



PATIENT EDUCATION

*Gentle Yoga*

learning **EDUCATION** EXCELLENCE  
**HEALTHY** CARING INTERACTION  
**LIVING**

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS  
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER



# *Introduction*

## **Even if you**

- Think you aren't very flexible
- Carry extra weight
- Have trouble concentrating (focusing)
- Haven't exercised a lot in the past
- Have bad joints (hips, knees, etc.)
- Have low back pain
- Think you have a health condition that limits your options for activity

## **Think about yoga!**

## **Yoga can help**

- Reduce your stress.
- Stretch muscles for better flexibility.
- Strengthen your muscles.
- Improve your posture.
- Improve your balance.

Yoga has all of these benefits.

## **In addition**

- You can do yoga in the comfort of your own home.
- No special equipment is needed.
- You can do it alone or with friends.
- You can add a video or just use this resource!

**Yoga is not**

*Yoga is not a religion. It's not a "belief system," like a religion. For millions of people around the world, yoga is simply a new way to help the body, mind and spirit feel better.*

**Yoga is**

*"Yoga" means "union" in Sanskrit, the language of early India. (The first people to practice yoga may have been in India thousands of years ago.) For many people, yoga means "the union (or 'joining together') of the mind, body and spirit."*

**Yoga can be whatever you want**

There are many different types of yoga and many kinds of yoga stretches (called "positions" or "poses"). Try these gentle poses, then try other types of yoga if you wish.

If you want to relax, stretch, strengthen, breathe better, or all of these, yoga may be able to help you!

*Talk to your primary health care provider before beginning any health-improvement plan, especially if you have any long-term (chronic) health issues or if you do not see your provider for routine, preventive care.*

# *Learning How to Breathe*

The most important part of yoga is breathing.

You may be thinking, “I know how to breathe. I do it all day.” But for yoga, you need to learn how to breathe a bit differently.

Most people do not breathe deeply during their everyday lives. But deep breathing is good for you. For most people, it provides more oxygen than their usual way of breathing. Oxygen is needed for the constant work being done by your body’s organs and tissues, including your brain.

**Yoga breathing is called “thoughtful breathing” (or “conscious breathing”). It takes practice and patience to think about each breath when you’re doing yoga.**

## **“Ocean breath”**

As you learn to do gentle yoga, one of the most helpful breathing styles is called “ocean breath.”

- Breathe in (inhale) through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Breathe out (exhale) through your nose for 4 second.

Be sure each of your breaths, from inhale through the end of your exhale, is smooth and even. There should not be any “starts and stops” during a breath.

### *Make your breathing noisy*

As you become comfortable breathing only through your nose — and that could take a few yoga sessions — next, try to make your breathing a bit louder than usual. Breathe just loudly enough that someone standing next to you could hear your breathing. (This sounds odd, it's true. Try it a few times, and you'll probably hear it.) To some people, this sound is like gentle waves rolling onto the shore.

### *Quieting the noises in your mind*

In time, as you focus on your breathing, you may find that you're able to quiet the "noises" in your mind. Yes, most people talk to themselves during the day — reminders to get gas in the car or pick up the kids or pay the bills. The ability to focus on breathing is one of the reasons many people believe yoga helps them quiet their minds and focus a bit better during the day. Practice and patience may help this happen for you, too.

# *Gentle Yoga Poses*

Each pose should be held, depending on your ability, for 4 to 6 slow breaths. (One breath = inhale + exhale in one smooth movement.)

## **Items typically used**

- Yoga mat (optional)
- 1 or 2 sturdy, armless chairs or a wheelchair with removable armrests
- Towel or blanket
- Yoga block(s) or small stool, approximately 6 to 10 inch tall (optional)

## **Two “gentle” options**

**Level 1 (L1)** is yoga performed sitting in a chair. If it’s hard for you to stand still for a short while, or to go down and get up from the floor, level 1 may be the better way to start. This type of gentle yoga allows easy movements for people who have poor balance, flexibility or strength for any reason.

**Level 2 (L2)** is known as “gentle yoga.” This level assumes that you can stand safely, get down on and get up from the floor, and have enough strength and flexibility to try poses that are somewhat more advanced than level 1 poses.

Some level 2 poses have an extra photo — showing another way to do that pose. Try those poses only if you feel able.

**Child's pose L1\***

- Begin seated, feet hip-width apart.
- Rest forearms on thighs.
- Place forehead in hands.
- Relax shoulders with each breath.

\* If you have osteoporosis, keep your back as flat as possible.





### **Child's pose L2**

- Begin on mat, knees wide apart and flexed.
- Rest hips on heels.\*
- Extend arms forward, rest head on mat (or as close to it as possible).

\* If this pose is difficult or you have pain in your knees, sit on a folded blanket placed in the fold behind your knees.



### **Mountain pose L1**

- Sit tall, back away from back of chair.
- Press feet flat, evenly on floor.
- Relax shoulders.
- Stretch entire spine upward; lift top of head toward ceiling.



## **Mountain pose L2**

- Stand, feet hip-width apart.
- Relax shoulders.
- Keep hands at side; stretch toward feet.
- Press feet flat, evenly on floor.
- Stretch entire spine upward; lift top of head toward ceiling.



### **Extended mountain pose L1**

- Begin with mountain pose L1.
- Extend hands high overhead, shoulder-width apart.
- Relax shoulders.
- Tighten thighs and abdominal muscles by pressing feet down into the floor.
- Stretch entire spine upward.



### **Extended mountain pose L2**

- Begin with mountain pose L2.
- Extend hands high over head.
- Tighten thighs and abdominal muscles by pressing feet down into floor.
- Relax shoulders.
- Stretch entire spine upward.



### **Cat pose L1 (exhale)**

- Sit tall, back away from back of chair.
- Press feet flat on floor.
- Pull in abdominal muscles.
- Tip pelvis and hip bones backward to round back.\*
- Tuck chin down.
- Round shoulders forward.

\* If you have osteoporosis, do not round your back during cat. Keep your back flat.



Cat pose L1 often is used with cow pose L1. Move between the two poses slowly while taking a breath.

### **Cow pose L1 (inhale)**

- Begin with cat pose L1.
- Relax abdominal muscles.
- Tip pelvis and hip bones forward, to hollow out back.
- Lift chin and chest gently.
- Press shoulders back and down.



### **Cat pose L2 (exhale)**

- Begin on hands and knees on floor.
- Pull in abdominal muscles to round back.\*
- Bring chin toward caved chest.

\* If you have osteoporosis, do not round your back during cat. Keep your back flat.



Cat pose L2 often is used with cow pose L2. Move between the two poses slowly while taking a breath.



**Cow pose L2 (inhale)**

- Begin with cat pose L2.
- Lift chin; open chest.
- Press shoulders back.
- Allow belly to sink downward, to hollow out back.



### **Forward fold pose L1\***

- Sit toward front of chair, back away from back of chair, feet flat on floor.
- Fold upper body forward slowly, bending at hips.
- Hold shins, ankles or toes gently.
- Relax head, shoulders and neck; face the floor.

\* If you have osteoporosis, keep your back as flat as possible.



### **Forward fold pose L2\***

- Stand facing chair seat, feet hip-width apart.
- Bend knees slightly.
- Fold upper body forward slowly, bending at hips.
- Rest arms on seat of chair.
- Relax head, shoulders and neck; face the floor.

\* If you have osteoporosis, keep your back as flat as possible.



### **Downward facing dog pose L1**

- Sit toward front of chair, back away from back of chair.
- Extend legs forward; flex ankles, bringing toes upward.
- Lean forward at hips; reach arms up and out; bring elbows up by ears.
- Stretch spine; keep back flat.



## **Downward facing dog pose L2**

- Place chair against wall or on yoga mat.
- Stand facing chair seat, feet hip-width apart.
- Forward fold at hips; bring hands to chair seat.
- Step back to near back edge of mat, approximately 2 feet away from chair; stand with heels on mat.
- Straighten arms; lower head between elbows.
- Keep back flat.



**Staff pose L1**

- Sit toward front of chair, back away from back of chair.
- Extend legs forward onto the floor, blocks or small stool.
- Flex feet.
- Sit up straight and flatten back; reach arms forward gently.
- Bend forward at hips, leading with the chest; keep back flat.
- Keep shoulders relaxed, down and back.
- Bend only as far as you can comfortably; keep legs straight and back straight.



## Staff pose L2

- Sit on mat on floor.
- Extend legs forward.
- Sit up straight and flatten back; reach arms forward gently.
- Bend forward at hips; keep back flat, use chest to move.
- Keep shoulders relaxed, down and back.
- Bend only as far as you can comfortably; keep legs straight and back straight.



### **Camel pose L1**

- Sit toward front of chair, back away from back of chair, feet hip-width apart.
- Place hands on chair seat behind buttocks.
- Push belly and chest forward.
- Roll shoulders back; look toward ceiling as much as you are able to do.





## **Camel pose L2**

- Kneel on floor, use support if needed.
- Press hips forward, reach hands to gently touch lower back.
- Push belly and chest forward.
- Roll shoulders back; look toward ceiling as much as you are able to do.



Remember: Each pose should be held, depending on your ability, for 4 to 6 slow breaths. (One breath = inhale + exhale in one smooth movement.)

**Boat pose L1**

- Sit sideways on chair.
- Tighten abdominal muscles and round back slightly.
- Hold back of chair with inside hand; lift chest upward.
- Lift one leg, bending knee slightly; hold back of knee with hand.
- Repeat on other side.



If you want to do a more advanced boat pose, try to lift the second leg and extend it straight out into the air while keeping your balance on the chair.

## **Boat pose L2**

- Sit on floor; extend legs in front, knees bent.
- Place hands behind knees to start.
- Rock back slightly to balance.
- Lift feet to have lower legs parallel to floor.
- Keep spine straight; lift chest upward.
- Reach arms forward if possible; relax shoulders.



**Tree pose L1**

- Sit toward front of chair, back away from back of chair.
- Lift right leg and cross ankle just above left knee. (If this is too difficult, cross right ankle over left ankle.)
- Move right knee down, opening space between legs.
- Bring palms to meet at the level of your heart.
- Sit tall, stretching spine.
- Lift joined hands over head, if possible.
- Repeat on other side.



## Tree pose L2

Use chair if needed for balance support.

- Hold back of chair with one hand.
- Lift one foot, place it at side of ankle, at mid-calf or above knee joint. (Never place foot directly at knee joint.)
- Stand tall, stretching spine.
- Relax shoulders; bring other hand to level of heart or directly overhead.
- If balance is OK, join palms together at level of heart or above head.
- Repeat on other side.



### **Eagle pose L1**

- Sit toward front of chair, back away from back of chair.
- Cross left leg over right; wrap legs tightly.
- Bring elbows to meet chest height.
- Cross wrists and bring back of hands to meet; point thumbs toward nose.
- Press arms and legs together tightly.
- Pull in belly and sit tall.
- Repeat on other side.



## **Eagle pose L2**

Have a chair available for balance support if needed.

- Stand with knees bent slightly.
- Cross left leg over right. Left toes may touch ground for balance as needed.
- Bring elbows to meet chest height.
- Cross right wrist in front of left; bring back of hands to meet; point thumbs toward nose.
- Press arms and legs together tightly.
- Pull in belly and straighten spine.
- Repeat on other side.



### **Crescent lunge pose L1**

- Sit sideways on chair.
- Extend outside leg back, turn toes under.
- Keep knee of front leg, directly over ankle.
- Raise arms overhead, shoulder-width apart.
- Reach up and sit tall.
- Tighten abdominal muscles.
- Relax shoulders slightly.
- Repeat on other side.





## **Crescent lunge pose L2**

Use chair for balance support if needed.

- Start in mountain pose L2, facing back of chair.
- Step right foot back comfortably, rest foot to toes, heel up off floor.
- Keep left leg flexed, knee directly above ankle joint.
- Hold back of chair with both hands, one hand, or no hands as necessary.
- Lift other hand(s) reach upward; relax shoulders.
- Stretch spine upward.
- Repeat on other side.



### **Spine twist pose L1**

- Sit tall, back away from back of chair.
- Cross left leg over right.
- Place right hand on outside of left knee.
- Place left hand gently over back of chair.
- Turn spine slowly to left; look over left shoulder.
- Relax shoulders and neck.
- Repeat on other side.



## **Spine twist pose L2**

- Lie on back on mat.
- Open arms wide to the sides.
- Bend right knee up.
- Allow right leg to fall and cross over left as far as you can.
- Allow lower spine to turn to the left; keep upper back flat on mat.
- Turn head gently to right.
- Repeat on other side.



### **Cobbler pose L1**

Use two chairs facing each other.

- Sit toward front of one chair, back away from back of chair.
- Place feet on second chair, bottom of feet touching.
- Hold ankles.
- Drop knees open gently.
- Sit tall; keep back flat.
- Rest elbows on inside of thighs; fold forward slowly at hips.
- Keep chin up, spine straight.



### **Cobbler pose L2**

- Sit on mat on floor.
- Bring bottom of feet together; allow knees to drop open.
- Hold ankles.
- Sit tall; keep back flat.
- Rest elbows on inside of thighs; fold forward slowly at hips.
- Keep chin up, spine straight.



### **Half pigeon pose L1**

- Sit sideways on chair.
- Pull inside foot onto chair. (If this is too difficult, consider using blocks to support the foot, keeping the hip turned.)
- Extend other leg back; straighten knee as much as you are able; curl toes under.
- Pull in abdominal muscles; flatten lower back; sit tall.
- Rest hands on back of chair and gently on knee.
- Repeat on other side.



## Half pigeon pose L2

- Lie on floor (or mat on floor).
- Draw knees to chest.
- Cross right ankle over left knee.
- Join fingers behind left knee.
- Draw left knee gently toward chest; allow right knee to drop open.
- Repeat on other side.



### **Savasana pose L1**

- Sit at back of chair; allow back to be fully supported by chair.
- Feet flat on floor or stool.
- Close eyes; relax shoulders.
- Drop chin gently.
- Relax and release tension in body, including face, eyes, jaw, scalp, back, legs, and feet.
- Clear your thoughts; focus on your breath.





## **Savasana pose L2**

- Lie on floor (or mat on floor).
- Relax feet and legs.
- If low back is tense, place feet and calves up on chair.
- Close eyes; opening palms up and relax shoulder blades.
- Relax and release tension in body, including face, eyes, jaw, scalp, back, legs, and feet.
- Drop chin gently.
- Clear your thoughts; focus on your breath.
- Repeat on other side.



# *Conclusion*

Yoga has helped millions of people worldwide improve their physical, mental and spiritual health by:

- Reducing stress.
- Stretching and strengthening muscles.
- Improving posture and balance.
- Quieting the mind.
- Refocusing on the naturally strong connection between body, mind and spirit.

Many people have said that they felt benefits from yoga within just a few weeks. Some even said they felt better after just the first or second session! And many people who practice yoga see it as a part of their lifelong health journey. It just makes them feel good!

## **When you are ready**

Every person is different. If you like, consider looking in your community for a yoga class that you can try out. There are many different types of yoga and many teaching styles. Find one that works for your body, mind and spirit!



## BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal patient of Mayo Clinic for more than 40 years. She was a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching, even as she assembled a museum-quality collection of antiques and fine art. She was best known by Mayo staff for her patient advocacy and support.

Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. Mrs. Lips had a profound appreciation for the care she received at Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.



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