

Yoga in a Chair

A lot of people think you have to be super fit to do yoga, and that you're going to have to twist yourself into weird shapes and stand on your head. This isn't true at all! People of all levels of fitness and with disabilities can do yoga. This yoga sequence can all be done sitting in a chair, and everyone can benefit from it – your muscles will be less tight and more flexible and you will feel calmer and less stressed.

1 Sit comfortably on a chair with your knees slightly apart and your feet flat on the floor or (if they do not reach the floor) on a book or folded up blanket. Let your feet relax. Let your legs relax. Soften your belly, let the waist spread, let the weight of the elbows release any tension in the shoulders, open the hands and rest them on your thighs. Take your attention to your head, relax the root of every hair, of every eyebrow and eyelash, feel the scalp moving backwards on the skull, opening the brow, releasing the expression from the face, softening all the muscles of the face. See there is no tension in the jaw or in the throat. If there is, swallow once. The throat has the softness of the throat of the bird. Breathe naturally. If

you can, breathe with the lips lightly together, breathing through the nose as it filters, warms and moistens the air. The breathing may slow down a little and that is fine but do not try to alter it since it is ideal if it is free to operate as it wishes. Feel the little pear-shaped lungs receiving the breath, and the movement of 12 pairs of protecting ribs on both sides, as they expand and deflate sideways, back and front, just like an umbrella. Where does this breath come from? Everyone knows the place where they are right at home although they cannot explain it. Most of us have some sense of intimacy to the place we arrived from, before we were born. Some people say it is Blackness,

No-thing, Love, or God. All these names can only hint at something we know and experience to be sacred – just as we experience it when we see a sunset or wake up to a tree. Yoga is hard because mostly when we breathe we are doing something else. In a way, the movements in yoga are quite unimportant as all that matters is that we try to stay aware of the breath. Still, the

movements can help us get rid of the blocks in our bodies and then, when we feel better, and able to sit still, we can let the silence work on the blocks in our minds.



2 Look at your hands. With the breath, rotate the wrists in one direction and then in the other, about 10 times. Extend the hand backwards and curl the hand forwards. Spread

the fingers. Shake the hand. Using the other hand's thumb pad, press the palm of the hand, all the way up the inner fingers, mound of the thumb and thumb. Repeat on the other side. Try to stay aware of your breathing throughout.

3 Bring the fingertips to the shoulders and raise the elbows to shoulder height. With the in-breath open the arms forward and as the breath flows out, bring the fingertips back to the shoulders. Repeat three times.

4 Breathe in and hunch the shoulders; breathe out and release. Three times.

5 Cross the legs and rotate one foot 10 times as you breathe, first in one direction and then the other. Breathe in as you point the toes, and exhale as you release – 3 times. Spread the toes to make space in the bones. Rest the foot down and, with your breath, extend the heel away from you, 3 times. Shake the leg and foot, feeling you have opened up the channels to the legs. Repeat on the other side.

6 To strengthen the knee, lift the foot from the ground, using the muscles of the thigh – 10 times. Try to work with the breath. Repeat on the other side.

7 Become aware of the belly, the “hara” as it is known in the East, the seat of our power (unlike the head as in the West). As you breathe in, feel the breath full in the belly as you arch slightly, with a feeling that the buttocks are moving back. As you breathe out, allow the breath to flow out as the spine rounds slightly and the buttocks feel as though they are moving forwards.

8 Place the hands on the lower belly. As you inhale, stretch up with the hands until they are extended towards the ceiling. As you breathe out, bring the hands back to the belly, rounding the back. 3 times.

9 Internal locks: Breathe in, breathe out and drop the chin to the chest. 3 times. Then take the attention to the pelvic floor. As you breathe in, try to draw up all the muscles between the legs, as though you are rising in a lift to level 1, 2, 3 & 4. Hold for a second or two at the top and repeat as you reverse and release. 3 times and finish with a squeeze of these muscles.

10 Bring the right ear to the right shoulder as you inhale. Return to the centre as

you exhale and repeat on the other side 3 times. Breathe in as you turn your head to the right, chin level. Exhale as you return to the centre. Do the same on the left. Breathe in as you look up, just as far as you wish to go. Exhale as you come back to the centre. Inhale as you drop the chin to the chest. Repeat 3 times.

11 Hold onto the chair aware of the solidity of your feet, and your buttocks on the seat. Relax. With the breath, gradually drop the right shoulder down to your right hip gently opening the left waist and torso. Repeat on the other side. Breathe in and turn to the right, placing your left hand on the right thigh. Breathe out. Inhale and turn so that you may be able to hold onto the back of the chair with your right arm (only if this is comfortable). Enjoy the twist for 3 breaths and repeat on the other side. Twists squeeze the discs of the spine and when they are released, the entire area can feed on fresh nutrients and work more efficiently, including the area of the nervous system.

12 Gently slide the hands down the legs, bend forward and breathe for a few breaths. Uncurl slowly and sit and recover. Check that the bottom is situated at the back of the chair allowing you to sit with a straight back with the head level, the palm of the right hand facing up in the lap and the left hand resting on it with the thumb tips coming together. In this position there is no pressure on the nervous system in the spine and no pressure on the organs of the body. In this straight position of comfort, relax around the bones of the body. Come back to the breath and sit receiving the breath as it flows in and out for 1 minute (or longer – up to 25 minutes is good). The eyes look down and gradually go out of focus. Feel free to close the eyes if it is your custom.



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