

Reduce Stress with 10 Minutes of Chair Yoga

Louise Mahoney, MS, RYT

What is Stress & How Does it Affect You?

- Stress is your body's response to any kind of demand both good and bad
- Can alter your state of health, your mood and emotions
- Can affect cognitive function - Impairs
 - Concentration
 - Attention
 - Decision making ability
 - Creativity

What Can You Do?

1. Understand how stress works
2. Identify stressors in your life
3. Engage in healthy stress management techniques such as:
 - Extended exhale breathing – let the exhale be longer than the inhale
 - Soft belly breathing – let the belly relax and expand on inhale
 - Progressive relaxation
 - Exercise and stretching
 - Yoga
 - Meditation
 - Visualization
 - Laughter

Stress Response Controlled by the Autonomic Nervous System

- Controls the body's reaction to stress by through a balance between its 2 branches:
 - Sympathetic
 - responsible for the "fight-or-flight response"
 - Parasympathetic
 - responsible for the "relaxation response"

The Vagus Nerve

- The 10th cranial nerve – derived from the word “vagabond” – “to wander” – extends from the medulla through the diaphragm to the abdomen.
- Main nerve of the parasympathetic nervous system and responsible for:
 - Respiration rate
 - Heart rate
 - Regulating blood pressure
 - Regulating digestive activity

Yoga Breathing

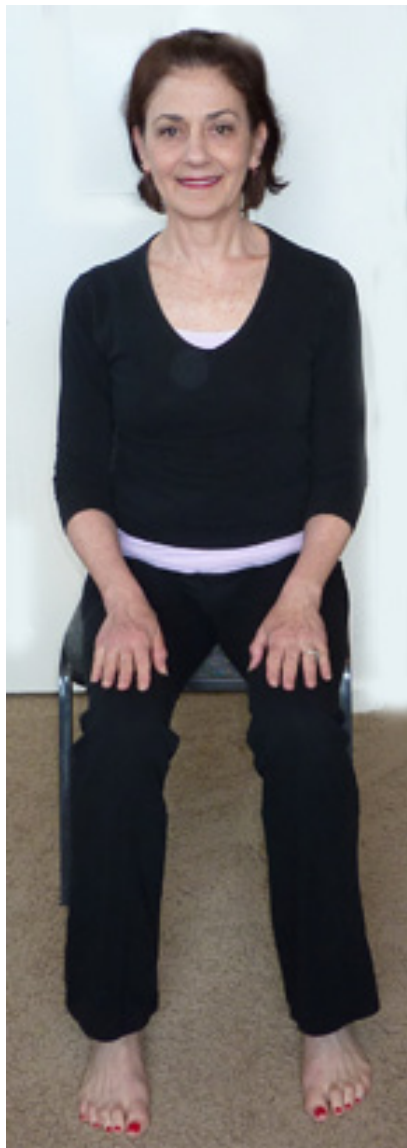
- Allowing the diaphragm to expand into the belly as you breath can stimulate the vagus nerve and help reduce stress
- A large component of every yoga class is controlled breathing
- One very effective breathing technique is Ocean (Ujjayi) breathing – narrow the back of throat to sound like ocean waves as you inhale and exhale

10 Minute Chair Yoga

- The following 7 yoga poses/exercises can be done anytime and anywhere to reduce stress and re-energize yourself during the day
- Begin the practice with slow breathing through the nose – try the Ocean breathing (next slide) and continue on to refresh and renew.....

Ujayii “Ocean” Breathing

- A balancing and calming breath
- Inhalation and exhalation are both done through the nose but the back of the throat is narrowed to create a “valve” that helps to slow down both the inhale and exhale
- A faint sound is created by narrowing the airway – as it would narrow with a whisper. Try whispering as you breath in and out to mimic the sensation
- You will feel a faint rubbing/vibration in the throat
- The inhalation and exhalation are equal in duration and are controlled in a manner that causes no distress



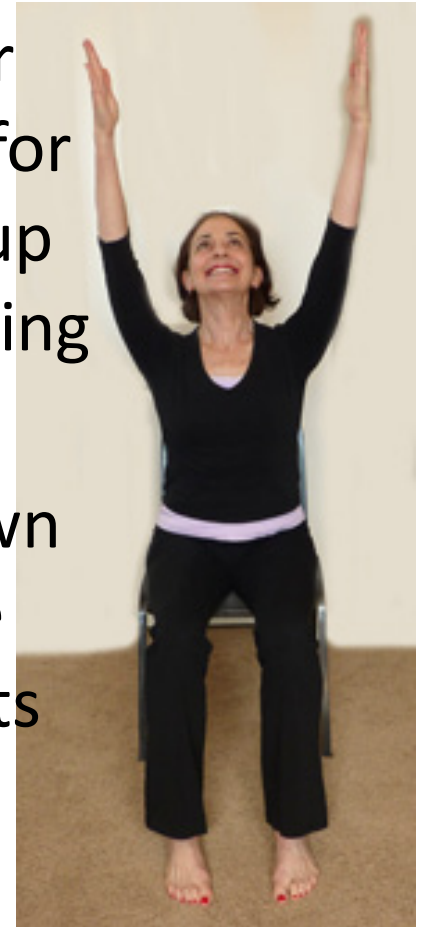
Chair Yoga

- Begin by sitting on the edge of a chair with your feet placed squarely on the floor about hip distance apart, toes facing straight forward.
- Place your palms flat on your thighs, and feel length in your spine—head balanced over heart, heart balanced over hips
- Inhale and exhale evenly for five counts each
- Repeat inhale/exhale 2 times

Seated Mountain Pose



- Place both arms down by your side and as you inhale slowly for 4 counts reach arms out and up with palms facing up while lifting arms overhead
- Exhale as you move arms down with palms facing towards the floor as you exhale for 4 counts
- Repeat 4 times



Seated Side Stretch

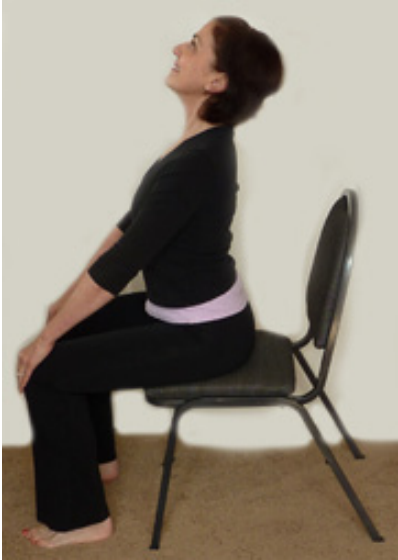


- Inhale and lift your arms overhead, taking hold of your left wrist with your right hand
- As you exhale, bend to the right. Stay there and breathe for two breaths - feel the stretch on the left side of the body
- As you inhale, come back up to vertical and change wrists
- Exhale, and bend to the left. Stay there for and breathe for two breaths – feel the stretch on the right side of the body
- Inhale back up to a tall spine
- Exhale, release your arms down by your side

Shoulder Rolls and Stretch

- Release tension in your shoulders and upper back by slowly lifting the shoulders up by the ears and allow them to roll back and down – Repeat 4x
- On the fourth roll, interlace your fingers behind your back with your arms as straight as you are able to make them
- If you don't have room behind you, reach back and hold onto the outside edges of the back of your chair and stretch your shoulders and chest

Seated Cat/Cow



- Place hands on your knees. As you inhale, lift your chest, and arch the back
- As you exhale, tuck your pelvis and pull your navel in toward the spine, round your spine back toward the back of the chair – keep your head in line with your spine – don't drop the head.
- As you move, inhale and exhale deeply and feel the opening of the chest as you inhale and broadness of the back of the body as you exhale
- Repeat 3 more times



Seated Forward Bend



- Move your feet out slightly wider than hip distance
- Engage your abdominal muscles as you begin to fold your upper body over your legs, letting your upper body fall through your thighs. You may be able to reach the floor with your palms flat or rest your forearms on your thighs – both shown here
- The goal is to allow your head to drop lower than your heart and relax the head and neck
- You may grab onto your elbows or let your arms release to the floor
- To finish, engage your abdominal muscles and slowly bring your back to an upright position - find length in your spine

Seated Spinal Twist



- Inhale and allow the spine to lengthen
- As you exhale, twist the thoracic spine about 45 degrees to the right
- You may place your left hand on the outside of your right thigh and your right hand on the back of your chair
- Turn your head to look over your right shoulder
- Move your eyes to the upper right corner of your eyes and then the lower right corner. Repeat 2 X
- Close your eyes as you return back to center
- Repeat to the other side

Seated Triangle Pose



- Sit on the edge of your chair, keep the left leg bent and extend your right leg straight to the side, keeping both feet on the floor. Extend arms out to the side
- Inhale deeply, lift your torso tall and as you exhale reach your torso up and out to the right side. When you cannot go any farther, allow the arms and body to windmill towards the floor – keep the arms outstretched
- Take 2 deep breaths. On your next inhalation, reach your torso and arms out and up and come back to seated
- Repeat to the left side

Namaste!



- Bring your knees back to center, hip distance, sit up tall
- Take 2 deep cleansing breaths as you raise your arms up overhead and back down
- On the third breath, bring the palms of your hands together, with the thumbs touching your chest
- Close your eyes and breath normally for a few seconds and you have completed your chair yoga break!



How to refer a Veteran to yoga classes in Palo Alto, CA

- Local mat or chair yoga classes at the VA Palo Alto/Menlo Park locations:
 - Complete the **WRIISC Yoga** consult request template in CPRS
- Telehealth Yoga from VA Palo Alto Community Clinics
 - Complete the **Telehealth Yoga Wellness** consult request template in CPRS
- iRest yoga nidra meditation by phone:
 - Complete the **IFC WRIISC Yoga Wellness** consult request template in CPRS

More information @

<https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/clinical/integrative-health/ca/index.asp>