stress, reducing and eliminating pain and gaining strength and flexibility. An important part of yoga is learning to pay attention to your breath and to be sensitive to what your body is telling you.

When you learn more about proper alignment you can begin to recognize habits in your life that create misalignment, pain and stress.

Below are six simple yoga practices you can do at work.

Breathing practice:

Full deep breathing is one of the best things you can do for your health and stress relief. Typically we use a very small percentage of our breath capacity. We often just breathe in the chest area.

- 1) Sit in a **relaxed position** with your weight on the **front of your sit bones**. (You should not feel most of the weight in the fleshy part of your butt.) Your neck and shoulders should be relaxed and stay relaxed.
- 2) **Lengthen your low back** so your back has a gentle curve. Your low back should not be rounded.
- 3) On your **inhalation feel the breath move from your belly, up through your ribcage and finally up to the collarbone area**. Feel your ribcage expand to the front, back and both sides.
- 4) On your **exhalation feel your body relax** and imagine that you are releasing any tension or anything else that you want to let go of
- 5) You can count on the inhalation and the exhalation. Count at least to 4. You can increase the count with each breath up to 8 and then decrease the count from 8 back to 4.
- 6) After you return to normal breathing notice how you feel.

Standing in Mountain Pose:

Standing with your body in proper alignment will relax your shoulders, neck, jaw and help strengthen your feet, ankles and knees.

- 1) **Ground deeply and evenly through the 4 corners of the feet** (big toe mound, inner heel, little toe mound and outer heel). Lift up through the arch of the foot.
- 2) **Keep the energy of the legs strong**. Hug the muscles to the bone, press the shins in and move the thighs apart. You should feel the natural curve in the low back when you do this.
- 3) **Draw the tailbone downward and lift the belly up**. Imagine an energy loop connecting these actions. So the energy of the tailbone draws toward the heels but then rounds upwards lifting and creating tone in the belly.
- 4) **Breathe in fully and deeply. Expand your breath into the back of the body**. The breath expands into the chest naturally but we want to consciously send the breath to open the back so the rib cage expands in all directions.
- 5) **Inhale feeling the breath lift the shoulders and lengthen the side body and spine**. On the exhalation, take the top of your throat back so your head lines up with your spine. Your head should feel lighter and more relaxed. Most people carry their heads forward of the shoulder so the muscles are strained keeping

the head lifted. Softly draw your shoulders onto the back with the bottom tips of your shoulder pressing forward. Feel your chest lift and expand.

- 6) **Lengthen the back of your neck with your chin parallel to the floor.** Energetically lift up through the top of your head.
- 7) **Inhale and lift your arms by moving from the back body** so your hands follow your arms. You should feel your shoulders engage on your back keeping your neck soft and relaxed.
- 8) **Exhale releasing your arms so they slowly float down to your sides.** Feel as if your arms are moving slowly through honey so there is some resistance and they lower to your side.
- 9) Repeat inhaling your arms up and exhaling your arms down 5 times.

Cat/Cow:

Stretching and lengthening the spine while moving with the breath promotes a healthy spine. A healthy spine is the key to staying young as you age.

- 1) **Sit up with a long spine in a chair** with your back away from the back of the chair. **Hold onto the sides of the chair seat** with your hands directly under your shoulders, fingers underneath the chair and thumbs on the chair seat.
- 2) **Inhale, lift your chest and head up toward the sky, reach your shoulders back, and stick your butt out behind you so you create an arch in your back.**
- 3) **Exhale and round your back so your mid-back reaches backwards, relax your neck letting your head tilt forwards.** Keep the lifting up through your sit bones so you do not collapse your spine.
- 4) **Let your breath lead the movement.**
- 5) Feel your spine lengthen as you move from arching your back to rounding your back.
- 6) **Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed at all times.**

Note: You can also do cat/cow on the kneeling on the floor with your shoulders directly over your wrists and your hips directly over your knees.

Seated Twist:

Twists are very therapeutic for your internal organs. Twists are done with a long spine and by relaxing into the twist on an exhalation. (If you have a back injury and feel any pain doing a twist, stop and do not do this pose.)

- 1) **Sit near the edge of your chair. Cross your right leg, just above your ankle, over your left leg just above your left knee.** Allow your knee to lift upwards.
- 2) **Press down through your sit bones** and lift your ribs away from your hips. **Lift your chest up and lengthen through the back of your neck** keeping your chin parallel to the floor.
- 3) **Place your left hand on the outside of your right knee.** Place your right hand on the back of your seat.
- 4) On an **inhalation lengthen your spine** and lift as tall as you can from your sit bones.
- 5) On your **exhalation** look over your right shoulder as you **gently release into a twist to the right.** (Do not try to go deep in the twist by forcing it with your arms.)
- 6) **Keep your chest open** and your shoulders reaching back **as your twist.**

- 7) Look as far to the right as you can with your eyes.
- 8) Keep the back of your neck lifting and relaxed as your twist.
- 9) Inhale back to center.**
- 10) Uncross your legs and switch legs to twist to the left.

Shoulder stretch at your desk:

Learning how to integrate your shoulders onto your back and open your chest will help you to relieve shoulder and neck pain.

- 1) **Place your hands with palms down on the edge of your desk.**
- 2) **Step back stretching your arms out and bend at your hips.** Stretch your hips back and lift your tail bone up toward the sky. **Your torso should be more or less parallel to the floor.**
- 3) **Press your hands into the desk and keep your arms firm.** Keep the backs of your arms and shoulders lifted so you do not hyperextend your armpits.
- 4) **You can bend your knees if you have tight hamstrings.** You should not feel any pain in the back of your knees.
- 5) Look toward the floor and lengthen the back of your neck. **Stretch your tailbone toward the sky and reach back with your hips.**
- 6) **Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed.**
- 7) **Breathe!**

Hip Opener:

Most of us have at least some tightness in our hips. Releasing some of this tightness can help the back, hips and shoulders.

- 1) Sit near the front edge of your chair. Sit in a **relaxed position** with your weight on the **front of your sit bones**. This is the same position as the first breathing practice.
- 2) **Cross your right leg, just above your ankle, over your left thigh, just above your left knee.**
- 3) **Activate your feet** by pressing out through the ball mound of your toes and your heel. (This will lift your arch.)
- 4) **Press out through the big toe mound** of the right foot to engage the muscles of your leg. This action will **protect your knee**.
- 5) **Press your knee toward the floor keeping your weight on your sit bones.** This will give you a big stretch in the outer right hip.
- 6) Keep your back long and lifted.
- 7) Repeat on the other side.

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