

Yoga Poses Explained
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Reclined low back stretches

Lie on your back with your knees bent, and support under the head and neck if needed. Bring one knee toward your chest and hold for 30 seconds, breathing easily. Repeat 2-3x on each side. Then bring both knees toward your chest and hold them in a comfortable position – to avoid knee compression, hold the back of your thighs. Breathe easily here for one to three minutes, stretching the lower back muscles gently. Then you can try some gentle movement; rocking left and right, or forward and back, or making small circles with your knees to massage the lower back, or experiment with taking the knees wider apart to spread the lower back on the floor.



Windshield wiper legs, plus side stretch

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet on the floor. Walk the feet apart until they are as wide as your mat. Then drop one knee in toward the center line of the body, stretching the outer hip and thigh. Stay for a few breaths, repeat on second side. Allow your ankles and feet to roll and also your hips if that feels good for your lower back. Repeat several times on each side, never going to your maximum, but just going to a point of a little resistance to gently stretch your hips – remember – there should not be any pain in your knees. As the back begins to loosen, add arm movement. When your left knee is down, take your left arm overhead to give more of a side body stretch (feels like your ribcage and hip are being stretched apart). Repeat on second side, and then repeat several times on each side staying for 20-30 seconds, breathing easily.



Right-ankle-on-left-knee (hip stretch)

Lie on your back, bend your knees and place the feet on the floor about hip-width apart. Bring your right ankle across your left knee and first use your left hand to bring your right knee across your body toward your left shoulder for a buttock stretch. Stay for 30 seconds to a minute, then release and repeat on second side. Repeat 2-3 times on each side, never pushing past a comfortable stretch.



Leg stretches with the belt

Lie on your back, place a belt around the ball of your right foot and stretch the right leg up toward the ceiling. Work at straightening the leg so you have a comfortable stretch in the back of the thigh (about 85% of what you maximum). Straighten your left leg along the floor and make it firm like Mountain pose. Stay for several breaths, seeing after 30-40 seconds if the leg can come in a little closer. Keep the left leg firm, engage your abdominals to stabilize your pelvis as you take the belt into the right hand and slowly begin to open the right leg toward the right. Stay for a few breaths, then inhale the leg back up to center. Change hands with the belt and take the right leg across your body for a twist. Stay for a few breaths, then inhale the leg back up to center, remove the belt, inhale your arms overhead and lengthen the leg back to the floor. Repeat on second side.



Cat/cow

Start on hands and knees, with the shoulders over the hands and the hips over the knees. Take a breath in and on the exhalation, tilt your pelvis in toward your belly, push your hands into the floor, chin toward your chest and round your back up toward the ceiling (cat



pose). Inhale and release your pelvis and head back to neutral (cow pose or no cat pose). Continue this movement with your breath, stretching your back muscles as you round. Repeat 3-4 times or as many times as feels good.

Puppy pose plus side stretch

From the hands and knees position, curl your toes under and move your hips back toward your heels. Then stretch your arms/hands forward. Keep moving the hips back as you continue to stretch the arms forward to lengthen the spine (traction the spine by pulling on both ends). Stay for a couple of breaths, then keep the hips steady as you walk the hands toward the left, pulling the right hip back as you stretch the right arm forward. Stay for a few breaths, then keep reaching out as you walk the hands back to center. Repeat on second side, then rest in child's pose.



Legs up the wall, with leg variations

Sit with one hip close to the wall, legs bent. Use your hands on the floor to help support your torso as you swing the legs up the wall. Release the torso onto the floor, in line with your legs. Move the buttocks as close to the wall as possible (hamstrings permitting) and keep your hips on the floor. Press up through the feet – heels and balls of the feet and press the thighs into the wall. Relax your head and torso. Stay for 3-5 minutes breathing normally. Lengthen from the inner groins out to the knees and press the thighs into the wall. Stay for 1-3 minutes then bring the legs back together and straighten them back up toward the ceiling. To come out, bend the legs, roll to your right side, and use your hands to bring you back up to sitting.



Relaxation, legs on chair

Lie on your back, with your calves resting on a chair seat, sofa, or other prop of an appropriate height so that your knees and your hips are bent at about 90 degrees and your lower back is comfortable. Roll your shoulders back and under, so that your arms rest comfortably with the palms facing up. Rest here for three to five minutes, or up to 10 minutes, breathing easily. Note: we used a 10lb weight on your abdomen to help your back muscles to relax.



Belly breathing

You can practice this anywhere, anytime, but especially in times of anxiety and stress, as well as before bed time. Place your hands on your abdomen, and feel the stomach rise into your hands as you inhale, and feel the stomach release as you exhale. Repeat a few times to calm the nervous system.

Relaxation breath

We practiced this breathing technique lying down with your legs resting on a chair, but you can practice the relaxation breath anytime, either sitting or lying down. First just notice what your breathing is like, following your inhalations and exhalations. Then start to emphasize the pause after the exhalations:

Step 1: Inhale naturally through the nose.

Step 2: Exhale naturally through the nose.

Step 3: Pause while counting to yourself, one thousand one, one thousand two.

Step 4: Repeat steps 1, 2 & 3. Continue breathing in this manner for several minutes. Do not try to inhale deeply, exhale deeply, or breathe slowly. If you ever feel like you're straining or gasping for a breath, take a few regular breaths, then go back to this pattern of breathing. Repeat for several rounds of breath, then rest and notice if your breath has changed.