

Yoga at Your Desk



Brief Introduction

Yoga dates back for centuries, consisting of a set of practices that was passed along in oral teachings. The exact date of its inception is unknown, but about the 2nd Century BC, Patanjali, an Indian scholar, teacher, and yogi set down in writing the Yoga Sutra to clarify and preserve the ancient oral teachings of yoga. Yoga was first introduced into the US in 1893. Yoga is widely practiced and it is estimated that more than 20 million people in the US currently practice some form of yoga.

The purpose of yoga is to create strength, awareness and harmony in the mind, body and spirit. There are more than 100 different types or schools of yoga, but most sessions typically include breathing exercises, assuming postures (sometimes called asana or poses) that stretch and flex various muscle groups, and relaxation and meditation.

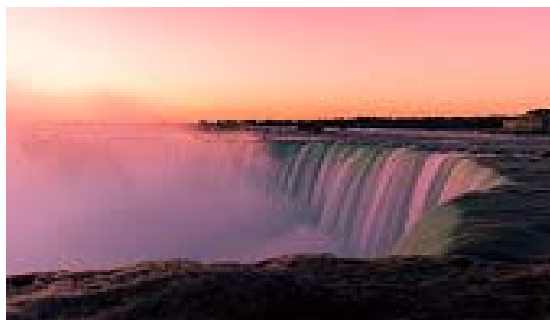
Physical Benefits

The physical benefits which result from regular practice of yoga are innumerable. Practicing yoga at your desk will alleviate muscle tension which builds up through the workday. The relaxation techniques incorporated in yoga can lessen chronic pain, such as lower back pain, arthritis, headaches and carpal tunnel syndrome. In addition to a wide variety of other physical benefits, yoga can also lower blood pressure and reduce insomnia.

Mental Benefits

Aside from the physical benefits, one of the best benefits of yoga is how it helps a person manage stress. Yoga's incorporation of meditation and breathing can help improve a person's mental well-being. Regular yoga practice creates mental clarity and calmness, increases body awareness, relieves chronic stress patterns, relaxes the mind, centers attention, and sharpens concentration.

*You are where you need to be
just breathe*



Yogic Breathing

Natural Breath

Observe your breath; its flow, depth, feel within.
Inhale and exhale through nose.

3-part Breath

Inhale: fill lower abdomen, then diaphragm, finally chest – expand to full capacity.
Exhale: start at chest, then diaphragm, then lower abdomen – breathe out fully.



Natural Alignment

Alignment

Sit or stand up straight, lengthen spine, hold head straight, shrug shoulders up and back, bring shoulder blades together, move chin back so ears align over shoulders, relax and breathe.



Spine and Torso Stretches

Side stretch

Clasp hands and lift arms overhead; pull stomach in, stretch side to side.



Spinal Twist

Sit tall. Bring right hand to outer thigh and twist from waist, keeping hips forward. Repeat on other side.



Cat/cow

Inhale, hands on thighs, gently arch back and look up.
Exhale, round back, tuck chin to chest.



Forward Bend

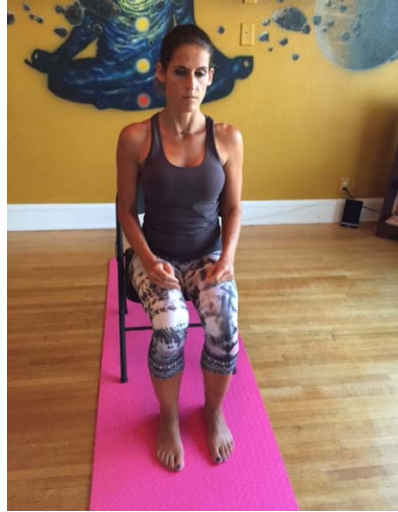
Inhale and exhale as you bend forward, going only as far as you are comfortable.
Let your head and arms hang over your knees. Relax into the position and hold for 4-5 breaths. Inhale and slowly come back up.



Shoulder Relaxation

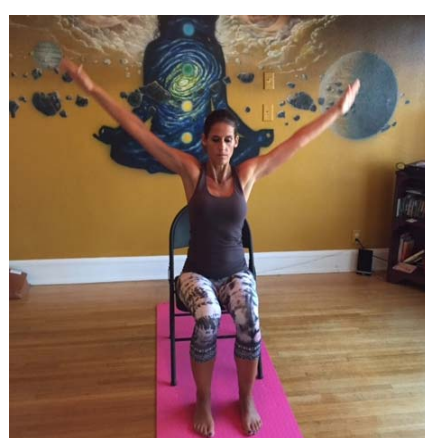
Stress Relief

Inhale, draw shoulders to ears and make fists.
Exhale, squeeze in shoulder blades, and relax.



Shoulder Circles

Sit tall, circle shoulders forward, up, back, down.



Leg and Hip Stretches

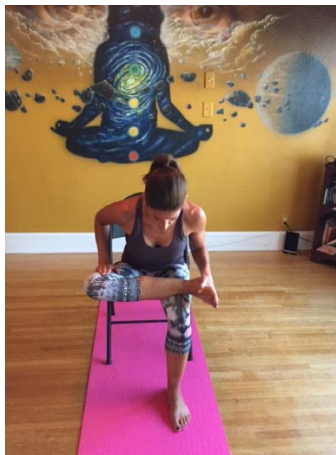
Knee Squeeze

Put both hands around the front of your knee, pull your left knee to your chest, hold your inhale for a few seconds, release slowly while exhaling. Repeat on right side.



Hip Opener

Sit up straight, place your right leg at ankle over your left knee, hold your right ankle with your left hand and place your right hand on your right knee, gently pressing down. Slowly come forward, bending at the hips (not the waist), as far as you comfortably can. Stay here for 4-5 breaths, then slowly come back up and release the leg to the floor. Repeat on left side.



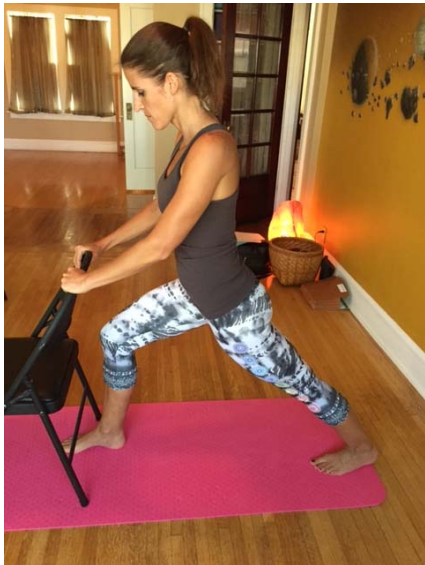
Hamstring Stretch

Face the front of your chair (make sure it will not roll), place right foot flat on floor and lift left foot onto the seat of the chair, toes pointed up, and slowly come forward, feeling the stretch in your hamstring. Repeat on other side.



Lunge

Face the back of your chair (again making sure it will not roll), place left foot about two to three lengths back, keeping right foot close to the chair, foot flat, and slowly lunge forward, feeling the stretch in your quads. Repeat on other side.



Bottom Lift

Sit on edge of chair. Slowly come up to half-standing position and then sit back down. Repeat for a total of ten times.



Hand and Arm Stretches

Wrists

Circle wrists one direction, then the other; flex and push wrists out to side as if pushing against a wall.

Bring palms together and circle to back of hands and rotate; repeat in opposite direction.



Arms

Clasp hands on opposite elbows and stretch side to side, reaching back with arms as far as comfortable while keeping legs and torso facing forward.



Sit up tall; reach up with both arms, feeling a good stretch; then reach up with each arm, repeating several times.



Neck Stretches

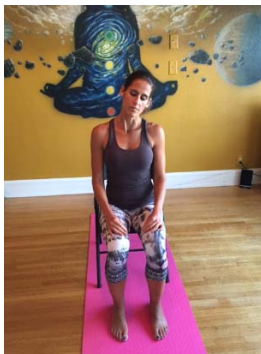
Side Stretch

Sit up straight. Relax shoulders. Gently lower right ear toward right shoulder, come back slowly. Repeat on left.



Rotation

Slowly roll neck in a circular motion, keeping face forward (imagine your nose is a pencil and you are drawing tiny circles). Change direction and repeat.



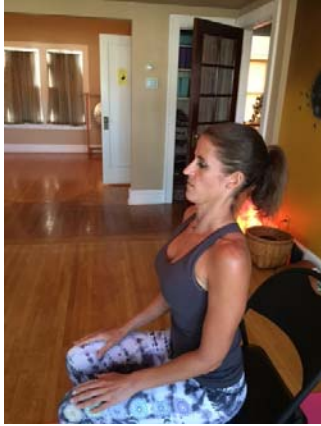
Neck Curl

Sit up straight, clasp your hands together at the back of your head and gently push forward.



Turtle

Sit up straight, chest drawn up and shoulders back; draw your head straight back, keeping chin level, and hold it for a few breaths, then jut your head forward, keeping chin level; repeat several times.



Eye Exercises

Keeping your head still, look up and down several times. Look right and left, then on a diagonal.



Rub your hands together to warm them, cup lightly over your eyes and let the muscles around your eyes relax.

Meditation/Relaxation

Close your eyes; breathe deeply, imagine breath as a wave-like flow; let go of all tension, relax.

Be a silent witness to your own thoughts and emotions, simply watch them flow by; let go of outside distractions and simply notice things. Sit still and see what comes. Stay in this state for a few minutes.

Gradually bring your awareness back to the present, take some deep breaths, open your eyes.



*"In the end, only three things matter:
how much you loved, how gently you lived,
and how gracefully you let go of things not meant for you."*

Buddha

NOTE: I cannot diagnose, heal or treat and every body is different, therefore, it is important to discuss any physical activity with your physician before beginning a regular practice.

By Bonny M. Fetch

Prepared for presentation at the 2017 NAHO Conference, Washington DC

Special appreciation to Deb Stafford for modeling the poses and Louise Wetzel for technical assistance.

Namaste