

Yoga to the Rescue

Yoga is a perfect practice for enhancing our health – it offers **relaxation** when we are stressed out, or **rejuvenation** when we are tired and run down. The key to yoga is connecting breath to movement. This technique turns off the “fight or flight” response and turns on the “rest and digest” response, resulting in a healthier resting state, where our body can heal itself. Below are two sets of simple poses you can do when you need to either relax or rejuvenate. Be sure to notice the breathing instructions.

Yoga Poses to Relax – This is an excellent practice to do right before bedtime.

1. **Goose Pose/Child Pose** – Begin on all fours. As you slowly inhale, lift your chin slightly and stretch chest away from navel (*this is “Goose”*). Feel the stretch along your belly. As you exhale, drop chin toward chest, lower elbows to the floor and let your hips sink back toward your heels (*this is “Child”*). Go back and forth between the two positions 6 times. Then rest in Child’s pose, counting 6 slow rounds of in and out breath.

2. **Simple Seated Twist** – Sit with legs crossed. Rest right hand on left knee, left hand on floor near left hip. As you inhale, sit tall. As you exhale, twist your torso, shoulders and head to the left. Stay in the pose, counting 6 slow rounds of in and out breath. Then release and repeat on the opposite side.

3. **Knees-to-Chest Pose** – Lie on your back, knees bent, feet lifted off the floor, hands resting on kneecaps, knees directly over hips. As you exhale, gently pull your knees closer to your belly and pause for a few seconds before taking the next in breath. Then inhale and return to the starting position, elbows straight, knees over hips. Repeat 6 times. (*Tip: When you inhale and move your knees away from your belly, don’t lift your feet or lower legs away from your body – that puts a strain on your lower back. Instead, let your feet dangle throughout the entire exercise*).

4. **Legs-on-Chair Pose** – Lie on your back with your lower legs resting on a chair, arms relaxing away from the body, palms up. If your neck is uncomfortable, place a folded blanket under your head. Cover up with a blanket to stay warm. Rest here for 5-20 minutes. You may want to play some quiet instrumental music in the background, or follow a guided meditation. Check out [SoundsTrue.com](http://www.soundstrue.com/store/catalogsearch/result/?q=guided_meditations) for great CD’s and audio downloads. (http://www.soundstrue.com/store/catalogsearch/result/?q=guided_meditations)

Yoga Poses to Rejuvenate – This is an excellent practice to do after work.

1. **Legs-up-the-Wall Pose** – Lie on your back with your legs resting up against a wall. If your hamstrings are very tight and this is uncomfortable, rest your lower legs on a chair instead. Place a folded blanket under your head if that makes your neck more comfortable. You may want to cover up with a blanket, as well. Stay 5-10 minutes, focusing softly on your breath. (*Tip: if you only have time for one pose, this is the one! It can both relax and rejuvenate the entire body and mind.*)

2. **Supine Rolling Twist** – Lie on your back with knees bent, feet on the floor, arms out to your sides at shoulder height. As you exhale, gently roll knees to the right and head to the

left, turning left palm up. As you inhale, come back to center and flow right into the next exhale, rolling knees to the left and head to the right, turning right palm up. Continue to flow slowly and gently with your breath, back and forth, at least 10 times to each side. When you are finished, pause in the middle. Notice your energy level and the quality of your breath. You may notice a nice tingling or vibration in your body.

3. **Child Pose/Down Dog** – Begin on all fours. As you slowly inhale, lift your chin slightly and stretch chest away from navel. Feel the stretch along your belly. Curl your toes under. As you exhale, push your hands into the floor and lift hips toward the sky (*this is “Down Dog”*). Let head and neck relax downward. Stretch the arms and legs, but feel free to bend the knees a bit if the hamstrings are tight. Spread your palms and fingers. Press chest toward thighs and keep hips stretching up toward the sky. As you inhale again, lower knees to the floor and bring your head up to level position. On the next out breath, drop chin toward chest, lower elbows to the floor and let your hips sink back toward your heels (*“Child’s pose”*). As you inhale, come back up to all fours. Repeat the entire cycle 4 times. If you like, stay in the Down Dog position for several breaths each time you repeat the cycle.

4. **Mountain Pose** – Stand with feet 6-8 inches apart, toes facing forward. Feel your weight evenly distributed through your feet, and imagine a puppet string in the crown of your head is making you taller. Let your shoulders relax. Lift your heart. As you inhale, sweep your arms out to the sides and up toward the sky. Pause for a few seconds before exhaling and sweeping the arms back down to your sides. Repeat 6 times, making sure to pause at the top of the in breath (*note: if pausing the breath is uncomfortable for you, skip this instruction*).

For an added boost: As you inhale and sweep your arms up, also lift your heels a couple inches off the floor, so you are on the balls of the feet (it’s not necessary to go all the way up on “tippy toes”). Pause your breath; then pull in your navel as you exhale and lower your arms and heels. Try to coordinate the movement so your arms and heels finish at the same time. Repeat 6x.