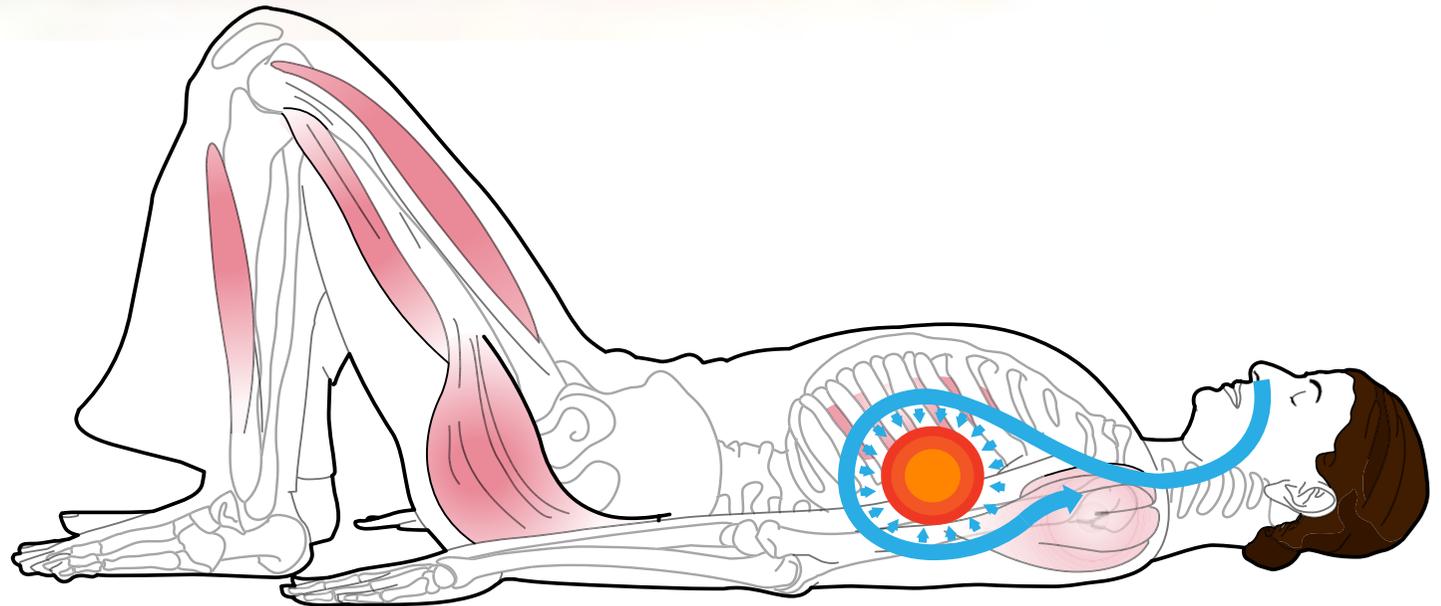
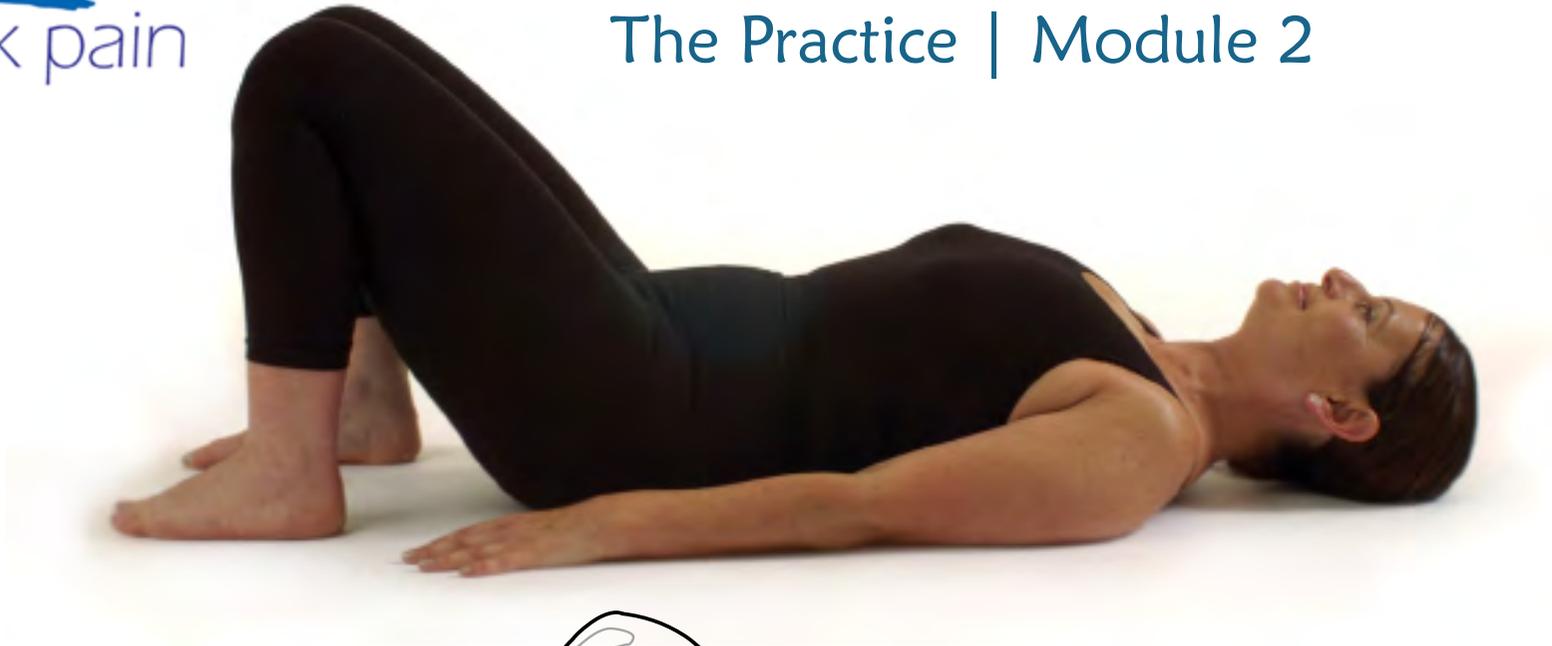




# The Yoga For Back Pain Toolkit

## The Practice | Module 2



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## The Yoga for Back Pain Toolkit

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## Disclaimer

As with embarking on any new exercise program you are strongly advised to consult with your doctor. Whereas the Yoga for Back Pain Toolkit has helped numerous people to recover, it is not a guaranteed cure. However, most people who follow the program accurately will experience a greater sense of wellbeing.

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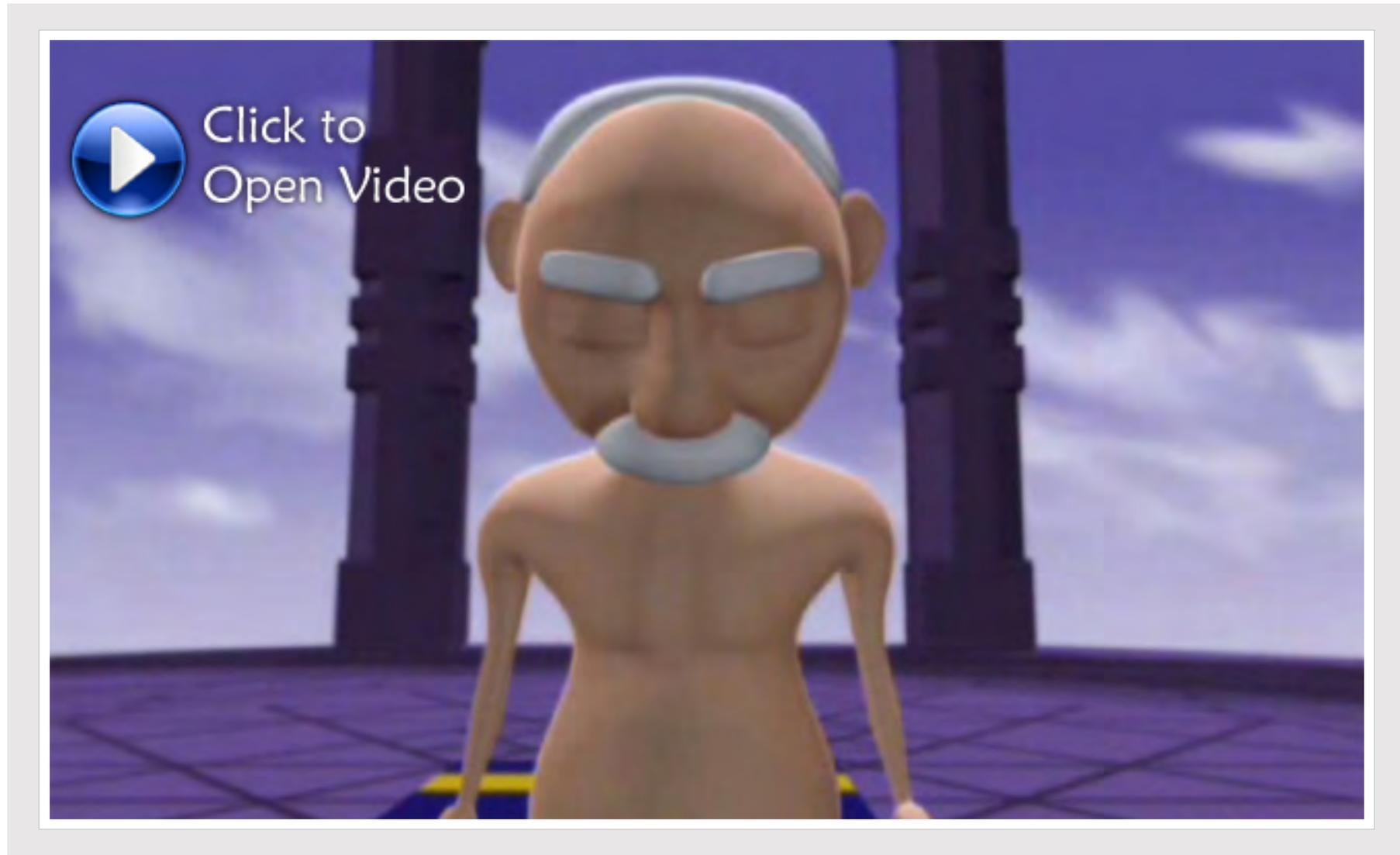
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# Don't sacrifice the body for the sake of the postures!



The fabulous Yogin by John Hanrahan

## How to use the Yoga for Back Pain Toolkit

*'I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they learn.'*

### Einstein

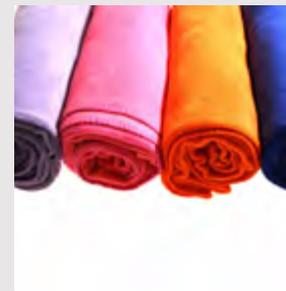
- I hope you find the first part of the Toolkit interesting. It's been written to appeal to a really wide audience. However, don't feel you have to read all the preceding chapters before embarking on your exercise program. As your practice deepens you may find the supporting information becomes more relevant.
- It's really important to read this chapter first.
- Consult your physician before commencing your program.



Yoga Mats



Yoga Blocks



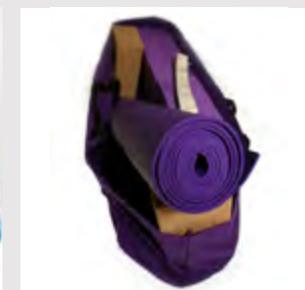
Yoga Blankets



Eye Bags



Yoga Toes



Yoga Kit  
Yoga Tools



Schedule in your practice times and stick to them

### Purchase the following:

- Sticky yoga mat
- Yoga belt
- *Toe separators* or *Yogatoes*
- Eye bag
- Light blanket

Apart from the yoga mat, the above are preferable, but not essential – you can use a soft belt or necktie to get started.

- Schedule in your practice times and stick to them
- On busy days remember 10 minutes is better than nothing!

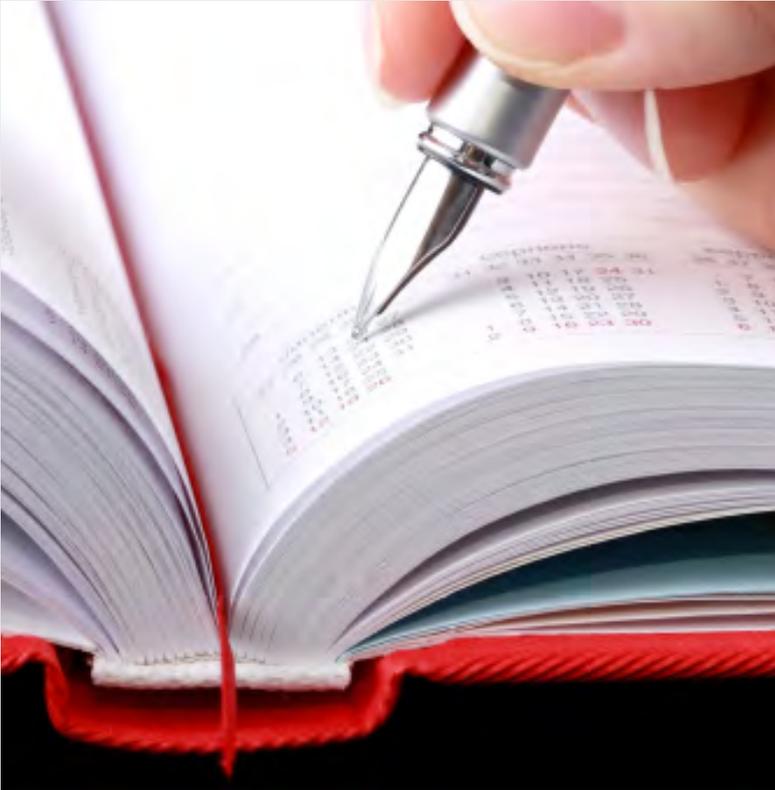
10 minutes a day for the first week

20 minutes a day for the second week

30 minutes a day for the third week  
40 minutes a day for the fourth week  
50 minutes a day for the fifth week  
60 minutes a day until fully recovered

- Remember, if you don't have 60 minutes go back to doing 10. Little and often is the best policy. It's important it doesn't feel like a burden and you don't punish yourself if you fall by the wayside. It's also really important not to overdo it, but let your body get used to this new way of working.
- Work at your own level. There are modifications and variations to help you. Listen to your body and do what feels right as with all painful conditions some days are better than others.

‘Listen to your body and  
do what feels right - as  
with all painful conditions  
some days are better than  
others’



It's really important to keep a diary

- Listen to the audio file when practising. It won't take you long to remember the exercises.
- Keep a diary. There will be times when the progress feels slow and you may feel demoralised. Refer back to your diary on these days and give yourself a boost. Just remember it's the journey that counts and there is no final destination.
- Always start with Surrender Pose.
- Don't avoid your least favourite postures; these are probably the most beneficial ones.

‘This is quality time to spend with yourself, try to embrace the practice and it will bring you joy.’

- Always do the right and the left side and pay attention to the weaker side.
- Remember to exhale.
- Always leave time to relax.
- This is quality time to spend with yourself, try to embrace the practice and it will bring you joy.

*‘Do your practice and all is coming’*

**Sri K Patthabi Jois**

# The Yoga for Back Pain Toolkit



“Spine Surfing” - ride with the wave of the breath

# Warm Up Section



Work on this posture for 10 minutes a day. This will teach you how to use the breath and is fundamental to the practise.



- 1 Lie on the floor on your back. Bend the knees so the feet and knees are hip width apart and the soles of the feet are flat on the floor
- 2 Check your feet are straight. If your back is misaligned, it's likely the feet won't be symmetrical. Often, they feel straight, when in fact they're crooked

- 3 Place a yoga block or something similar under the head. The block needs to rest at the nape of the neck so the head is on the block and the neck is off
- 4 Spread the toes and press the feet into the floor
- 5 Place your hands over the stomach, expand the stomach on inhaling and contract the stomach on exhaling
- 6 Think about the rhythm of the breath
- 7 The breath enters slowly, and increases at the top of the breath
- 8 The breath leaves slowly, and increases at the end of the breath
- 9 Acknowledge a slight pause at the top of the breath, and a slight pause at the end of the breath
- 10 At the end of each breath, relax the curve of the lower back into the floor by contracting the stomach more
- 11 Observe the ebb and flow of the breath like waves of the sea
- 12 Imagine you are watching yourself breathe
- 13 As the posture says, surrender yourself to the floor

**Modification 1** If you can't get on the floor use the bed

**Comment:** When exhaling think of drawing the stomach towards the *spine* without building up tension.  
Do not use a pillow. You will need a hard base to create some traction in the *cervical vertebrae*.

This will posture stretches your lower back.



- 1 Draw knees into chest
- 2 Hug knees to chest. As you inhale, release the knees slightly
- 3 As you exhale, draw knees towards the chest
- 4 Aim to take the thighs to the chest, the chin towards the chest and keep the neck long. Feel the *spine* lengthen
- 5 Remember to expand the stomach as you inhale, and contract as you exhale



Modification 1



Modification 2

**Modification 1** Place a belt behind the knees and draw them into the chest

**Modification 2** Arms under knees

**Comment:** When the breath expands the stomach, the knees automatically release.

As you exhale, the movement of contracting the stomach allows the legs to fold in deeper and the *spine* lengthens.

If you see sheep doing this turn them over! But for humans, it helps to release the lower back.



- 1 Start in *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Raise right leg followed by left leg
- 3 Keep legs relaxed
- 4 Press the lower back into the floor as your exhale
- 5 Stretch arms towards ceiling, find a place where it feels effortless
- 6 Feel as if the arms and legs were hanging on strings
- 7 Stay for 10 breaths



**Comment:** Feel the effect of gravity on the *spine*

If the previous posture hurts your back - you need to modify it.



- 1 Start in *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Raise right leg to 90° and hold for 5 breaths
- 3 Keep leg relaxed
- 4 Press left foot into the floor
- 5 Use the exhaling breath to press lower back into the floor
- 6 Work on dropping the pelvis more than stretching the leg
- 7 Replace leg



Modification 1

Variation 1 Substitute a wall for a chair

Modification 1 Support the legs with a chair

# Leg Stretch Section



This posture opens the pelvis and prepares the body for the Straight Leg Stretch.

- 1 Prepare the same as *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Extend left leg along the floor and hug right knee to chest
- 3 Check left leg is parallel to outside edge of mat
- 4 Release the right knee slightly as you inhale and draw it in deeper towards your chest as you exhale
- 5 Focus on dropping, releasing and lengthening the left leg
- 6 Feel the extension right down to the toes
- 7 Stay for 5 breaths
- 8 Rest

**Variation 1** Flex both feet

**Variation 2** Point the toes

**Modification 1** Bend the resting leg and place the sole of the foot flat on the floor



Variation 1



Variation 2

**Comment:** The action of dropping and lengthening the resting leg will enable the working leg to fold in deeper. It takes time to undo the hips, and the pelvis needs several breaths to open.

Short hamstrings will put extra strain on the back. This is a very good hamstring stretch.

- 1 Make a stirrup with a yoga belt or neck tie and place it over the sole of the right foot
- 2 Slowly begin to stretch the leg up to a right angle
- 3 Walk the hands up the belt towards the foot
- 4 Keep chin in and neck long
- 5 Lengthen the left leg and release it into the floor
- 6 Try to exhale the lower back into the floor
- 7 Soften the knees on the inhaling breath and extend fully on the exhaling breath

**Variation 1** Flex both feet

**Variation 2** Point the toes. Support leg by holding behind the knee (without the belt)

**Advanced Variation 1** Hold foot and flex

**Advanced Variation 2** Hold foot and point toes

**Modification 1** Use belt around raised leg



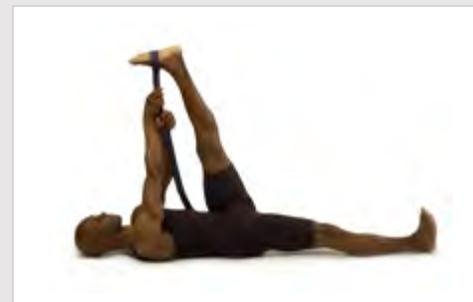
Variation 1



Advanced Variation 1



Advanced Variation 2



Modification 1

**Teaching Points:** Focus on the resting leg. The more it drops the better the extension you'll get on the working leg. Careful not to hyper-extend the back of the knees. Pull the thigh muscles up to protect the knees.

**Comment:** Don't force the stretch it will improve with time.

This posture stretches the inner thighs and opens the hips.

- 1 Make a stirrup with the yoga belt or neck tie and place around the left foot
- 2 Holding the belt with the left hand, take the left leg out to the side towards the floor
- 3 Exhale and press the lower back into the floor
- 4 Soften the knees between the breaths and extend fully on the exhaling breath
- 5 Place right hand on right hip to stabilize

Repeat the whole leg sequence with other leg

**Variation 1** Flex both feet

**Modification 1** Rest the right leg against a wall, chair or cushion

**Modification 2** Bend the resting leg and press the sole of the resting foot into the floor for stability



Variation 1



Modification 2

**Comment:** Don't take the leg too far; it's more important to keep the hips straight.  
When you feel the hips begin to tip towards the working leg – you've gone far enough.

# Twister Section



This posture stretches and twists the spine - enjoy! Don't worry if it clicks.



- 1 Start in *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Bring knees, ankles and thighs together
- 3 Imagine you're holding a \$100 bill between the knees, ankles and thighs
- 4 Stretch arms to quarter to three position
- 5 Walk the hands along the floor like a spider several times and then press palms into floor
- 6 Arms should feel fully stretched, palms stuck to the floor
- 7 Roll head to the left towards the left shoulder
- 8 Try to press shoulders into the floor
- 9 Keeping knees close together, roll the knees over to the right
- 10 Stay for 5 relaxed deep breaths

Repeat on the other side



Modification 1



Modification 2

- Modification 1** Place a yoga block or something similar under the head
- Modification 2** Insert a cushion or blanket under the knees
- Teaching Points** Remember to roll your head the opposite way to your knees  
Focus on keeping the opposite shoulder down  
Keep the legs close together

Still feel stiff? Then move from side to side till your spine starts to release.



- 1 Start in *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Place arms at shoulder height
- 3 Inhale
- 4 Roll knees to the right and head to the left, exhale
- 5 Inhale, roll knees and head back to the centre
- 6 Roll knees to the left and head to the right, exhale
- 7 Inhale, roll knees to centre
- 8 Synchronise the breath with the movement

Repeat 5 times each way



Modification 1



Modification 2

**Modification 1** Place a yoga block or something similar under the head

**Modification 2** Insert a cushion or blanket under the knees

**Comment:** This feels like a massage.

# Twizzle Stretches

Twizzle was a fictional character from the late 50s who could “*Twizzle*” himself to any length or height he wanted. He could stretch himself to be as tall as a lamppost!

He could extend his arms and legs to reach high objects, and that was how he eventually managed to help all the toys to escape from the toy shop. You can see a picture of Twizzle *here*.

imagine being as tall as a lamppost!



This posture stretches everything! It will also teach you how to stand well.



- 1 Start in Surrender Pose
- 2 Stretch arms above chest as in *Dead Sheep Pose*
- 3 Notice how the ribs and lower back want to lift
- 4 Drop the ribs and lower back as you exhale
- 5 Inhale, extend the arms towards the ceiling
- 6 Exhale, start to take the arms over the head towards the floor
- 7 Use 5 breaths to take the arms down
- 8 Move on the out breath
- 9 Keep the arms shoulder width apart
- 10 Try to open the elbows
- 11 Keep legs slightly apart
- 12 Now stretch the arms and legs simultaneously



Modification 1

### Arms

- 1 Inhale, let the arms extend with the wave-like movement of the breath
- 2 Exhale, and sustain the stretch whilst contracting the stomach and pressing the lower back into the floor

### Legs

- 1 Flex the feet and raise heels off the floor
- 2 Inhale, extend the arms and legs
- 3 Exhale, contract the stomach and press the lower back into the floor
- 4 Release slightly between the breaths
- 5 Repeat 5 breaths with the feet flexed
- 6 Repeat 5 breaths with the toes pointed towards the floor

**Modification 1** If the arms don't reach the floor, place a cushion or blocks under the arms and use a smaller cushion as the body opens

**Variation 1** Flex the feet

**Variation 2** Point the toes

**Teaching Points:** Try to resist lifting the *spine* as you take your arms over your head.

A more intense version of the Basic Twizzle Stretch.



### Twizzle Arms

- 1 Keeping the arms overhead, stretch the right arm along the floor, feeling it make space in the armpit
- 2 Repeat on the left
- 3 Repeat several times, each one growing taller than the last

### Twizzle Legs

- 1 Extend the right leg along the floor, feeling it lengthening through the foot
- 2 Repeat on the left side
- 3 Feel the hips moving up and down
- 4 Stretch from side to side several times

### Twizzle Arms and Legs Together

- 1 Inhale, extend the right arm along the floor
- 2 Extend the right leg along the floor simultaneously
- 3 Exhale, press the lower back into the floor
- 4 Release
- 5 Inhale, extend the left arm along the floor
- 6 Extend the left leg along the floor simultaneously
- 7 Exhale, press the lower back into the floor
- 8 Release

Variation 1 Flex the feet

Variation 2 Point the toes

**Comment:** Flow from one side to the other - imagine you're climbing a ladder.

This posture stretches the body diagonally and also helps to strengthen the stomach.



Diagonal Twizzle Stretch

- 1 Inhale, extend the right arm and left leg along the floor simultaneously
- 2 Exhale and continue to stretch
- 3 Hold the stretch for several breaths
- 4 At maximum stretch, exhale, suck in stomach and press lower back into the floor
- 5 Repeat cycle flowing from right to left
- 6 Let the body move about the floor

**Modification 1** Open the arms into a V shape

**Variation 1** Flex the feet

**Variation 2** Point the toes

### A more intense version of the Basic Twizzle Stretch.

- 1 Interlock the fingers above your head, and stretch the palms away from the head
- 2 Unlock the fingers and continue stretching
- 3 Stretch both the arms and legs simultaneously
- 4 Release the elbows and knees slightly between the breaths
- 5 Inhale, stretch
- 6 Exhale, sustain the stretch and press the lower back into the floor
- 7 Continue to stretch for several breaths
- 8 Relax



- Modification 1** Instead of interlocking the fingers, take arms over the head, shoulder width apart
- Modification 2** Rest arms on cushions or blankets
- Modification 3** Open the arms into a V shape and drop onto cushions

**Comment** Approach these *Twizzle* stretches like a cat yawning and playing. Feel the freedom of your body.

# Footwork Section



If the *spine* is injured the feet tend to compensate. By working the feet we can help to release and re-align the spine. We rarely do this movement in every day life, so the ankles not only get stiff, but also have a tendency to retain fluid when the *spine* is misaligned.



Rotate Clockwise



Rotate Anticlockwise

- 1 Start in *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Lift right leg and support the back of the knee
- 3 Rotate the foot clockwise, leading with the toes
- 4 Imagine you were painting circles with the foot each one increasing in size
- 5 Notice where the movement is difficult
- 6 Pay attention to the areas that don't rotate with ease
- 7 Start with 5 circles
- 8 Work up to 50 by increasing in increments of 5
- 9 Blow the breath out of the mouth

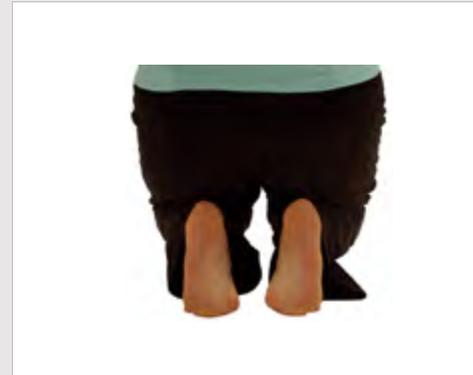
Reverse the circle by rotating anti-clockwise  
Repeat whole sequence with the left foot

**Comment:** Aim to keep the working leg stretched and pointing towards the ceiling.  
Less is more. Make large rotations slowly. Don't rush.  
Really exaggerate the movement until you feel the ankle begins to 'burn'.

I call this Pretty Feet, but my students call it '*Torture Toes*' - I wonder why!



- 1 Join the ankles together and kneel on the balls of the feet
- 2 Try to join up the big toes and the ankle bones
- 3 Sink the weight of your hips on to the feet to really open the feet
- 4 Try not to resist but let your hips sink as you exhale
- 5 Relax the breath, the jaw and un-frown!
- 6 Stay for several breaths
- 7 Relax



Modification 1



Modification 2

- Modification 1** Move feet to hip width to make pose more comfortable
- Modification 2** Pad floor with cushions or blankets

**Comment:** If you haven't experienced *sweet pain* before – you will now! Believe it or not this exercise is very good for you!

Soften the feet into the floor and feel the ankles stretch.



- 1 Repeat the above exercise with the feet turned under
- 2 Rest the hips on the soles of the feet
- 3 Soften the feet into the floor
- 4 Try to keep heels together
- 5 Stay for several breaths
- 6 Relax



Modification 2

**Modification 1** Move feet to hip width to make pose more comfortable

**Modification 2** Pad floor with cushions or blankets

**Teaching Points:** Try to drop the weight of the hips firmly on the feet.  
Breathe deeply and really work on staying in the posture.

**Comment:** Trust me this does get easier!

# Animal Section



This posture releases tension in the lower back.



- 1 Kneel on the feet as in *Soft Feet*
- 2 Modify posture according to your level
- 3 Start to take the head and chest towards the floor
- 4 Move on the exhaling breath and take several breaths to arrive
- 5 Rest arms by your side, ensuring palms face the ceiling
- 6 Expand the abdomen as you inhale and contract as you exhale
- 7 Encourage the hips to feel heavy
- 8 Stay for several breaths



Modification 3

### Ladybird Extended Arms

- 1 Start in Ladybird Pose
- 2 Stretch hands away from you
- 3 Keep palms flat and the middle finger parallel to edge of mat
- 4 Use the hands to press the hips further back on to the heels
- 5 Inhale, extend the arms away. Exhale, press the hips back and down

Variation 1 Ladybird Extended Arms

Modification 1 Knees apart and feet apart

Modification 2 Knees apart, feet together (*very beneficial if pregnant*)

Modification 3 Place cushions or blankets between hips and feet. Rest the head on a large book, several yoga bricks or blocks.

**Comment:** Don't force the position. Use the breath to open and lengthen the *spine*. Use the contact of the hands on the floor to press the hips back and down.

This posture stretches the spine in 2 directions, concave and convex. Flow through the two positions smoothly and synchronise the movement with the breath.

Curious Cat



Angry Cat



Curious Cat



- 1 Start from the *Extended Ladybird Pose*
- 2 Bring the hands in and place hands directly under the shoulders
- 3 Push up onto all fours

#### Concave - Curious Cat

- 1 Inhale, and lift the breast bone and tail bone up
- 2 Contract the stomach to support the *spine*
- 3 Press the floor away with the hands
- 4 Try to take the breastbone towards the ceiling
- 5 Eyes look towards the *third eye*

#### Convex - Angry Cat

- 1 Exhale as you move into the Convex Cat
- 2 Take the nose towards the pubic bone
- 3 Lift the *spine* high like an angry cat
- 4 Suck in the stomach

I've modified this posture for people with bad knees, bad necks and even bad backs!



Modification 1



Modification 2



Modification 2

**Modification 1** Use padding under the knees

**Modification 2** For Concave and Convex, use a chair if you have injured knees

**Teaching Points:** If the concave cat catches the lower back, then keep the back flat and don't arch too far.

The full *Pigeon Pose* is a very advanced yoga posture and this variation has been adapted for beginners. This pose really stretches the buttocks and is one of the best hip exercises. The good news is, it can be done lying down. The bad news is – more *sweet pain!* This posture can be very intense.



**Comment:** Remember don't force the posture, breathe.

- 1 Start from *Cat Pose*
- 2 Draw the right leg forwards and place the right heel under the left groin
- 3 Extend the back leg
- 4 Inhale, and stretch the arms forwards
- 5 Exhale, draw the stomach in and press the hips back with the hands
- 6 Support the weight of the body with the hands
- 7 Stay for several breaths

Repeat on the other side  
Rest in Ladybird in between sides

If it's difficult to 'ground' the hips, try using a folded blanket to stabilize them.



Modification 1



Modification 2

- Modification 1** Place a cushion or blanket under straight thigh
- Modification 2** Change the angle of the knee to accommodate any pain. A more acute angle will generally decrease the pain, whereas a wider angle will intensify the stretch.

**Teaching Points:** Do not strain the bent knee. If it hurts roll up a sock and place in the fold of the knee. Keep the back of the pelvis level; try not to lean into the bent leg side.

**Comment:** You've probably noticed the postures have become more demanding. This one in particular can be very intense. You need to listen to your body and take things gradually so you don't aggravate your back problem. Small changes are the first steps to a major breakthrough.

This posture stretches the spine. It's also a very good hamstring stretch.



- 1 Prepare in Convex Cat
- 2 Turn toes under and begin to stretch the legs
- 3 Stay on the ball of the foot initially
- 4 As the posture unfolds, slowly begin to open the knees and work the heels down towards the floor
- 5 Use the hands to press the body weight back into the feet
- 6 Inhale, release the stomach and exhale, stretch the arms and legs
- 7 Stay for several breaths
- 8 Soften the joints in between the breaths and extend fully at the end of each exhalation

**Teaching Points** Careful not to let the *spine* sag.  
Pull up the muscles on the front of the thighs so you don't *hyperextend* the back of the knees.  
Drop the breastbone towards the floor but be careful not to push the ribs out.  
Use the action of the palms pressing down, to press the heels down.  
To flatten the back roll elbows in, lessening distance between shoulder blades.  
Soften the joints between the breaths.  
Stretch the arms and legs on the out breath.

**Comment:** Remember dogs smile when they stretch!

If you feel stiff after the *Dog Pose*, then this will loosen you up.



i



ii



iii

### Moving Dog

- 1 Staying on the spot, start walking through the feet
- 2 Bend one knee and stretch the other
- 3 Allow the hips to roll from side to side
- 4 Allow the body to find its own movement
- 5 Let the body feel free
- 6 Yawn like a dog
- 7 Lower the chest to deepen the stretch
- 8 Shake your body like a dog after it's been in water!
- 9 Repeat this several times and experiment with your own movement
- 10 Do what feels good
- 11 Rest in *Ladybird pose*

**Comment:** Dogs really have fun when they stretch so try to mimic all the variations that dogs do.

This posture stands alone or can be substituted if Dog Pose is too difficult.



- 1 Stand about 3 feet away from the wall or chair
- 2 Feet hip width apart
- 3 Elevate the hands so they are flat on the wall or chair
- 4 Keep the hands shoulder width apart and press the shoulder blades down the back
- 5 Move the feet back in parallel until you feel your body start to stretch
- 6 Experiment with arms at different levels
- 7 Feet the same as *Dog Pose*
- 8 Inhale into the stomach, and exhale contract the stomach
- 9 Feel the *spine* lengthen

**Teaching Points** Don't forget to stretch out the hands and the feet. Careful not to let the *spine* sag. Make sure you suck in the stomach to support the lower back. Use the contact of the hands on the wall or chair, and the feet on the floor, to elongate the *spine*.

**Comment:** You will experience the stretch in a variety of ways, depending on where your body needs to lengthen. If the hamstrings are short, this will be where you'll feel the stretch most intensely; if your shoulders are stiff, that's where you'll find most resistance. However, as the body opens, you will experience the stretch in the *spine*, and the healing process will accelerate.

This breathing exercise stands alone, but I've included it just before the next section, because it can be very effectively used as preparation for a posture, as well as being part of your breathing practice. It can be done literally in any posture, but I recommend you practise it initially either in *Tadasana* or from a seated position.



- 1 Start in a seated position
- 2 Arms by your side, palms face forward, stretch palms wide
- 3 Inhale through the nose
- 4 Open the mouth wide and throw the breath out. At the same time stretch out your tongue towards your chest!
- 5 The exhaling breath is noisy and sounds a bit like growling
- 6 Remember you're a lion!
- 7 Eyes look up to *third eye*
- 8 Eyes bulging
- 9 Repeat 5 times

**Comment** Try doing this to diffuse stress; you will be amazed how your energy can change in a moment.

I like to do this one especially in traffic jams!

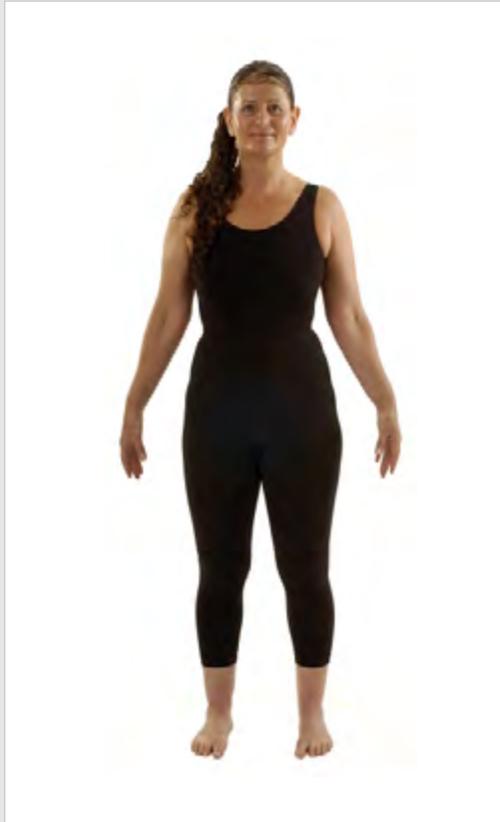
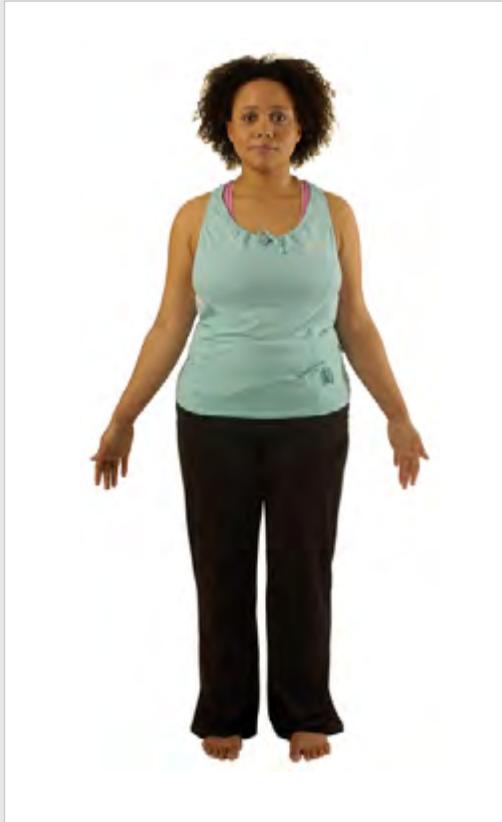
Don't worry about what you look like. I was photographed doing this breath on the back of [Mary Stewart's Yoga for Children's Book!!](#)



# Tadasana Section

This pose looks simple but it's deceptive!

"Mountain pose teaches us, literally, how to stand on our own two feet .... teaching us to root ourselves into the earth .... Our bodies become a connection between heaven and earth." *Carol Krucoff*



### Preparation

- 1 Stand with feet hip width apart
- 2 Toes turn in slightly, heels turn out
- 3 Stretch the toes until you can see a piece of mat between each toe
- 4 Lift the big toes up and down several times and hold the big toes up for several breaths
- 5 Lift and lower the 3 middle toes whilst keeping big and little toes down

**Teaching Points:** In the beginning, if the toes don't want to respond, try the following. Bend the knees, and with your fingers, press down the four outer toes, whilst lifting and stretching the big toes towards each other. Next, hold down the big and little toes and lift the 3 middle toes up and down. Try walking around at home with *toe separators* in for 10 minutes a day to wake the feet up.



- 1 Stand at the front of your mat, feet hip width apart
- 2 Toes turned slightly in, and heels turned slightly out
- 3 Feel the balls of the feet, the outside edges and the heels press into the ground
- 4 Lift the inner arches
- 5 Imagine the feet are being pulled into the floor. We call this *grounding*

- 6 Balance the weight evenly between the right and left foot
- 7 Still maintain your *Ujjai* breathing. Visualise the breath coming out of the soles of the feet
- 8 Drop the *tailbone* and lift the pubic bone
- 9 Keep the knees soft
- 10 Pull up the thigh muscles
- 11 By *grounding* the feet, it helps the *spine* to stretch in 2 directions
- 12 The *spine* moves downwards from the back of the waist, dropping towards the *tailbone*. It also moves upwards from the back of the waist towards the nape of the neck
- 13 This gives you the sensation of growing taller
- 14 As you stand, the legs become heavy and *grounded*, the *torso* becomes light and lifted
- 15 Lift the ribs off the hips
- 16 Press the shoulder blades down your back
- 17 Arms are by your side
- 18 Palms face each other
- 19 Feel the heart open
- 20 Lengthen the back of the neck
- 21 The back of the head is balanced over the *tailbone*
- 22 Eyes look ahead
- 23 Breath flows with ease

**Teaching Points:** If your knees hyper-extend, work more on the feet. Careful when you stretch the knees not to lock them. You'll find it helpful to stay focused on your feet.

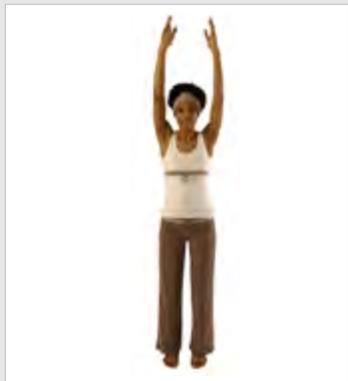
**Comment:** It is a lot to remember but don't worry about getting it all at once.

This is an intense stretch. It stretches the sides of the body and the shoulders. It also improves your stamina.



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Interlace the fingers the *habitual* way and stretch them over the head
- 3 Palms face the ceiling
- 4 Let the pelvis drop and feel the *spine* lengthen with the movement of the breath
- 5 Release the knees and elbows slightly between the breaths and extend fully at the end of the exhaling breath
- 6 Arms frame the ears
- 7 Press the shoulder blades firmly down the back
- 8 Keep head in-line with neck
- 9 Stay for 5 breaths
- 10 Relax arms

Repeat interlacing the fingers the *non-habitual* way for several breaths



Modification 1



Modification 2

**Modification 1** Don't interlace the fingers – stretch arms up shoulder width apart

**Modification 2** Follow the above instructions, interlace the fingers and draw arms further back behind the ears. Don't let ribs pop forward and keep the head in line with the neck

**Variation 1** Repeat whole sequence with the palms facing down both the habitual and the non-habitual way

**Advance Variation 1** Do this posture with *Pretty Feet*

**Advance Variation 2** Do this posture with *Soft Feet*

This posture helps to counteract 'round shoulders'.



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Clasp the hands behind your back and interlace the fingers the *habitual way*
- 3 Take several breaths to straighten the arms
- 4 Roll the shoulders back and down
- 5 Keep the back long and straight
- 6 Lift the hands up behind you towards the back of the neck
- 7 Stay for several breaths increasing the intensity

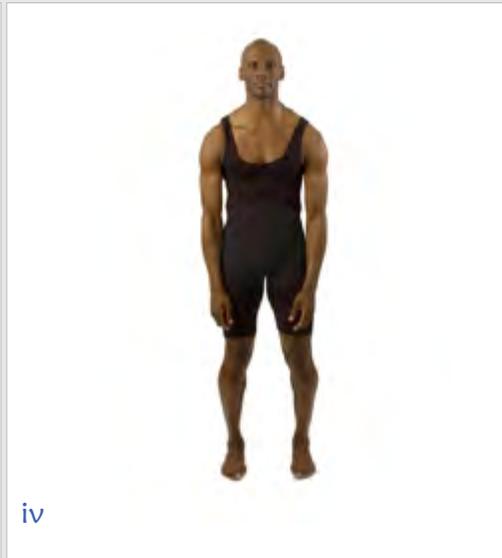
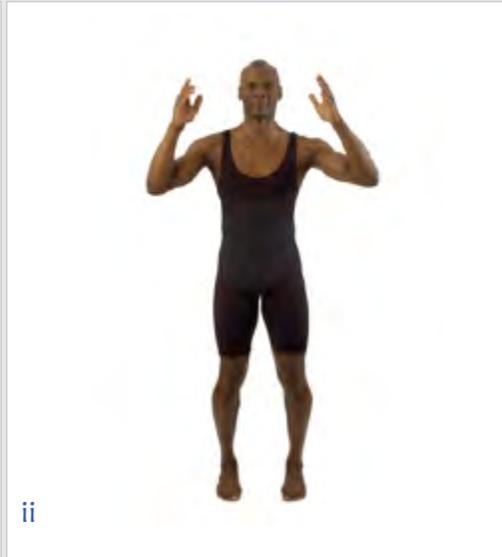
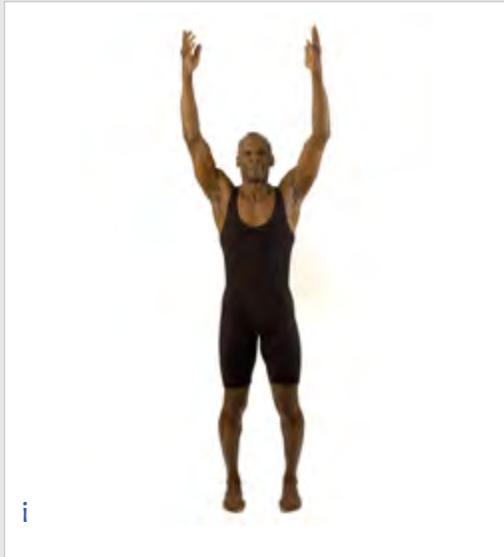
Repeat the exercise clasping the hands the *non-habitual way*.

**Comment:** This is really nice after a long session at your computer!

# Release Work Section

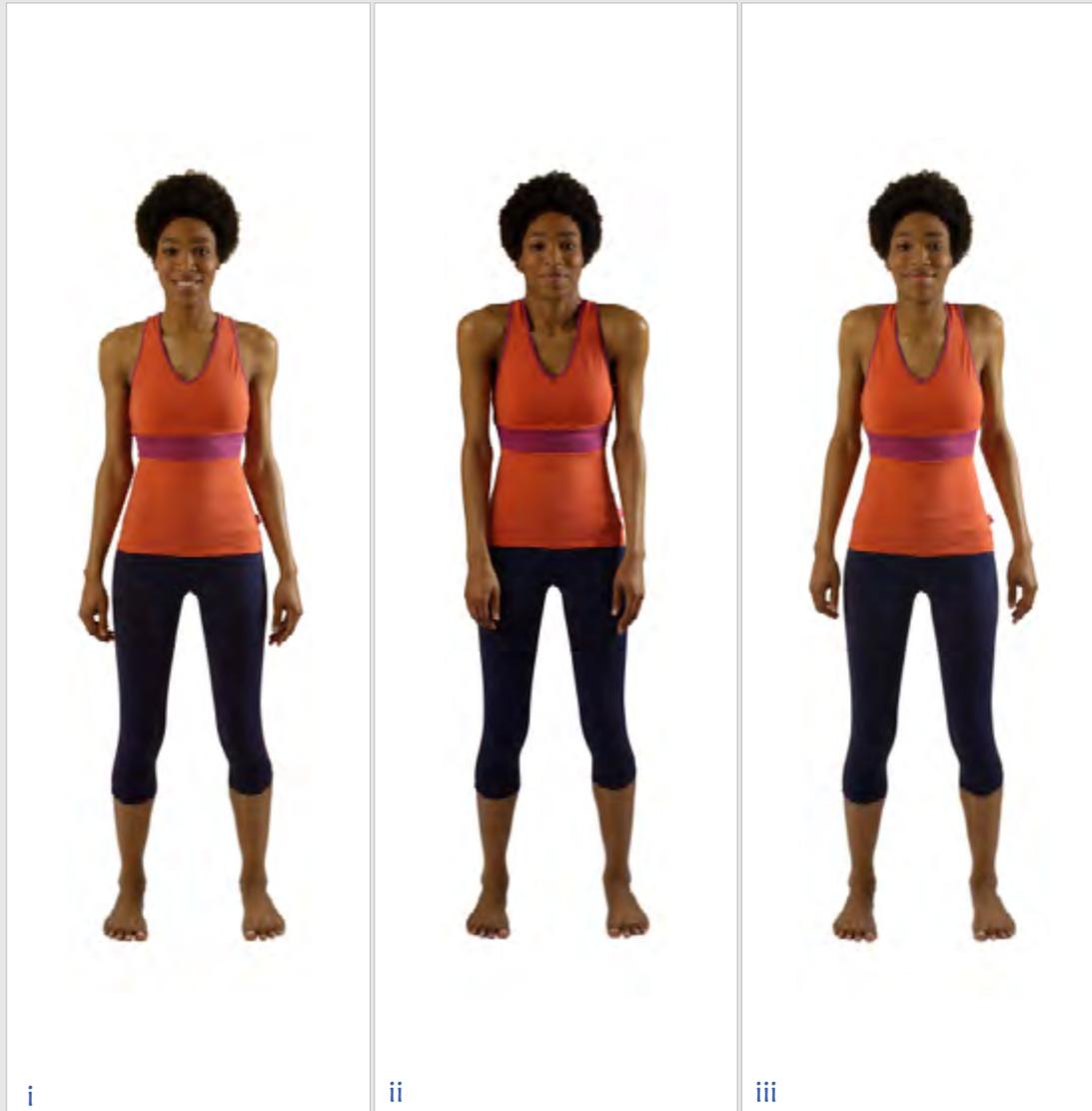


These postures will help you to release the shoulders. Although the postures are strong, you need to remain soft.



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Knees bent
- 3 Stretch arms up over the head
- 4 Exhale, and drop the arms
- 5 Feel the weight of the arms drop like lead
- 6 Imagine you're shaking out freshly laundered sheets
- 7 Repeat over and over again increasing speed
- 8 Blow out the breath, through the mouth
- 9 Think of something you'd really like to shake off!
- 10 Relax the face and do this with a smile

This warms up underneath the shoulder blades and quickly starts to release stiffness and tension.



- 1 Rotate both shoulders **backwards**
- 2 Make big circles trying to touch the earlobes and pull the shoulder blades down the back
- 3 Repeat 10 times
- 4 Rotate shoulders **forwards**
- 5 Make the circles as big as you can
- 6 Repeat 10 times

This will help you to drop the shoulders away from the ears.



- 1 Raise shoulders up to the ears
- 2 Lift and drop the shoulders making them heavier and heavier
- 3 Keep repeating getting faster
- 4 This is not a race! Focus on dropping your shoulders further with each release.
- 5 Make a forceful *ha* sound with the out breath

This rotates the shoulder cuffs and stretches the arms and even the hands.



- 1 Keeping the arms straight circle the arms backwards simultaneously
- 2 Repeat 10 times
- 3 Keep shoulder blades down your back
- 4 Make even bigger circles
- 5 With straight arms circle the arms forwards
- 6 Repeat 10 times as above
- 7 Blow out the breath, through the mouth

**Variation 1** Circle the arms backwards alternating right and left arms

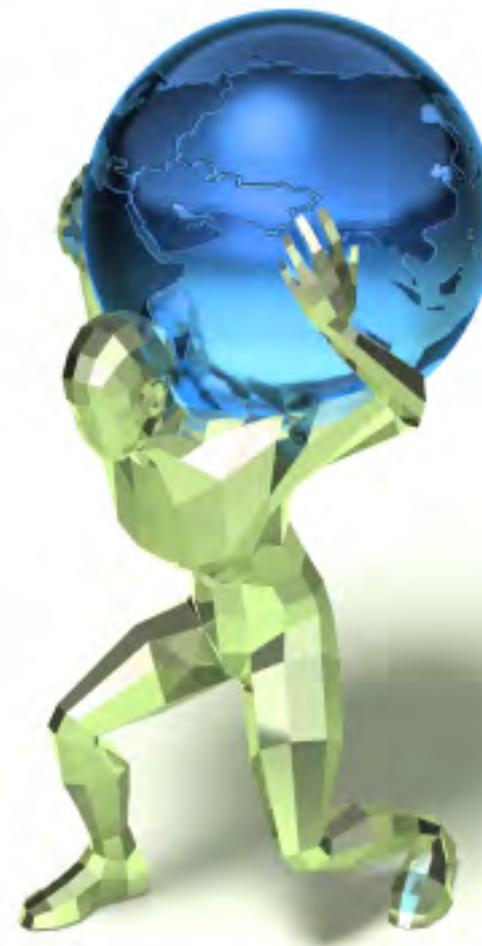
It's good to shake out the tension again as windmills can be quite strenuous.



- 1 Repeat *Funky Shoulders* again 10 times to shake out any residual tension

**Comment:** It's really important to keep the knees bent during the release work so there is no risk of jarring the *spine*.

# Shoulder Stretches



“We carry the world on our shoulders”

This helps to correct round shoulders and opens the heart.



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Relax your shoulders and take the arms behind your back
- 3 Fold the arms behind you and catch the elbows
- 4 Walk your hands up the forearms towards the elbows
- 5 As you exhale, drop the *tailbone* and feel your *spine* lengthen

This opens the upper back and stretches the upper arms.



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Stretch arms out to quarter to three position
- 3 Wrap the right arm over the left, in front of your body
- 4 Try to cross your elbows and wrists over each other
- 5 Relax the shoulders
- 6 Try to feel the upper back widen with the inhaling breath
- 7 Release the *tailbone* with the exhaling breath
- 8 Expand the back of the ribs as you inhale
- 9 Stretch arms up as you exhale

Repeat the exercise with the left arm on top



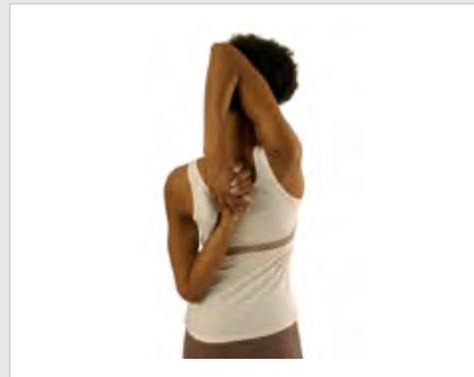
Modification 1

**Modification 1** If you can't wrap the wrists over each other, then just wrap the elbows and rest your hands on your shoulders

This is a very intense shoulder stretch and a great stress buster!



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Take your right arm behind, and up your back
- 3 Put middle finger on the *spine*
- 4 Palm away from the body
- 5 Stretch left arm up by your ear
- 6 Bend the left arm and try to catch your right hand or belt
- 7 Focus the breath where the hands touch the *spine*
- 8 Relax the shoulders
- 9 Try to feel the upper back lengthen with the inhaling breath
- 10 Release and drop the *tailbone* with the exhaling breath



Advanced Variation 1 Catch wrists

**Teaching Points:** You will probably notice that there is more flexibility on one side than the other. As you practice, this will begin to even up. At the beginning it's very hard to catch the hands, so use a towel or a belt. Walk your hands up the belt, taking the hands towards each other to increase the stretch. Note which is the stiffer side and repeat twice.

# Standing Poses



This posture is the same as the lying down version - only now you're standing up!



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Shift the weight to the right leg and bend the left knee
- 3 Draw the knee into your chest
- 4 Support the bent leg with your hands
- 5 Inhale, soften the joints, exhale, draw the knee in further
- 6 Focus on the standing leg, root it to the floor
- 7 Continue to lengthen the *spine* as you exhale
- 8 Look ahead at eye level
- 9 Hold for 5 breaths

**Comment:** Focus on something at eye level, don't look at the floor.



Modification 1

Repeat on the other side

Modification 1 Try using a chair

Often bad backs are exacerbated by weak legs. This will make your legs very flexible and strong.



- 1 Follow instructions for *Standing Leg Stretch, Bent Knee*
- 2 Use a chair to aid balance
- 3 Find your balance and begin to straighten the bent leg
- 4 Use a yoga belt or neck tie to make a stirrup around the foot of the raised leg. Walk the hands up the belt
- 5 Stay rooted through the standing leg
- 6 Look ahead at eye level
- 7 Don't lean back and keep the shoulders straight
- 8 Hold for 5 breaths

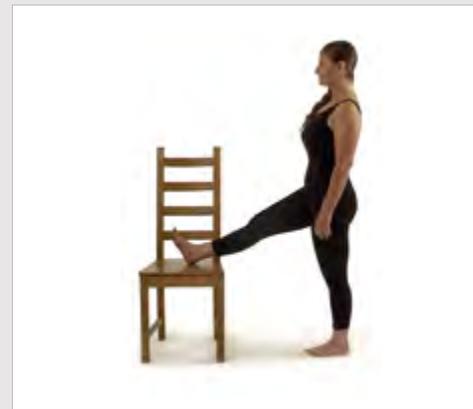
**Comment:** Send the breath through the standing leg to aid balance.

Spread your toes and allow yourself to feel rooted to the floor This is a powerful balance.



- 1 Follow instructions for *Standing Leg Stretch, Extended Leg*
- 2 Let go of the belt whilst keeping the leg extended
- 3 Try to maintain the height of the leg
- 4 Don't lean back

Repeat Posture on other Side



Modification 1



Modification 2

The following modifications can be applied to all 3 Standing Leg Postures

**Modification 1** You can rest the lifted leg against the wall or on top of chair for support

**Modification 2** Place left hand onto a wall or a chair to aid balance, be careful not to lean into the supporting arm

**Comment:** When balancing, focus on the standing foot and look ahead. If you look down, you're more likely to fall over. Re-balance in *Tadasana* for 5 breaths to ground yourself before changing sides.

This is a strong, passive stretch on the back of the legs and the weight of the head will give the spine a gentle traction. Let your branches blow in the breeze!



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana* with feet hip width apart
- 2 Turn toes in and heels out
- 3 Exhale, bend forward with knees slightly bent
- 4 Inhale, let the *spine* lift and lengthen
- 5 Begin to straighten legs working with the breath
- 6 Lean forward so the hips are over the heels
- 7 Let the arms hang softly where it feels comfortable
- 8 Feel the feet rooted, the legs strong and the *spine* soft
- 9 Allow the *spine* to lift on the inhalation and drop on the exhalation
- 10 Allow the weight of the head to stretch the *spine* by letting it drop towards the floor



Advanced Variation 1

**Modification 1** Stand with your back to the wall, rest the *tailbone* on the wall and drop forward

**Modification 2** Substitute pose with *Flat Back Stretch*

**Modification 3** Catch elbows and work elbows towards the floor

**Advanced Variation 1** Interlock the fingers and bring arms over the head towards the floor

**Comment:** Careful not to *hyperextend* the knees, keep weight evenly distributed through the feet. Try to bring the hips forward so they are over the heels. Feel the breath lift the *spine* as you inhale. Feel the *spine* release as you exhale.

This posture stretches and rotates the spine. I recommend you do this against the wall until you are confident with the pose.



Repeat posture on the other side

- 1 Stand with your back against the wall
- 2 Take the legs about 3 ft apart
- 3 Have the heels close to the wall
- 4 Turn the left foot in and the right foot out
- 5 Stretch and *ground* the feet
- 6 Inhale and extend the arms to the side at quarter to three position, palms down
- 7 Hips face forwards
- 8 Relax the shoulders and press the shoulder blades down the back
- 9 Slide your rib cage to the right and stretch the body sideways
- 10 Take the right hand towards the right shin
- 11 Stretch the left hand up the wall, palm faces forward
- 12 Take 5 breaths to move into this position
- 13 Stay for 5 breaths
- 14 Each exhaling breath takes you nearer the floor
- 15 Support your body with the wall and feel your neck lengthen
- 16 Turn head to gaze at raised arm
- 17 Feel that your left leg is being pulled into the floor and you're hanging off your left arm
- 18 Try to keep the weight on the back leg to release the lower back
- 19 Exhale out through the feet to come up

**Modification 1** If your neck hurts, just gaze ahead

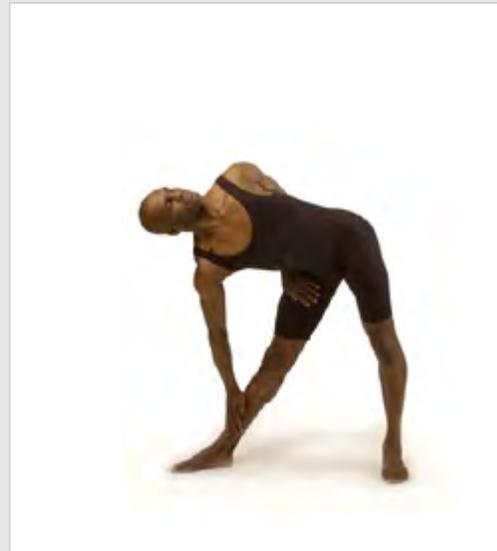
Modify the posture and make it work for you.



Modification 1



Modification 1



Modification 2



Modification 3

**Modification 1** If it's difficult to bend sideways, place a block or a chair by the leading foot and rest the hand on it for support

**Modification 2** If it's difficult to raise your arm, wrap it round the back of your hip, keeping the shoulder open

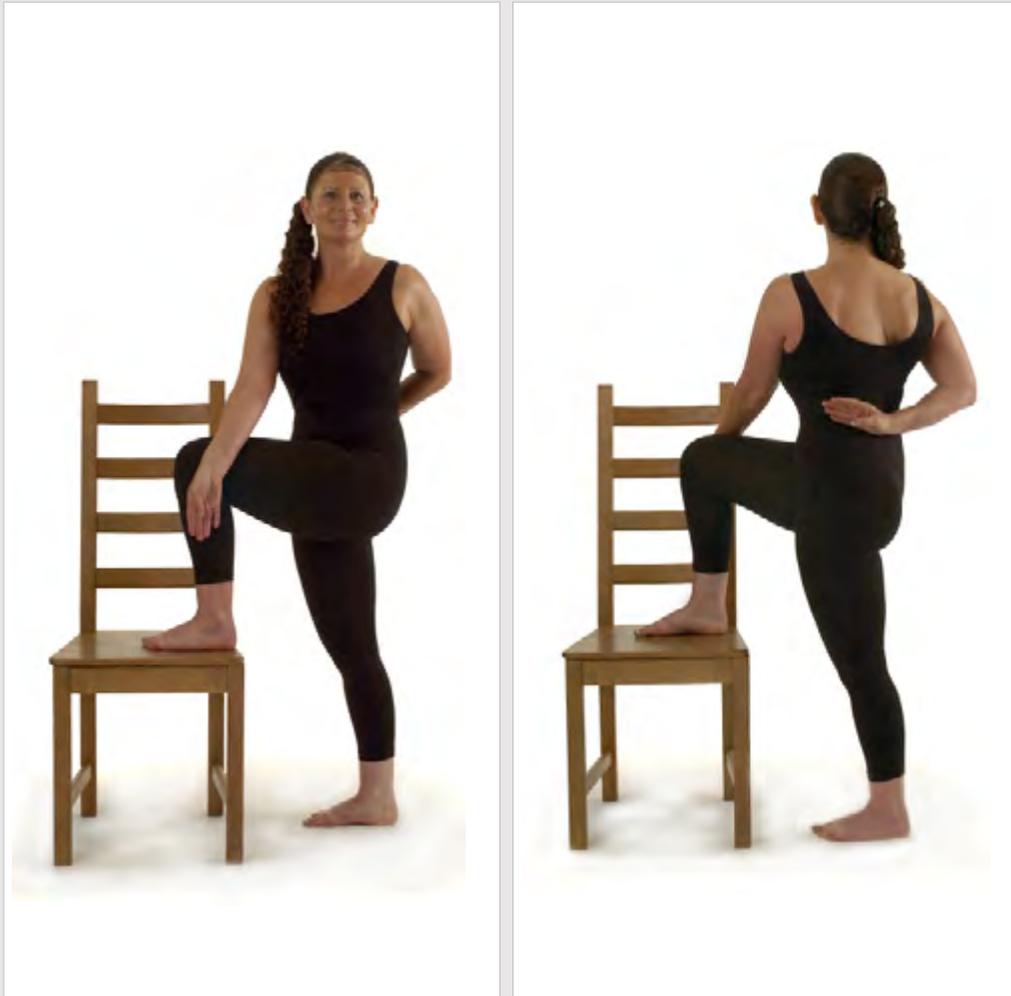
**Modification 3** Ask a friend to hold down your back foot

Repeat on the other side and reverse the feet

**Teaching Points:** Remember to do all *transitions* with the knees slightly bent and work on straightening the knees once in position. Let the back rest on the wall to enable the *spine* to undo. Focus so that your upper back touches the wall; do not twist your abdomen to touch the floor.

**Comment:** Its more important to feel the *spine* lengthen than to reach the floor

When you twist, whether sitting, standing or lying, you need to stabilise the hips so the *torso* can move. In this standing posture, we grow roots through the standing foot to help stabilise the hips.



- 1 Stand in *Tadasana*
- 2 Bend your right knee and place the sole of your foot on a chair or step
- 3 Find your balance by rooting the left foot to the floor
- 4 Stretch the left hand over the right thigh
- 5 Wrap your right arm round the back of the waist
- 6 Try to keep the hips level and facing forwards
- 7 Inhale, and twist your *torso* to the right. Exhale, draw the stomach in, and let the pelvis drop
- 8 Release slightly between breaths
- 9 Use your arm as a lever and your stomach to support the lower back
- 10 Look over right shoulder
- 11 Keep neck long
- 12 Stay for 5 breaths, increasing the stretch with each breath
- 13 Rest

Repeat on the other side

**Comment:** Be patient; it takes time to twist.

This posture is wonderful for stretching a stiff lower back. It can be done with the feet parallel or turned out. Use a partner to start with, or hold onto a strong support, such as a table.



- 1 Stand with the feet hip width apart
- 2 Turn toes out slightly
- 3 Bend the knees as far as you can without straining the knees
- 4 Ground the feet
- 5 Drop the weight of the body forward
- 6 Finally, lift up the head and lengthen the *spine*

Repeat with feet parallel



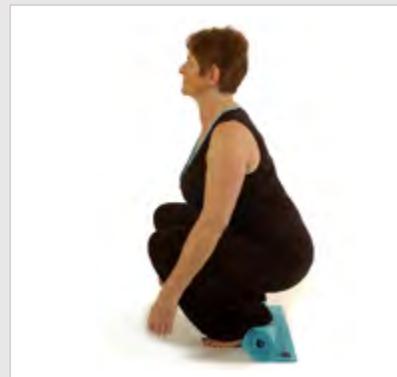
Modification 1



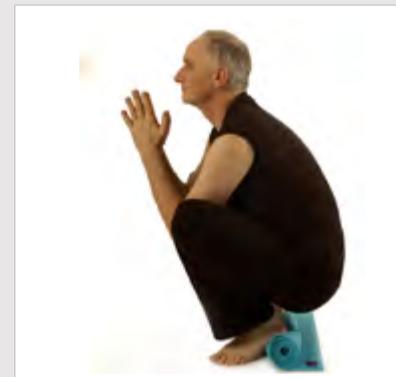
Modification 2



Modification 2



Modification 3



Modification 3



Modification 3

**Modification 1** Use a partner to help with the balance

**Modification 2** Use an aid like a table or chair

**Modification 3** If the ankles feel stiff, place a rolled up towel under your heels

**Comment:** If you don't practice anything else, do this posture - it's the best thing you can do for your back.



# Sitting Poses

I think this is the king of poses for bad backs. Make a big sigh as you go into this one, you'll know what I mean!



- 1 Sit on the floor with both legs stretched out in front
- 2 Bend the left leg and place the sole of your foot against the right thigh
- 3 Sit tall and feel the pelvis heavy
- 4 Try to let the left knee drop towards the ground
- 5 Turn the *torso* towards the right knee
- 6 Stretch your arms up, reach towards the right foot and catch the leg, foot or knee
- 7 Try to relax over the right leg. Feel the *wave of the breath* lengthening the *spine*
- 8 Stay for 5 breaths

Repeat on the other side



Modification 1



Modification 2

- Modification 1** Use a yoga belt or tie to make a stirrup around the foot of the straight leg  
Walk the hands up the belt to pull yourself down further
- Modification 2** Place a cushion or a block under the bent knee to support the leg if it is raised up

**Teaching Points:** Don't tug with the hands.

Focus on the pelvis dropping and the *spine* lengthening, as opposed to trying to go further forward.

Try to exhale through the hip of the bent leg to root the pelvis down. This will encourage a really deep release in the lower back.

Try to extend the length of this posture by increasing it in increments of 5 breaths, until eventually, you can stay for 50 breaths



# Back Bends

This gently loosens the pelvis and base of the *spine* and prepares the body for more advanced backbends



- 1 Start in *Surrender Pose*
- 2 Bring heels in close to the hips
- 3 Turn the toes in and the heels out
- 4 Arms rest by your side
- 5 Palms can be face up or down
- 6 Rock the pelvis backwards and forwards as follows
- 7 Inhale into the stomach
- 8 Exhale, press down the back of the waist into the floor and feel the *tailbone* curl upwards
- 9 Inhale, drop the *tailbone*, roll the pelvis forwards and feel the lower back arch
- 10 Repeat sequence for 5 breaths
- 11 Relax

**Teaching Points:** Don't grip the buttocks, but release the back of the waist into the floor.  
Press the feet down firmly.

**Comment:** This is a lovely release on the *spine*. It's a very subtle movement, and difficult to show, but it is nevertheless very beneficial.

The Bridge can be a progression from the Pelvic Tilt and bends the *spine* backwards.



- 1 Loosely tie a belt around the thighs to keep them hip width apart
- 2 Start from the *Pelvic Tilt* with the *tailbone* curled up
- 3 Instead of rocking the pelvis, with each exhalation, raise the pelvis higher, keeping the back of the waist long
- 4 Use the *rebound* of the feet to lift the pelvis up
- 5 Relax the shoulders, keep the chin in and the neck long
- 6 Take 5 breaths to arrive
- 7 Hold for 5 breaths
- 8 Roll down on an exhaling breath, curve the back of the waist into the floor, bringing the *tailbone* down last
- 9 Relax

**Teaching Points:** Make sure you round your back into the floor so the *spine* lengthens on the way down.

**Comment:** Always follow a backbend with a front bend.

# Warm Down Section



This is a preparation for the full shoulder stand which is the most fabulous stretch on the *spine*. However, for the time being, we are going to work on a supported version until your back is strong enough for the full posture.



I used a chair in the photo; you can use either, but a wall is preferable.

#### Technique for Chair

- 1 Lie on the floor
- 2 Put feet on the chair
- 3 Press down with the soles of the feet to lift the hips up
- 4 Support the *spine* by placing your hands on the back of the rib cage
- 5 Stay as long as you like
- 6 Focus on your breath and on relaxing your lower back

**Comment:** Make sure the blanket's folded smoothly.

#### To Release the Posture

- 1 Lift up the hips
- 2 Place hands flat on the floor
- 3 Roll down through the *spine*
- 4 Let the legs rest on the chair for several breaths
- 5 Give yourself a hug
- 6 Roll over onto one side to come out

**Variation 1:** Substitute a wall for a chair

The hardest part is getting close enough to the wall to support the pelvis. I suggest you sit sideways to the wall with the hips touching; keep legs to the right. In one movement, swing your legs round until they are vertical. Wiggle forward as far as you possibly can.

If your back prevents you from doing the previous posture, then you can try this modified version of Shoulder Stand.



### Technique for Chair

- 1 Start the same as *Supported Shoulder Stand*
- 2 Place a folded blanket or mat on top of your yoga mat
- 3 Shoulders and arms need to be on the padding, and the head and neck should be on the mat or a block
- 4 Bend your knees and place the soles of the feet on the chair
- 5 Inhale, and press the palms into the floor
- 6 Exhale, and raise your hips as you did in the *pelvic tilt*
- 7 Using the breath, lift the pelvis higher as you exhale
- 8 Drop the weight into the arms and hands
- 9 Stay for 5 breaths

### To Release the Posture

- 1 Roll down through the *spine*
- 2 Bring the *tailbone* down last
- 3 Give yourself a hug
- 4 Roll over to one side
- 5 Rest

**Variation 1** Substitute a wall for a chair

**Variation 2** Bend your elbows and support the *spine* with the hands

**Counterpose:** The counterpose for *Shoulder Stand* is *Dog Pose*. Make sure you do a *Dog Pose* at the end of this section.

**Teaching Points:** Do not strain the lower back.  
Work the arms and hands into the floor.



# Two's Fun

Healing can be sociable and fun!



- 1 Sit behind your friend or partner
- 2 Place your hands over his/her stomach and encourage them to breathe into your hands
- 3 Synchronize your breath

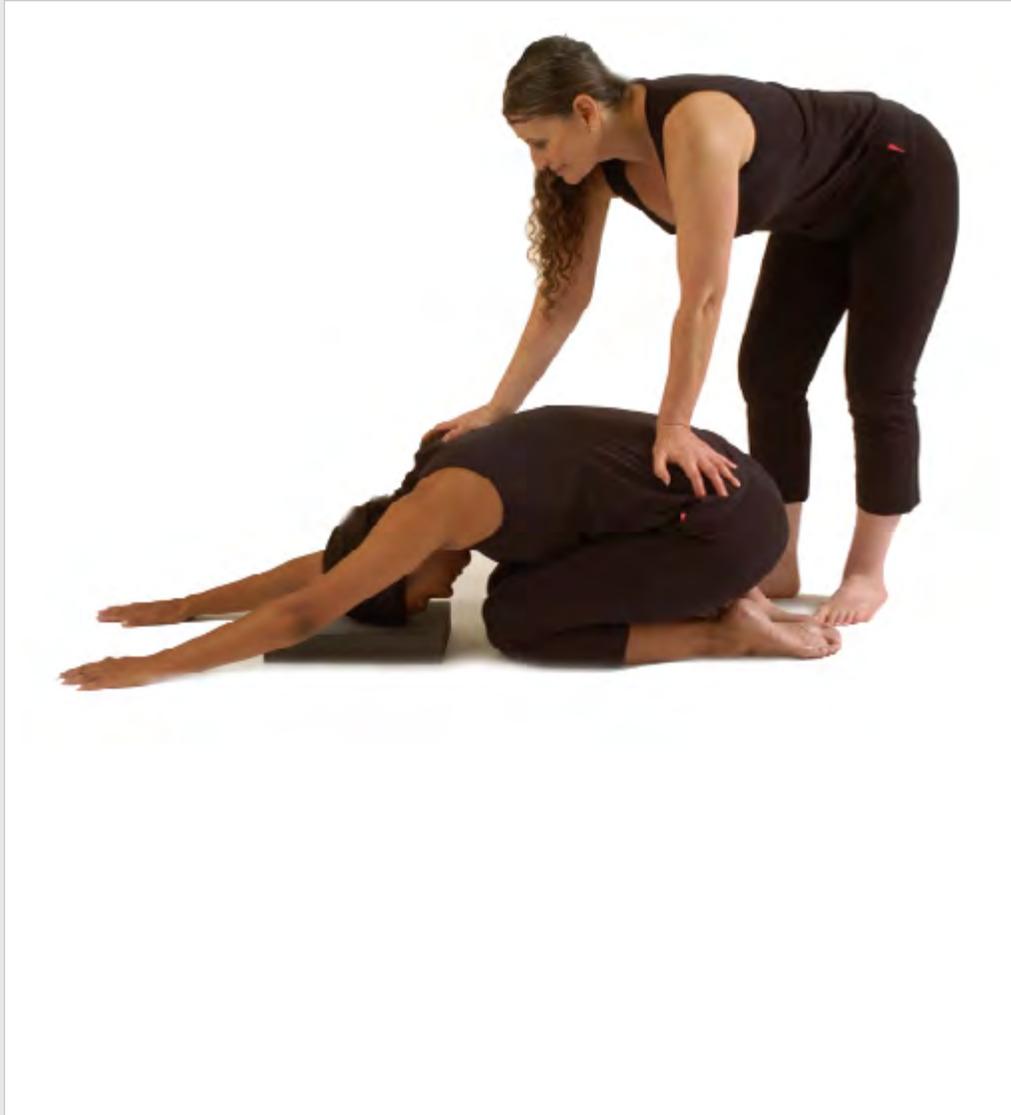
**Modification** If you find it difficult to sit on the floor, sit on a block and/or use a wall for support

My students love this! Your partner's weight can feel really good.



- 1 Go into *Ladybird Pose*
- 2 Place your hands on your partner's hips and pull down
- 3 Do not use your strength, just lean in using your bodyweight
- 4 Encourage your partner to *breathe through your hands*
- 5 Synchronize your breath

This posture stretches the spine diagonally.



- 1 Go into *Ladybird Pose*
- 2 Place one hand on your partner's hip and the other one on the opposite shoulder
- 3 Use this as a traction to stretch your partner's *spine*
- 4 Encourage your partner to breathe into the space between your hands
- 5 Stretch both directions
- 6 Synchronize your breath

Different spines make different shapes.



**Person A** Prepare in *Ladybird Pose*  
**Person B** Line up your *tailbone* with your partner's, and roll yourself out over your partner's back

- 1 Stretch your arms away from you along the floor
- 2 Catch hold of each other's arms
- 3 Synchronize your breath
- 4 Place your hands on your partner's hips to come up
- 5 Swap positions

**Comment:** This is a great stretch for both partners.

After all your hard work, you've definitely earned this!



- 1 Kneel behind your partner
- 2 Use fingers and thumbs to knead the shoulders
- 3 As your partner relaxes you'll feel the knots soften
- 4 Synchronize your breath

**Comment:** Experiment with pressures, everyone's different.



# Breathing Section

Be very interested in your breath. Think about the purpose of your breath. Observe how you breathe. Breathe with ease.



- 1 Sit comfortably with your back against the wall
- 2 Place your hands over the stomach
- 3 Expand the stomach while inhaling
- 4 Contract the stomach while exhaling
- 5 Think about the rhythm of the breath
- 6 The breath starts slowly and the intensity increases at the top of the breath
- 7 Keep the shoulders relaxed and down the back
- 8 The breath leaves slowly and the intensity increases at the end of the breath
- 9 There is a slight pause at the end of each breath
- 10 Feel the pelvis becoming heavy and the *spine* becoming light and fluid
- 11 Feel each breath lengthening and opening the *spine*

**Modification 1** In the beginning, it can be very tiring to sit for long periods of time, so I suggest you sit with your back to a wall for support. If this position hurts the knees, sit with legs crossed or stretched wide

**Comment:** Try to find a way of sitting comfortably as this is a very powerful exercise.

If sitting on the floor hurts your back it can be done equally successfully from a chair.  
The main points to consider when working in a chair are:



- 1 Sit in a hard backed chair (not an armchair)
- 2 Support the *spine* by sitting forwards in the chair so the feet are flat on the floor
- 3 Don't slump back in the chair but maintain a good seated posture
- 4 Drop the weight of the pelvis as an anchor to lengthen the *spine* upwards
- 5 Once in position, follow the instructions for breathing as in *Seated Breathing from the Floor*

# Relaxation and Meditation

How do I think of nothing?



It can be difficult to go from our busy lives into a totally relaxed state. The purpose of the *Ujjai breathing*, combined with the postures, is to help the body to unwind. Now you have prepared the way for deep relaxation.



- 1 Lie on the floor on your back
- 2 Cover yourself with a blanket, and make sure you are warm
- 3 Place a heated wheat bag under the small of your back and/or the back of your neck
- 4 Legs are straight
- 5 Connect with your breath
- 6 Start by yawning
- 7 Inhale, expand the stomach
- 8 Exhale, contract the stomach and feel the *spine* relax into the floor
- 9 Tighten and release each part of your body
- 10 When your mind wanders, bring the focus back to your breath
- 11 Take time to observe how your body feels

**Modification 1** If the back hurts, relax in *Surrender Pose*

**Modification 2** If you can't lie on the floor, lie on the bed

Repeat the following *Mantra* to yourself. '*My body feels soft and heavy, and heavy and soft, and warm and heavy.*'



Nirvana is your own special place

Take time to recover.



- 1 Slowly deepen the breath
- 2 Start to slowly open the eyes and look around the room
- 3 Begin to wiggle the fingers and toes
- 4 Stretch the arms over the head, and then stretch the whole body
- 5 Hug the knees to chest
- 6 Carefully roll over onto one side, curl into a ball
- 7 Stay for 5 breaths
- 8 Carefully come up to sitting

Bring the Peace with you - Namasté

Comment: Drink plenty of water after your practice!

# Back to Reality (until next time!)

