

A YOGA ROUTINE

{ for relaxation & stress reduction }

Brought to you by MyLifeStages and Bella Dreizler, physical therapist and yoga instructor.

In these yoga poses, we'll gently encourage the body into various shapes to lengthen tight areas. Just as important, we will work with the body mindfully. Mindfulness helps us safely practice poses, searching for the "edge" in each shape. The edge is just the right amount of sensation to create healthy change, and usually this feels like a "good hurt." Too much sensation creates injury; too little will not create change. Once you find your edge, cultivate physical stillness and invite the mind back into the current moment time and again, focusing on the quality of your breath.

INSTRUCTIONS

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

CHILD'S POSE



From hands and knees, let hips descend toward heels and place your forehead on the ground. If forehead does not touch ground, use a soft blanket. If needed, place a blanket between calves and back of thigh.

Variations:

- Knees close together or wide apart
- Arms extended forward, palms down
- Hands stacked with forehead resting on back of hands
- Arms back, palms up next to soles of feet

By starting with child's pose, we signal the body and mind to turn inward and dedicate a few precious moments to self care. In this shape we are forward folding, lengthening the back body. We begin to tune into the quality of breath and start the process of witnessing what is arising moment by moment.

PUPPY POSE



Position knees directly under hips, extending both arms forward. Let forehead rest on floor, propping on soft blanket if needed. Allow your heart center to melt toward floor and focus on releasing tension in your upper back. Feel the gentle ski slope of your entire spine. Notice what feelings and thoughts arise and then just gently return to the breath.

The shape of puppy pose brings us into a gentle back bend, reversing the "hunch" of sitting slumped forward. It gives us healthy compression of the vertebra and opens the soft tissue of the front body. The close connection of the ground keeps the breath audible. Notice the sensations of your center chest.

CATERPILLAR POSE



Sit with legs extended, knees facing up. Unable to have a straight spine? Prop hips on a folded blanket or pillow. Drop head, round shoulders and allow the low back to stretch. Feel a lengthening in spine, back of hips and thighs. If needed, lift head from time to time, then return. Try anchoring the upturned palms under the thighs, knees or calves.

Caterpillar brings us back into a forward fold, continues to open the spine and hips and adds in a lengthening in back of thighs. This might be our first strong sense of what it means to come to the edge of comfort and hold there. There is a nourishing connection of the lower body to ground, balanced by surrender of upper body to gravity.

LUNGE POSE



Come into a lunge position with front knee directly over ankle, hands resting on floor, on either side of foot. Allow belly and/or chest to rest on top of thigh. Scoot your back leg back until you feel sensation of lengthening tension in front of that hip. Breathe deeply into the sensation. Repeat on other side.

In lunge pose we open and soften the front of the hips which, because we are seated so much, are usually short and tight. We return to a lower body back bend. If we truly bring our attention to find just the right sensation edge, the intensity will keep us present to whatever arises.

INSTRUCTIONS

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

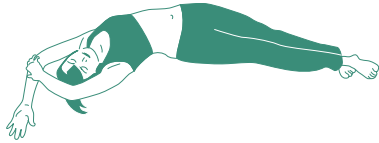
SLEEPING SWAN



Start on hands and knees. Draw right knee up between wrists. Allow upper body to sink down on thigh. Wiggle hips back and forth, finding a shape that creates lengthening tension in side of right leg and deep in right hip. You can stay on elbows or place a pillow or blanket under right hip. If comfortable, extend left leg further back to increase stretch. Repeat on other side.

Swan delivers us to the paradox of a forward bend in the front folded leg and a back bend in the outstretched leg. This allows us to continue to lengthen the tight front hip flexors and adds in the deep hip rotators. This shape helps us return inward to the audible breath and track the passing moments.

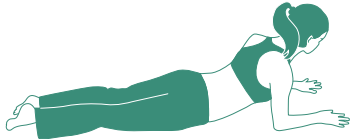
BANANA POSE



Relaxed on your back, scoot legs to right until there is sensation in left leg. Cross right ankle over left, or left ankle over the right; whichever feels best. Keep left hip plastered to floor. Slowly scoot upper body to right. If you want, create more sensation in left side rib cage by extending cradled arms overhead. Rest deeply, breathe into the stretched areas. Repeat on other side.

Banana is a powerful side body opener. On the convex side you experience lengthening in the shoulders, chest, hips, even ankles. It looks deceptively easy! In this shape we may feel quite vulnerable and have a chance to allow and explore this feeling. We can notice the side-to-side differences and how they affect the breath.

SPHINX POSE



Lying on stomach, place the elbows directly under the shoulders, forearms flat on the floor, palms down and raise up head and chest. Relax the buttocks. Focus on the sensation of compression in the low back. Variations:

- Legs together or apart
- Shoulders slumping toward ears pulled back
- Elbows under shoulders or slightly in front of shoulders
- Place a folded blanket under forearms

Sphinx is another back bend. It may seem counter-intuitive that compressing the low spine is good, but it is! The right amount of compression may contribute to healthy bone growth and counters all the hours we spend sitting. This pose should not create pain but maybe slight discomfort, which should dissipate within a minute after release.

TWIST POSE



Lay on side, knees flexed deeply into chest. Keeping legs on floor, rotate upper body to the opposite side, twisting your middle. Try different arm positions to explore the sensation in chest, low back, hip and side of leg. Try turning the head in either direction. Focus on filling and emptying the upper lungs with breath. Repeat on other side.

When we let our hips move one way and our shoulders the other, we are literally wringing out the spine like a wash rag, and enhancing blood flow to internal organs. All this happens deep inside while we lengthen chest, shoulders, hips and watch the effect this shape has on the breath.

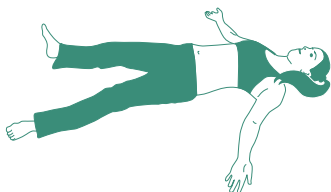
LEGS UP WALL



Scoot hips right up to the wall, then extend legs up the wall and lay back on the floor. If back of the legs are too tight to straighten knees, back hips a bit from wall. Try slowly sliding the legs apart on the wall, just to your comfort edge. Feel the lengthening tension in the inner thigh, possibly all the way to the inner knee.

This is a classic inversion pose that reverses gravity's effect on circulation. A few ankle pumps as you settle in will stimulate blood flow back to the heart. Create a bit more ease by looping a strap around the thighs, place an eye pillow over closed eyes, relax totally, enjoy!

SHAVA-SANA



In this final pose, lie back on the floor. Create the exact shape your body needs for full surrender to gravity. Maybe there is support under knees or head. Spend a minute making adjustments as you track and release tension. Once you settle, commit to stillness in the body. Try following the out breath until it is completely gone, pausing in a moment of no breath before inhaling.

A famous yoga instructor has said that an incomplete exhalation provides "the soil, or base, for thoughts to arise." Maybe this un-exhaled breath, this bit we are unwilling to let go of, is perfect compost for our crazy thinking! Breathe deeply and relax in this closing practice of mindful meditation. It may be your most relaxing moment of the day.