

YOGA: LONG SESSION

Stretching and loosening the body helps to quiet and calm the mind. So now we're going to do some yoga together. Please stand up and give yourself a bit of space.

Yoga has been practiced for over 5000 years – it's a science, increasingly recognized by medical doctors and scientists for its ability to heal, rejuvenate and restore the natural functions of the body.

It's also an art form, because it's very individual. When we practice the various poses we have the freedom to explore our selves within the various shapes and configurations we'll be in.

The good news is that yoga was invented by human beings for human beings, so any human being can practice it. Just like meditation – it's for all of us! So even though some of the poses may be challenging at first, these specific poses are for everyone, no matter how flexible or inflexible! Please take time to look at the photos and imitate them as precisely as you can.

A note about breath:

Our breath is linked to our mind; it's as if the mind rides on the wings of the breath. Consciousness is breath, because a body without breath is no longer conscious. So while practicing the poses pay close attention to your breath. Breathe naturally but a little more slowly than normal. Try not to hold your breath while practicing, or notice when you are holding it, so that you can bring it back.

You can move your breath anywhere in your entire body. For example, try breathing into your foot. Literally the foot doesn't breathe, but it's as if you can feel the breath in your foot – try it for a minute. What's happening is that we are bringing our mind and with it energy to the place we're focusing upon and we can feel that happening. This is a very powerful tool – its power to awaken our body by bringing awareness into it.

1. We'll begin now by standing in Mountain pose.

Start by placing your feet hip width apart, and feel the soles of your feet. By bringing awareness to the feet we begin by practicing being rooted and part of the earth. Notice how you stand on your feet – do you lean into the right foot? Left? The inside, outside, front or back of each foot? Ultimately if you stand evenly on the four corners of each foot, your body will align itself naturally.

Think of your feet and legs as roots of the body. Engage your leg muscles gently hugging the thigh muscles around the bones. Don't squeeze the life out of them....just a hug!

Now align the pelvis by pointing the sitting bones (the bottom of the hips, that we feel when we sit) so that they look towards the heels of your feet, then gently bring the pubic bone upwards towards your navel. There should be a gentle curve at the base of your spine – called the lumbar curve, this is natural and healthy, don't try to flatten it.

Once the pelvis is in this position, we can lift the spine. Think of lifting the spine from a root. Allow the spine to organically arise from the root, towards the sky. Our body is then planted on the earth and reaching towards the sky.

2. Hang: Tuck your chin towards your chest and roll down slowly, arms loosely by your sides till your hands touch the floor, or fold your arms and hold your elbows. Allow your belly to soften with breath. Allow your head and neck to hang freely. Allow your breath to be full and relaxed. Stay here for 3 breaths.

3. Downward dog: Place your hands on the floor and on an exhale walk your feet back about 4-5 feet. Bend your knees and if your legs feel tight, press the hips away from the roots of your hands. Without straining, see how long the spine can become by tilting the sitting bones towards the sky and continue to press the hips away from your hands a bit more. Relax your neck and breathe into your belly. Pause in a dog pause for 3 breaths.

4. Lunge (right): On an exhale lunge your right foot toward the outside of your right hand, (or wiggle it forward if it doesn't go that far at first) placing the left knee on the floor/ Release your neck. Stay here for 3 breaths.

Downward dog: Reverse the lunge by lifting up the left knee first on an inhale. Exhaling, bring the right leg back into downward dog. Stay in dog pose for 2 breaths.

Lunge (left): On your next exhale lunge your left foot to the outside of your left hand, placing the right knee on the floor. Pause here for 3 breaths.

Downward dog: Reverse the lunge as before and stay in downward dog for 2 breaths.

Straight leg lunge (right): On an exhale lunge your right foot forward towards your right hand so that your feet are 4-5 feet apart. Inhale, slowly straighten your right leg and turn your left foot out 45 degrees. Exhaling, bend your torso over the right leg and release your neck. If your hands don't touch the floor, place them on your shin, now you're experiencing the hamstrings in the back of the leg....for most of us these are pretty tight so breathe into them! Stay here for 2 breaths.

Downward dog: On an exhale bend the right leg, place hands down, turn left foot forward, and bring right leg back into downward dog. 2 breaths here.

Straight leg lunge (left): On an exhale lunge your left foot forward. Inhaling, straighten your left leg and turn your right foot in 45 degrees. Exhaling, fold over your left leg.

Reverse back to downward dog. Now you're even on both sides! Feel the space and occupy it with your mind for 2 breaths.

5. Standing split: Exhaling, lunge the right leg forward again, this time turn both feet to the left. The outer edges of your feet should be parallel to each other. Inhale, then exhaling, fold from your waist until your hands reach the floor, or bend your knees so that your hands can touch the ground. Drop your neck and head and stay here for two breaths. On your next exhale slowly bend your right knee, keeping the left leg straight. On an inhale, straighten the right leg. Exhale, bend the left leg. Bend to each side twice.

To come back to standing bend, both knees, clasp your hands behind you neck, and roll up slowly as you inhale. Your head is the last to come up. Bring one leg to the other so that you're standing with your feet hip width apart.

6. Peddlers pose: Sit down on the floor (thank goodness), bend both knees and place the soles of your feet together. On an exhale, slowly fold forward from your waist as far as you can, let your neck hang freely. Breathe into your belly. Stay here for three breaths. Now inhaling, roll up by stacking one vertebra onto the next like coins until your back is in an upright position.

7. Reclined twist: Lie on your back, left leg bent and right leg straight. Place the left foot on the inside of the right knee and on an exhale let the left knee fall towards the floor. Bend both knees. If this uncomfortable on your lower back, extend your arms out to the sides. Allowing your breath to be very soft, stay on this side for three breaths. Roll onto your back and switch sides.

Roll onto your back, then to your right to come up.

9. Seated forward bend: Sit with your right leg straight in front of you, left knee bent and foot on the inside of the right thigh. On an exhale bend from the waist, extending your spine towards your foot. If this is too harsh on the back of your legs, slightly bend the left knee as you come forward. Drop your head. Pause here for 3 breaths.

Now roll up slowly, stacking the vertebra again and switch your legs to bend over the left leg. Stay here for 3 breaths.

Roll up slowly, stacking the vertebra....You made it!

Sit for a minute or two in a comfortable position, or you can lie on your back and relax. Notice how you feel; your body, your breath, your mind and heart. It doesn't take a lot to create change, to feel better, to be more awake in body and mind. Taking a few minutes to reflect after practicing allows the body and mind to fully absorb all that you did. Best wishes for your practice!