

## Breathing Techniques

### Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing

Here is my favorite stress relieving breathing technique:



- Place your left hand on your belly and your right hand on your chest. Inhale through the nose and imagine blowing up a balloon in your belly. You should feel your belly rise and as you continue to inhale you will feel your chest expand.
- On the exhale, using your abdominal muscles, press your navel towards your spine. Your diaphragm moves up and helps press the air out of the lungs.
- Continue inhaling and exhaling through the nose.
- Start to lengthen the breath on the inhale and the exhale.
- As you become use to breathing in this way, make the exhale longer than the inhale. A long exhale activates your

parasympathetic nervous system telling your body to relax.

You can do this anywhere, lying down or sitting or even standing to bring your stress under control in less than five minutes.

### Alternate Nostril Breathing



Alternate Nostril Breath (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama) is a simple and powerful technique that settles the mind, body and emotions. In addition, it rejuvenates the nervous system and improves our ability to focus the mind. Its best to practice in a seated position. Make sure your spine is straight.

- Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths inhaling and exhaling through your nose.
- Relax your left hand and bring your right hand in front of your face.
- Place your pointer finger and middle finger between your eyebrows.
- Close your right nostril with your thumb and slowly inhale through the left nostril.
- Close your left nostril with your ring finger and hold the breath for a brief pause. Release your thumb and exhale slowly through the right nostril.
- Pause and slowly inhale through the right nostril and hold both nostrils closed with the thumb and ring finger and pause briefly. Repeat 5-10 cycles, allowing your mind to follow your inhales and exhales.

## Ocean Breath



Ocean Breath (Ujjayi Pranayama) has a balancing influence on the entire cardiorespiratory system, releases feelings of irritation and frustration and helps calm the mind and body.

- Seal your lips and start to inhale and exhale through your nose. Put your tongue on the roof of your mouth.
- Take an inhalation through your nose that is slightly deeper than normal. Exhale slowly through your nose while constricting the muscles in the back of your throat.

Unlike the other breathing techniques discussed, you can use this breath during any yoga practice and is a good way to concentrate the mind and stay present when you are practicing.

## Bee Breath



Bee Breath (Bhramari Pranayama) is an instant way to relieve tension, anger and anxiety. It is a very effective breathing technique for people suffering from hypertension as it calms down the agitated mind.

- Sit in any comfortable seated position with hands resting on the knees.
- Close your eyes, relax your whole body.
- Lips should remain gently closed with the teeth slightly separated throughout the practice.
- Raise the arms sideways and bend the elbows, close your ear lids with your thumbs.
- Place your index finger just above the eyebrow.
- Close the eyes. Use the middle finger to cover the eyes.
- Place the ring fingers next to the nose and apply a little pressure. Do not close the nostrils.
- Inhale through nose and exhale slowly and controlled while making a deep, steady humming sound like that of the bee.
- Do 5-10 rounds in the beginning and increase to 15 over time.

Any of these techniques will work to instantly calm you in 5 minutes or less. They can be done anywhere, or you might want to find a quiet place to practice.

Now that you have learned to use the breath to calm your nerves, let's work on how you can physically improve your nerves.

Everybody's bone structure and flexibility are different and where possible I have added in modifications. Try them all and practice the ones that work best for you. I have included the Sanskrit names of the poses so you can amaze your friends with your knowledge.

## Cat/Cow

The Cat/Cow sequence is 2 poses that are often done together. Using your coordinated breath strengthens the nervous system and encourages your muscles and your mind to relax. Mastering this pose will allow you to intensify focus, improve emotional balance and stabilize your mind.

- Start by sitting in a chair and stacking the vertebrae or on all fours with a neutral (flat) back
  - Bring your attention to your lower back
  - On an inhaled, starting at the lowest part of your spine, arch your back one vertebra at a time with your head looking up last
- On an exhaled, starting at the lowest part of your spine and round your back with the head rounding down last
- Always starting the movement at the lower spine
- Go through this sequence at least 10 times
- It is always important to maintain your focus on the spine



## Half Spinal Twist Pose



- Half Spinal Twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana) helps to relax the diaphragm and so reduce stress.
- Bend the left leg and place the heel of the left foot beside the right hip (optionally, you can keep the left leg straight).
- Take the right leg over the left knee.
- Place the left hand on the right knee and the right hand behind you.
- Twist the waist, shoulders and neck in this sequence to the right and look over the right shoulder.
- Keep the spine erect. Hold and continue with gentle long inhaleds and exhaleds through the nose for at least 30 seconds or as long as is comfortable. Exhaled, release the right hand first (the hand behind you), release the waist, then chest, lastly the neck and sit up relaxed yet straight. Repeat on the other side. Exhaled come back to the front and relax.



## Mountain Pose

Mountain Pose (Tadasana Samasthithi) is the starting point of all standing poses and lifts the sternum. This helps reduce stress, boosts self-confidence and increases your alertness.



- Begin standing with the inner edge of your big toes touching.
- Align your feet to be parallel to one another, heels slightly apart, if this is too hard to balance, then move your feet hip distance apart.
- Focus on evenly spreading your balance between the balls, toes, and outer/inner edges of your feet.
- Allow your thigh muscles to be active without locking the knees.
- Feel a lift through your core up through the crown of your head.
- Keep your chin parallel to the mat, creating length through the neck.
- Gaze forward as your chest opens and shoulder blades release and draw back slightly.
- Allow your arms to drape beside your body naturally and keep eyes, tongue and facial muscles soft and relaxed as you breathe slowly and evenly. To boost your self-confidence, reach your arms over your head and wide apart. You will instantly feel more powerful.
- Hold the pose for 30 - 60 seconds or as long as is comfortable

## Triangle Pose



Triangle Pose (Trikonasana) this pose taps energy stored in the tailbone, which is an important source of vitality and strength and should be practiced regularly. This helps those who require more energy to function efficiently when under stress. The pose activates the spine, keeping it supple and well-aligned.



- Begin standing in Mountain Pose. Inhale as you widen your stance, your left foot facing the front of the mat, your right foot turned slightly out.
- Bring the arms parallel to the ground then on an inhale, hinge forward as you reach the left hand away from the body.
- Exhale and pivot the arms so they are in one line, moving in opposite directions (left hand reaching towards the ground, right hand reaching towards the ceiling). Your

abdominal muscles should be engaged to support your torso. It is not necessary to bring your hand all the way down your leg. Just come down as far as is comfortable while keeping your chest open. Do not lean on your leg as the arm should be able to swing freely. As you become more flexible, you can reach your hand farther down the leg or even hover above the floor. Remember, it is more important that your chest is fully open, and you are using your abdominal muscles to hold the pose.

- Keep both legs straight and thighs engaged. Be careful not to lock the knees. Keep them soft.
- Keep the chest open and torso lengthened. If comfortable, take the gaze toward your top fingers.
- Hold for 30-60 seconds or as long as comfortable. Inhale and using your top extended arm to pull you up, hinge back to standing and repeat on the opposite side.

### Child Pose



Child's Pose (Balasana) is a very restful pose to practice since it pacifies the frontal brain, reducing stress, soothing the eyes and nerves, and calming the mind. It also helps to rejuvenate you after a tiring day.

- Begin by coming down to your hands and knees. As you exhale, lower your hips down to your heels,

forehead to the mat.

- Rest your arms alongside your body palms up or you can reach your arms forward for a great stretch first.
- If you prefer and it is comfortable, you may turn your head to one side.
- Remain in this pose as long as comfortable.
- To release the pose, place your hands under your shoulders, inhale and gently press into a kneeling position.

### Downward Facing Dog



Downward Facing Dog (Adhomukha Svanasana) is an inverted stretch which brings fresh blood to the heart as well as the lungs, increasing fitness of the entire body,



allowing a better stretch of the limbs, calming and soothing the mind.

- From child's pose, place your hands on the mat in front of you, fingers spread wide.

- As you exhale, tuck your toes and press evenly into your hands and feet as you lift your hips towards the ceiling.
- Maintaining a long spine, extend your heels towards the floor, it is unimportant that your heels are on the ground. As your hamstrings release, your heels will naturally move farther towards the floor.
- Check to ensure your hands and feet are hip width apart with even distribution of your weight.
- Relax your neck and let your head hang freely as you gaze between your feet.
- Hold for 30-60 seconds or as long as comfortable. To release the pose, exhale and lower your knees to the mat returning to child's pose

### Seated Wide Angle



Seated Wide Angle Pose (Upavista Konasana) is an easier version of forward fold (the next pose) for those who have stiff backs



and eliminates the more advanced bending forward over closed legs. This pose relaxes stress-related tension in the abdominal muscles.

- Begin with the legs extended in front of you.
- Take the legs wide with toes and kneecaps pointed towards the ceiling.
- Actively extend through the heels.
- Inhale and press backs of legs down.
- Reach up through the spine and as you exhale, hinge forward from the waist, placing your hands to your shins or ankles or wherever they naturally fall without straining.
- Hold for 30 to 60 seconds or as long as comfortable.

## Seated Forward Fold



Seated Forward Fold (Paschimottanasana) relieves lower backache and makes the spine supple. When practiced regularly this pose cools the brain, calms the mind and rejuvenates the entire body.

- Begin sitting with your legs outstretched.
- Inhale and raise your arms overhead to lengthen your spine.
- Exhale as you hinge forward from your hips, placing your hands on your knees and slowly walking them down your legs as you lean your torso forward.
- Keeping a straight back, lengthen forward, allowing your hands to rest on your shins, ankles or clasping toes.
- With each inhalation, lengthen through your spine and with each exhalation, draw your chest closer to your legs. Try to keep the spine as long as possible. Only release the head and spine down if that is comfortable for your back.
- Hold the pose for 30 to 60 seconds or as long as comfortable.

## Bridge



Bridge Pose (Setubandha Sarvangasana) in this pose, the body arches to take the shape of a bridge. The chin lock in the pose calms the flow of thoughts and soothes the mind. It sends a fresh supply of

blood to the brain, resting and revitalizing the mind and body.



- Begin lying on your back with bent knees. Place your feet hip width apart with knees over ankles, feet parallel. Your knees should be coming straight out from your hips and not splaying apart.
- Flatten your shoulders and place your hands palm down.
- Lengthen your neck and as you inhale, press firmly into both of your feet, lifting your pelvis towards the ceiling. Only go as high as is comfortable. You may want to start with moving bridge, inhaling up and then exhaling down a few times one vertebrae at a time to bring fluid into the spine and make it more flexible.
- Clasp your hands underneath your buttocks, drawing your shoulder blades together or you can leave your hands by your side or bring them over your head.
- Engage your legs and buttocks to lift your hips higher, keeping your chin tucked into your throat with your head on the floor.
- Hold for 30 to 60 seconds or as long as comfortable
- To release the pose, on an exhale, release your hands and gently roll your spine back down to the mat one vertebrae at a time.

## Corpse



Corpse Pose (Savasana) is not meditation but reflects a mastery of the inner self and a surrender to a higher power. The steady, smooth breathing allows energy to flow into your body, invigorating it and reducing the stress of everyday life.

- Begin by lying on your back, head and spine in a straight line. Make yourself as comfortable as possible. You can use a bolster or pillows under your knees and behind your neck. A lavender scented eye pillow is very relaxing as well. Cover yourself with a blanket to keep you warm. Make yourself as comfortable as you can so you can stay in the pose for a while for maximum benefit.
- Close your eyes and take a deep breath as you relax your whole body. Feel the ground come up to support your body and allow yourself to soften into the mat.
- Mentally scan your body, breathing into and relaxing any tightness you feel in your body.
- Become aware of your breath and allow it to ease into a natural pace.
- Remain as long as comfortable. When ready, return your attention to your physical body and your surroundings. To release the pose, use your hands to gently push yourself back up to a seated position.

## **POSES TO RELIEVE STRESS**

This is a preventative practice. Find time to do the entire practice every day or choose one or two of poses that benefits you the most and make them a part of your lifestyle.

Your resiliency to stress depends on many factors, but there are steps you can take to improve your tolerance and handle more setbacks and challenges without becoming overwhelmed by stress. You may be so used to being overloaded with stress that you don't even notice it anymore. Feeling stressed feels normal. But being mindful of what you're feeling, physically and emotionally, can have a profound effect on both your stress tolerance and how you go about reducing stress. Having the emotional awareness to recognize when you're stressed and then being able to calm and soothe yourself can increase your tolerance to stress and help you bounce back from adversity.

The science behind mind-body medicine is rapidly growing. There is an undeniable link between state of mind and health of the body. Studies in psychoneuroimmunology and psychoneuroendocrinology show improved immune responses and balanced hormones. When your body is allowed to rest, there is a physiologic response that promotes the health and healing of your body.

A restorative practice promotes your relaxation response, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, lowering heart rate and blood-pressure, decreasing respiratory rate, and promoting digestion. Restorative yoga is exercise of the mind, enabling you to face stress. This is the physiologic state that allows your body to rest and rejuvenate. Restorative yoga is for total relaxation. This practice facilitates a quality of physical and mental rest that promotes balance in the nervous system response. You may lay in a dimly lit room, listening to either silence or calming music. You will want to make use of some props, like a few blankets, a bolster, a foam block, a strap or long belt and maybe a neck pillow or eye pillow. In each pose, you want to feel completely supported and relaxed.

## Supported Child Pose



Supported Child Pose (Salamba Balasana) is a deeply relaxing pose that aims to quiet your mind and calm your body. It gently stretches the hips, thighs, and ankles.

- Come into a kneeling position on your mat with a bolster or a rolled towel positioned between your knees.
- Sit on your shins and then on an exhale slowly lay your torso down over the bolster.

You can add blankets or blocks or towels to get to a comfortable height.

- Arms can be either in front or positioned to the sides of the body.
- Your head should be turned in one direction and then switched to the opposite direction half way through the hold.
- Hold the pose for 1-3 minutes (or as long as comfortable) and breathe deeply as you fully relax into the pose.
- To release from the pose gently push off the bolster with arms at either side and remain sitting for a few breaths before moving on.

## Supported Wide Angle Pose



Supported Wide Angle Pose (Upavishta Konasana) calms your mind and focuses on releasing tight adductors (the inner thigh muscle group). Stretches the insides and backs of the legs and stimulates the abdominal organs.

- Sit on a folded blanket rotating your thighs inward and engaging a neutral spine.
- Bring your legs to a wide-angle and maintain safe alignment by pointing the kneecaps towards the sky.
- Position your bolster between your legs extending away from your body and on an exhale, lay your torso onto the support. You may wish to bend your knees slightly if tightness prevents you from relaxing

onto the bolster. For added support, place rolled blankets under your knees. Observe your breath and body as you maintain this supported position. Allow yourself to sink further down onto the pose with each exhale releasing mental and physical resistance.

- Hold this pose for 2-3 minutes (or as long as comfortable) and use your arms to slowly push you back up to sitting, remove the bolster and fold one leg in at a time to come out of the pose.

## Supported Bound Angle



Supported Bound Angle ( Salamba Baddha Konasana) is a good stress-reliever and can relax your body completely. In addition, the pose calms the mind, improves digestion, and can help relieve mild depression. It gently opens your hips and chest.

You will need a bolster positioned the length of your back and pillows for under each knee.

- On an exhale recline your lower back and torso towards the bolster positioned behind your pelvis.
- Bring the soles of your feet together and let your knees fall to each side supported by the pillows. Adjust so that your knees are fully supported by the height of the pillows.
- Allow your hips to fall out to the sides as your groin sinks in towards the pelvis.
- Position your arms on the floor or pillows angled about 30 degrees away from the torso. Palms face upwards.
- Stay in the pose for a few minutes increasing the hold to 10 minutes with continued practice. To come out use an arm to roll to the side, sliding off the bolster, rest for a few breaths before slowly coming up to a sitting position.
- Take a deep 3 count breath into the belly before moving on.

## Supported Fish Pose



Supported Fish Pose (Matsyasana) lessens anxiety, calms the respiratory system and relieves fatigue.

Build a blanket and bolster stack and come to sitting in front of the stack and line it up with your lower back.

- With your knees resting on a bolster, slowly start to lower your spine onto the blanket stack.
- Allow your throat to slightly open and the back of your head to be supported by a single blanket at the top of the stack.
- Allow the space between your shoulders to deeply rest into the blanket stack as you bring the forearms and palms to rest on the floor with your palms up.
- Continue to deepen the breath, with a focus on the rib cage expanding and contracting.
- Hold for 1–3 minutes (or as long as comfortable).

## LEGS-UP-THE-WALL

Legs-Up-the-Wall (Viparita Karani) is a mild inversion and one of the most powerful restorative poses. It helps to relieve tired feet, legs and mild backache. It also helps to gently stretch the



back of the legs, front torso, back of the neck, and calms the mind.

With blankets and/or bolsters create a support for your low back and hips a few inches away from the wall. The height of the support and distance from the wall is determined by your flexibility. If you are stiff, the support will be lower and further away from the wall. The support is positioned perpendicular to the wall.

- Curl onto your left side with your buttocks against the wall and just to the left of the support. On an exhale, use your left arm to assist and roll onto the support and sweeping your legs up onto the wall.
- Adjust your position on the support so that your entire low back and middle back rest on the support with the shoulders and head resting on the floor.
- Keep your legs straight and the back of your thighs against the wall.
- Make sure that the front of your torso gently arches from the pubic bone to the top of the shoulders.
- Soften your eyes and your breath and relax your body completely. Place an eye pillow on your eyes and begin to draw long slow breaths into the belly relaxing any tension in the facial muscles.
- Rest in this position for 5-10 minutes, up to 15 minutes.
- To release the pose, bend your knees and roll to one side coming down from the support. Stay on your side for a few breaths and then slowly come up to a sitting position.

## Supported Corpse Pose



Supported Corpse Pose (Salamba Savasana) helps calm your brain and reduce stress, headache, fatigue and insomnia. It relaxes your body and helps lower blood pressure.

- Position a bolster under the knees and pillows under the arms to support their weight.
- Add a blanket or towel roll under the lower spine to increase support and improve alignment to the neck.
- Position blankets under the arms.
- Allow the inner muscles of the legs, arms, and face to soften. Release any lingering tension in the body as you scan head to toe. Let the eyes be heavy and close the lids dropping inwards into the pose and releasing the external world.
- Allow the inhalation to softly enter and exhale for 5 to 8 counts. Take a pause for 3-5 seconds before your next inhale. Breathe in balance, calm, and peace and exhale judgment, expectation, and anything else that is not serving you. Be present and stay in the moment. Allow yourself this time to relax and renew.
- Remain in this pose for 10 to 30 minutes while you integrate your mind, body, and spirit and allow your whole being to refresh and renew once more.
- To release from the pose, begin by wiggling your fingers and toes, waking your body and then stretch the arms overhead and lengthen your spine with a few deep breaths. Bend your left leg and roll onto your right side. Stay here for a few breaths before pushing up to a comfortable sitting position.

Practice this restorative practice whenever you become overwhelmed or stressed. If you have trouble sleeping, this is a great practice to do before bed. If you only have time to do one or two of these poses, I recommend Legs up the wall and corpse for maximum results. For an immediate 5-minute stress buster, continue to the next lecture on breathing techniques.