

# Take A Yoga Break!



When we think of Yoga at work, what springs to mind is a dash to change out of our office clothes, a sprint with our yoga mats under our arms, to a room with the tables pushed back against the walls, followed by a short 45 minute session of stretching and then another quick change, a hastily gobbled lunch and finally taking a breath as we settle back into our desk chairs as though nothing happened! Not very relaxing or yogic and really, was it worth it?

The thing is that something is better than nothing but perhaps the “Yoga break” is

the way forward...

Long hours of sitting hunched over a computer can really take its toll on our posture, our tension levels and our mind set. The body can always do with a short break to release muscles, relieve stress and prevent stagnation in the joints. Luckily it is easy to adapt some simple yoga postures and practices to the “desk environment” that will allow you to feel the benefits of Yoga without ever having to leave your seat.

Treat yourself to a five minute break with this rejuvenating practice.

### **1. Breath Awareness**

Having control and an understanding of your breath can make the difference between coping with a stressful situation and completely losing the plot! This simple breath awareness exercise can help to relax you and keep you calm at any time, as long as you remember to do it!

So, sit at the front edge of your chair so that your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line. Make sure the height of your chair allows your knees to drop down at a 90 degree angle with your feet supported on the floor or on a stack of books.

Close your eyes and focus on finding a smooth, even breath; feel the stomach expand or inflate slightly as you breath in and give the abdominal muscles a gentle squeeze in as you breath out.

After one minute, move on to the gentle stretches as explained, starting each exercise from this basic seated position.

### **2. Neck stretches**

We often store tension in our necks and the tops of our shoulders, this short sequence will stretch and loosen the neck and hopefully you will watch the tension just ebb away.

Sitting as before, inhale facing front and exhale as you turn your head to the right to try and look over your shoulder, inhale back to centre and exhale as you turn the head left, repeat two or three more times.

Next inhale to centre again and this time exhale as to gently drop your right ear down to your right shoulder, being careful to keep both shoulders drawing down towards the floor and not up to the ears, inhale to centre and exhale as you drop the left ear to the left shoulder, repeat two or three more times to each side.

Finally Inhale to centre and exhale as you drop your chin down towards the chest trying to reach it to the centre of the collar bones and breathe here for two to three breaths.

### **3. Seated Cat/Cow**

Cat and Cow help you relieve the muscles in the shoulders and upper back and you can totally do cat/cow while sitting at your desk! To do this, keep both hands on your desk or thighs and with a straight spine, inhale deeply and a slight back bend while rolling the shoulders back slowly, then exhale and let the shoulders roll/hunch forward and tuck the chin towards the chest, you can even try pulling the naval to the spine for an extra bonus.

### **4. Seated Twist**

Twists are very detoxifying for the body, they stimulate the internal organs, giving them a gentle massage, they also help to free the spine if one has been sitting in an unhealthy position for hours at a time.

Breathe in as you face front and then as you exhale, begin to twist to your right, rest both hands on the seat just behind your pelvis and your left hand on your right thigh. Allow the breath to guide you deeper into the pose by lengthening the spine with each inhale, and squeezing the belly in while deepening the twist with each exhale. Hold for three to five deep breaths, then switch sides.

### **5. Leg Cradle**

Legs can get stiff and circulation poor as we sit in the same place all day, this stretch for the legs and hips will help to alleviate both problems.

Place the outside of your left ankle on your right thigh. With your right hand resting on your left ankle and your left hand on your left knee, exhale and bend forward from the hip joints. Keep the spine straight as you fold forward. Fold only as far as you're comfortable, gently stretching the deep muscles surrounding the left hip joint. Hold for three to five deep breaths, then change sides.

## **6. Wide-Legged Forward Bend**

This posture will release tension in your back and neck and allow the hips and inner thighs to have a satisfying stretch. The inverted position will also help to clear the mind, for a brief moment allowing the blood to rush to the brain. If you have high blood pressure avoid this posture and if your blood pressure is low then come up afterwards very carefully and slowly.

Separate your knees and feet slightly wider than hip distance and place your hands on your thighs. Exhale and fold forward from the hips, keeping the spine straight. Hold for a few breaths, then slide your hands down your legs, allowing the spine to round (be careful if your chair is on wheels!). Breathe into the hip joints and enjoy the length and spaciousness along the spine. For a deeper stretch, release your hands to the floor between your feet. Hold for three to five deep breaths, then slowly come back up, using your leg and abdominal muscles for support.

Go back to your breath awareness practice for another minute before you go back to work feeling refreshed and revitalised!

Column by Serena Burgess from the Om Space













