

Short and Empowering

Don't let this brief practice deceive you—it can be energizing and very strengthening.

Three-Part Breath

Range-of-Motion Sequence

One-Legged Bicycle

Supple Spine Flow

Plank Progression

Mountain

Warrior 2

Triangle

Eagle

Baby Cobra

Bridge

Knees to Chest

Relaxation

Three-Part Breath

This breath pattern is an invaluable tool for giving your body and mind a quick reset by intentionally guiding your belly, ribs, and chest to expand on the inhalation and fully relax on the exhalation. Sometimes called “diaphragmatic breathing,” it is often used therapeutically to reduce pain, anxiety, and sleep disturbance. The Three-Part Breath practice can be done anywhere and anytime, multiple times a day or at night. While you can do this practice in any position—lying down, sitting, or standing—it’s easiest to learn when you’re lying down or sitting in a reclined position. Try this breath for a few moments (5 to 7 complete rounds) and then notice how you feel.



Figure 5.1 Three-Part Breath

Part 1: Rest your hands on your belly, just below the navel. As you take your next breath in, let your belly soften and expand like a balloon. As you breathe out, let your belly sink toward your spine. Repeat 3 times.

Part 2: Rest one hand on your ribs and one hand on your belly (see figure 5.1). With your next inhale, let your belly soften and feel your ribs expand to the left and to the right. As you exhale, let everything sink. Repeat 3 times.

Part 3: Rest the hand that was on your ribs on your upper chest, just below your collarbones. As you breathe in, allow your belly to soften, your ribs to expand, and your upper chest to broaden. As you exhale, let everything go. Repeat 3 times. Spend a few moments here, with one hand on the chest and the other on the belly, exploring this three-part rhythm. Allow this full, easy breath to open and nourish your body.

As you release the Three-Part Breath pattern, take a moment to notice how your body responded, how your emotional heart responded, and how your mind responded to this breathing practice.

Note: Three-Part Breath is *not* meant to be used all the time during your practice. It should be done as a periodic reset for your body and mind.

Range-of-Motion Sequence

Neck Release

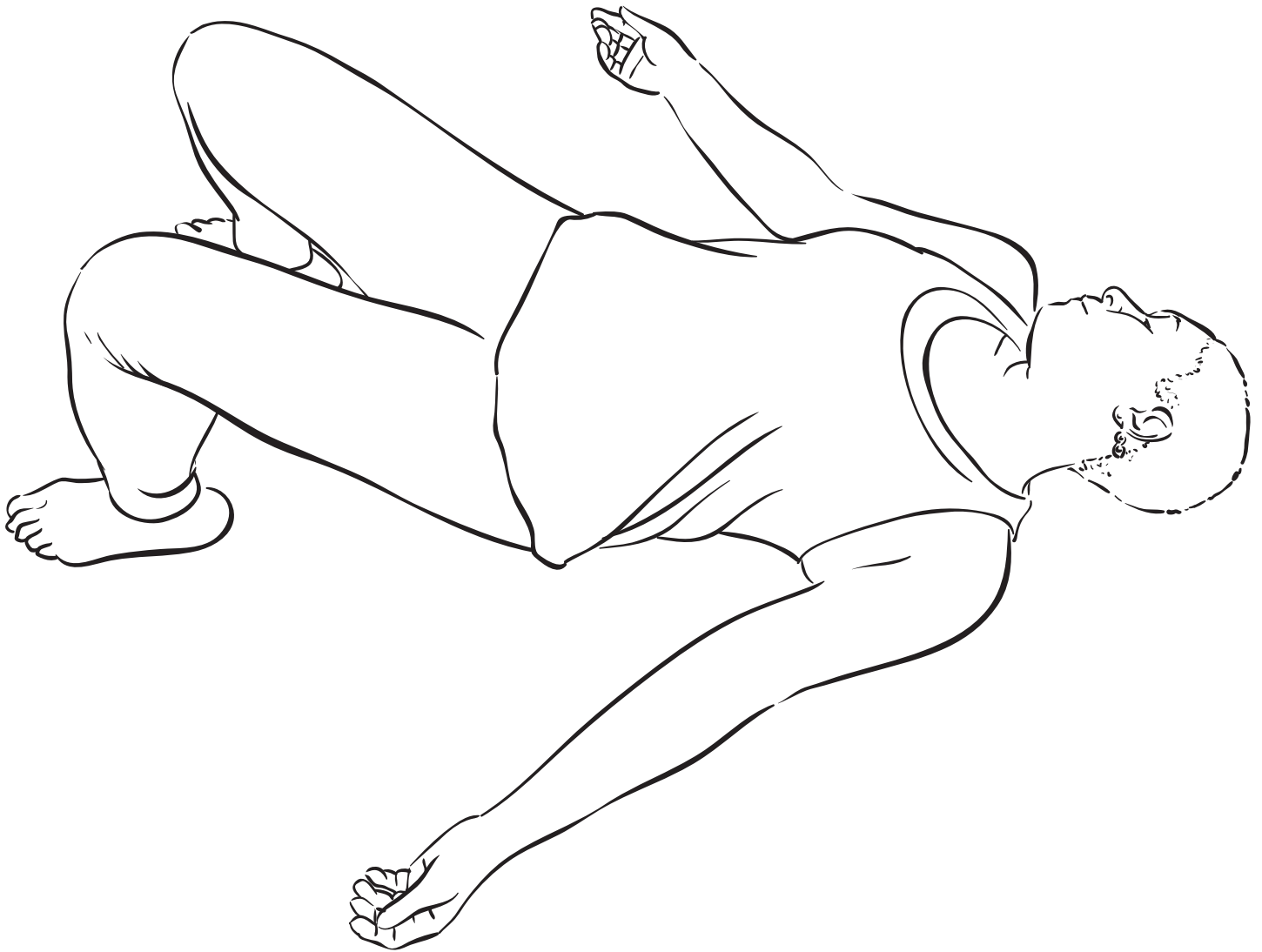


Figure 5.2 Neck Release

Setup

Lie on your back with your knees bent, soles of the feet flat on the ground, and arms at your sides. If your chin is higher than your forehead, place a folded blanket or towel behind your head so that your chin is at the same level—or slightly below—your forehead. Tune in to your breath.

Movement

Inhale in place.

Exhale and rotate your head to the right, looking over your right shoulder (see figure 5.2). Invite your left shoulder to be a little heavier.

Inhale back to center.

As you exhale, rotate your head to the left, looking over your left shoulder. Invite your right shoulder to be a little heavier.

Repeat this for a few cycles of breath.

Feel free to linger with your head rotated to the right and then left. Close your eyes, if you like, and feel into the sensations.

Remember

- Try not to force your head in one direction or the other.
- Be sure to keep the natural curve in the back of your neck. If you are elevating your head with a folded towel or blanket, make sure it's not so high that your neck flattens.
- Notice, without judgment, any differences between the movement to the right and to the left.

Arms Overhead



Figure 5.3 Arms Overhead

Setup

Lie on your back with your knees bent and the soles of your feet resting on the ground. Bring your arms alongside your body, palms facing down, and tune in to your breath.

Movement

As you inhale, extend your arms up and overhead so the backs of your hands move toward the ground behind you, or as close to the ground as they will comfortably go (see figure 5.3).

As you exhale, bring your arms back up and return them to the starting position, down along your sides.

Repeat for a few cycles of breath.

Remember

- Synchronize your movement with your breath so that your arms are moving toward your ears as you breathe in and toward your hips as you breathe out.
- Feel free to bend your elbows as much as you need to for comfort.
- Don't worry if the backs of your hands don't reach the ground. Just do the best you can without force or strain.
- Enjoy the feel of your breath.
- Take a moment to rest after you've finished, and try to notice any echoes of movement in your shoulders and arms.

Universal Legs

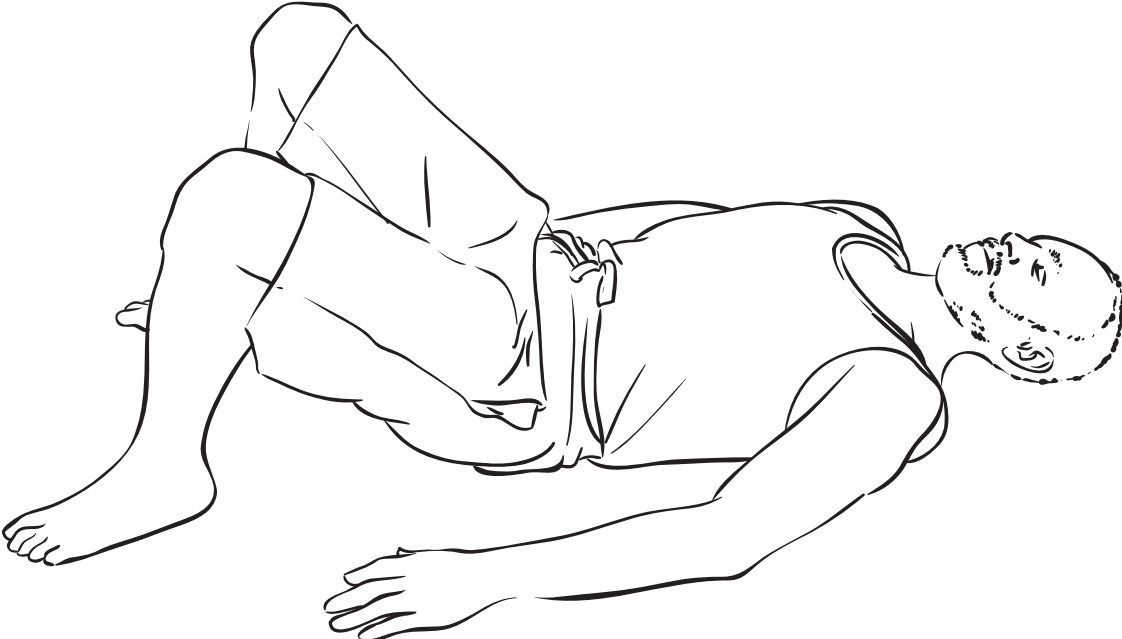


Figure 5.4



Figure 5.5



Figure 5.6



Figure 5.7

Setup

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the ground, and arms at your sides (see figure 5.4).

Movement

Take an easy breath in.

On an exhalation, hug your right knee into your chest—lightly holding your leg behind your right thigh (see figure 5.5).

Stay here for a few breaths. Each time you exhale, draw your right thigh in toward your rib cage.

Next, continuing to hug your leg, imagine that your big toe is a crayon and begin slowly drawing large circles in the air to wake up your ankles. When you're ready, reverse the direction and draw a few more slow, easy circles going the other way. Then relax your foot.

Inhale and extend your right foot up toward the sky, straightening your leg as much as you comfortably can (see figure 5.6).

Exhale and bend your knee, bringing your foot back down by your buttocks.

Repeat this movement for a few breaths—inhaling and extending the leg, exhaling and bending the knee.

Next, keep your leg extended up in the air, with your leg as straight as is comfortable. Extend your foot toward the sky and drop your buttocks down toward the ground.

Keeping your leg extended, flex your right foot so the heel lifts up to the sky and the toes reach toward your nose. Then point your right foot, so your toes reach up to the sky.

Repeat this flexing and pointing a few times.

Relax your foot and draw big circles in the air with your toes, taking your ankles through their full range of motion. Circle a few times in both directions.

Next, bend your right knee and bring your right ankle onto your left thigh (see figure 5.7). Flex your right ankle to maintain healthy alignment in your knee. Linger here, bringing your attention to any sensations that arise and inviting your breath to soften any places where you feel tension.

When you are done, bring your right foot back to the ground, and rest here for a moment, relaxing and releasing. Notice if you feel any difference between your right side that you've just challenged, and your left side, which hasn't had a turn yet.

Now repeat the sequence with the left leg.

When you are done, release both feet to the ground, knees bent, and relax for a few easy breaths.

Remember

- If holding your leg is a strain on your shoulders or arms, use a strap behind your thigh to catch your leg, or rest your arms on the ground as you move your leg through the sequence.
- As always, challenge yourself, but don't strain—just do the best you can.
- Synchronize your movements with your breath—inhale as you straighten your leg, exhale as you bend your knee.
- Avoid holding your breath. Keep it flowing comfortably.
- Notice where you feel the sensation of stretch and movement.
- Notice where you feel the sensation of relaxing and releasing.

Supine Twist

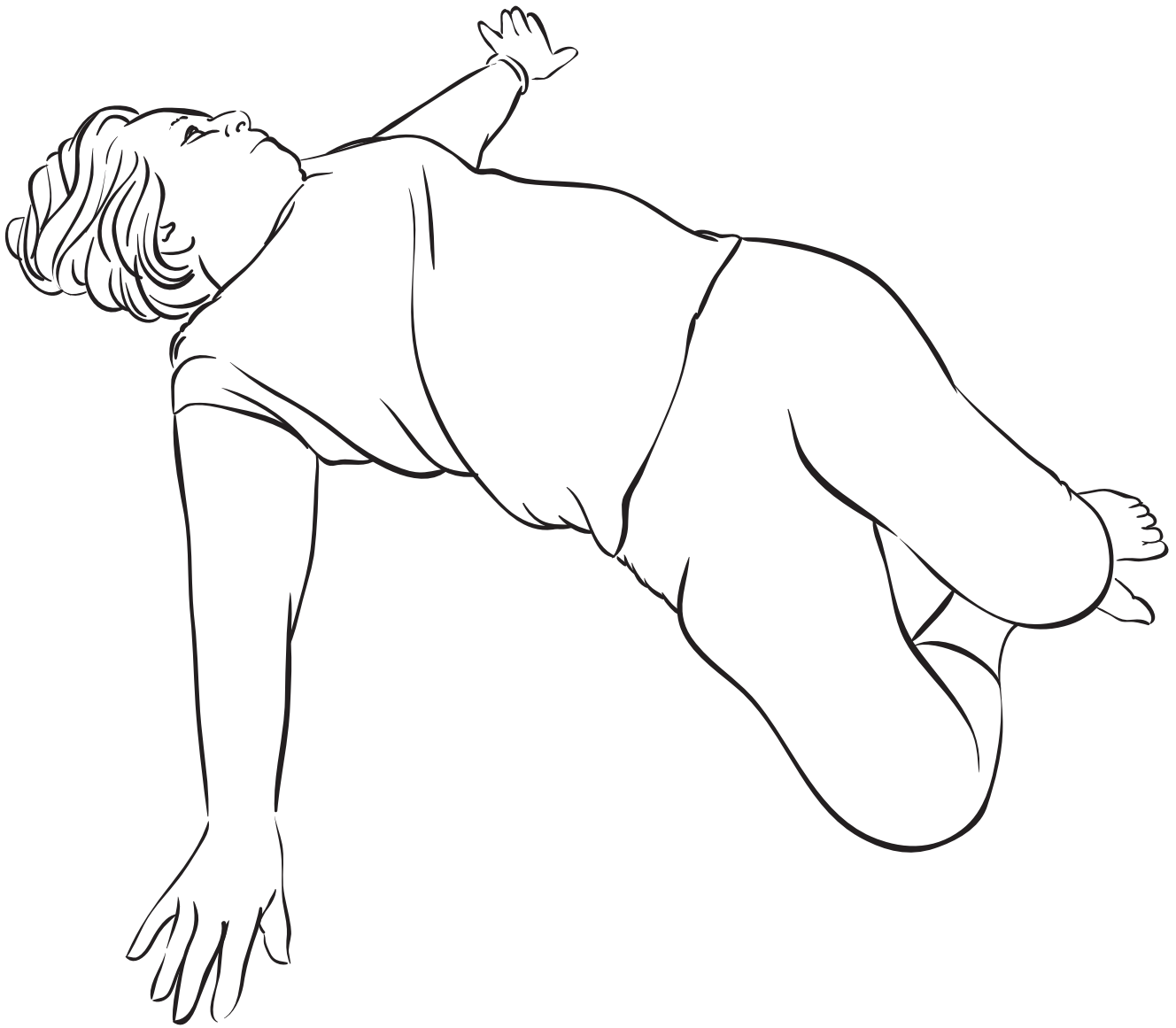


Figure 5.8 Supine Twist

Setup

Lie down with your knees bent and your feet about hip-width apart. Extend your arms out to the sides, palms up or down, whichever feels better.

Movement

Rock your knees from side to side, slowly and gently. Be sure to keep your feet on the ground.

Turn your head in the opposite direction of your knees, keeping your movement and your breath smooth and easy (see figure 5.8).

Repeat a few times.

Linger with your knees dropped to one side and your head rotated to the other. Rest here for a few breaths.

As you inhale, fill your body with breath. Inhale into your hips, waist, ribs, and armpits.

As you exhale, soften into the twist. Let each exhalation be an opportunity to release and let go.

When you are ready, inhale your legs back to center and square yourself off.

Then exhale and linger with your knees dropped to the other side. Rest here for a few breaths.

When you are done, come back to center with bent knees and both feet on the ground, and relax.

Remember

- When resting in the twist, feel free to place a rolled blanket or towel underneath your leg for support if your knee doesn't comfortably reach the ground.
- Do not force your leg to touch the ground.
- Release the weight of your arms and shoulders into the ground as you gently rotate your spine above and below this area.

One-Legged Bicycle



Figure 10.2



Figure 10.3

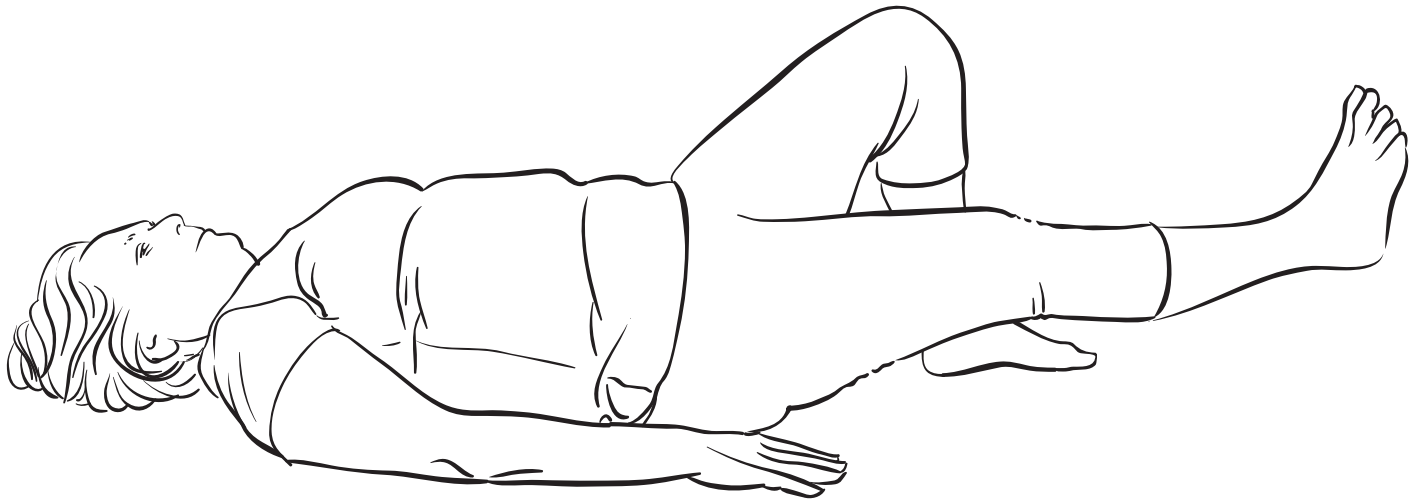


Figure 10.4

Setup

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the ground and hip-width apart. Position your head so that your neck maintains its natural curve. Place your arms along your sides, palms down. Tune in to your breath.

Movement

Lift your right foot off the ground and bring your right knee in toward your belly (see figure 10.2).

Inhale and extend your right leg up toward the sky, flexing your ankle (see figure 10.3).

Exhale and engage the deep belly muscles of the Royal Cough (see page 168) as you lower your leg until it is just above the ground (see figure 10.4).

Inhale and bend your right knee, bringing it back in toward your belly, then extend your right leg back up toward the sky.

Exhale and lower your leg until it is just above the ground, engaging the strength in your center.

Repeat a couple of times at your own pace.

To build more strength, linger with your right leg hovering just above the ground for a couple of breaths. Be sure to keep your breath flowing comfortably.

When you are ready, exhale your leg to the ground and notice the cascade of release when gravity takes over and your leg can rest. Pause here to be present for this letting go.

Repeat on the other side.

When you are done, place both feet on the ground, knees bent, and enjoy several smooth breaths.

Remember

- Engage only the muscles that you need, softening what you don't need. Be sure to keep your upper body—shoulders, neck, and face—relaxed.
- Find ease in your breath. If you need more than one breath to extend your leg or bend your knee, that's fine. Just do your best and avoid holding your breath.

Caution

- Be sure to bend your knee toward your belly before extending your leg straight up. Avoid lifting a straight leg up from the ground.
- If your low back feels strained, try rooting your low back into the ground by engaging your belly throughout the movement.

Supple Spine Flow

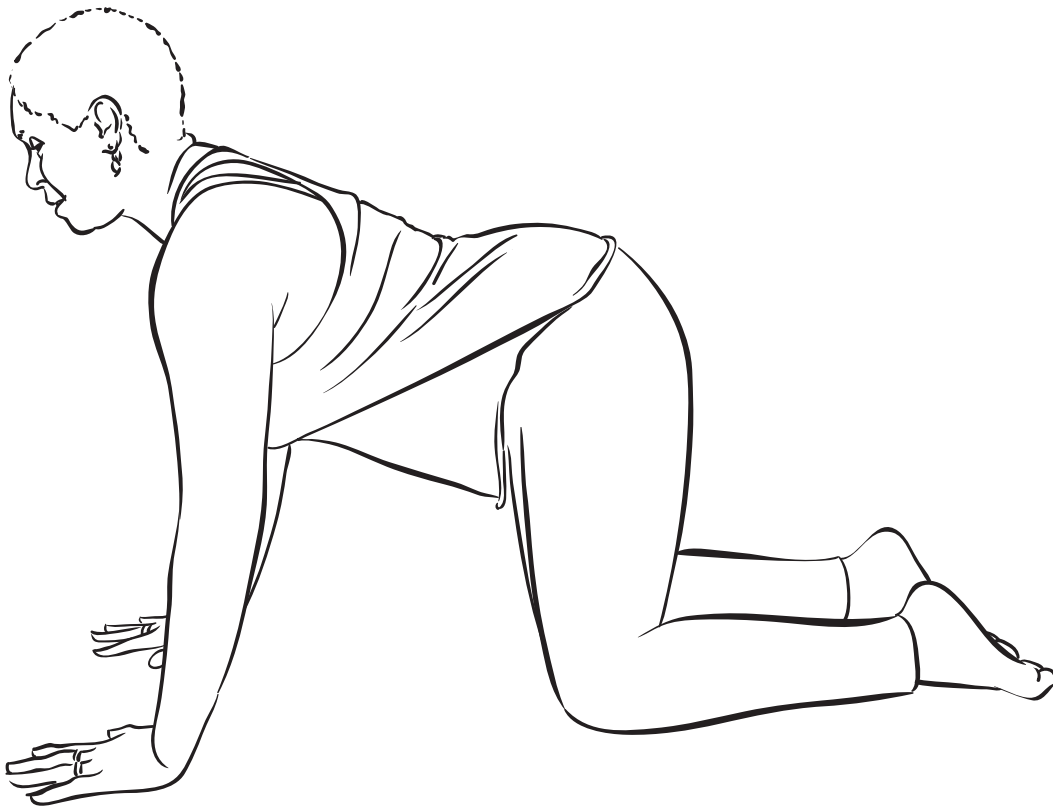


Figure 9.1

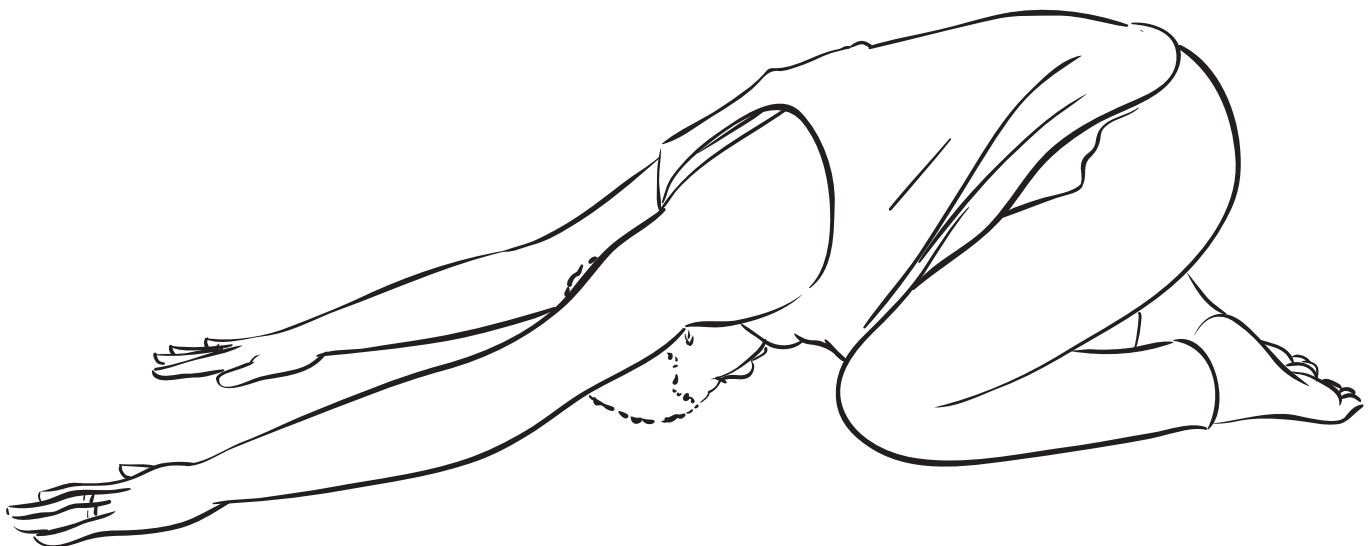


Figure 9.2

Setup

Come down onto your hands and knees on a mat or soft carpet. In this table-top position, place your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Feel free to cushion your wrists and/or your knees with a folded towel or other prop.

Movement

Inhale as you lift and extend your breastbone toward the wall in front of you and your tailbone toward the wall behind you (see figure 9.1).

Exhale as you drop your tailbone down and relax your head toward the ground. Avoid emphasizing the rounding of your upper back as you relax your head and tailbone down—in other words, do not press down with your arms to strongly round your back.

Inhale and lift your heart forward and your tailbone up and back—so your spine arches in two directions, like a smile.

Exhale and relax your tailbone and your head down.

Continue extending and articulating your spine in this way for a few breaths, trying to synchronize your movement with your breath.

Next, as you exhale and drop your tailbone and head, also move your buttocks as close as they will come to your heels (see figure 9.2). This posture is known as Child's pose.

Inhale back to hands and knees, and extend your heart forward and your tailbone behind you.

Exhale as you drop your tailbone and move your buttocks back toward your heels again into Child's pose.

Continue this rhythm for a few breaths.

Then pause with your buttocks as close to your heels as they will comfortably go, and relax your head toward the ground. If your forehead doesn't comfortably reach the ground, please give it a place to rest—be sure your head doesn't just hang. You might

stack your palms or fists and rest your forehead on them. Or, if you prefer, rest your forehead on a block or cushion.

Relax here for several breaths, inviting your breath to nourish your low back, waist, shoulder blades, and neck.

Remember

- If your wrists aren't able to support the weight of the arms and shoulders, explore coming onto your fists or lowering down onto your forearms.
- If your knees and/or wrists are sensitive, try placing a pillow or a rolled towel under them.
- Bring your buttocks back toward your heels only as far as is comfortable.
- Welcome the simple pleasure of just being.

Caution

- Avoid pressing into the ground with your hands when your head and tailbone are dropped. Pushing your spine into this rounded "Halloween cat" position can place too much force on the vertebrae.

Plank Progression

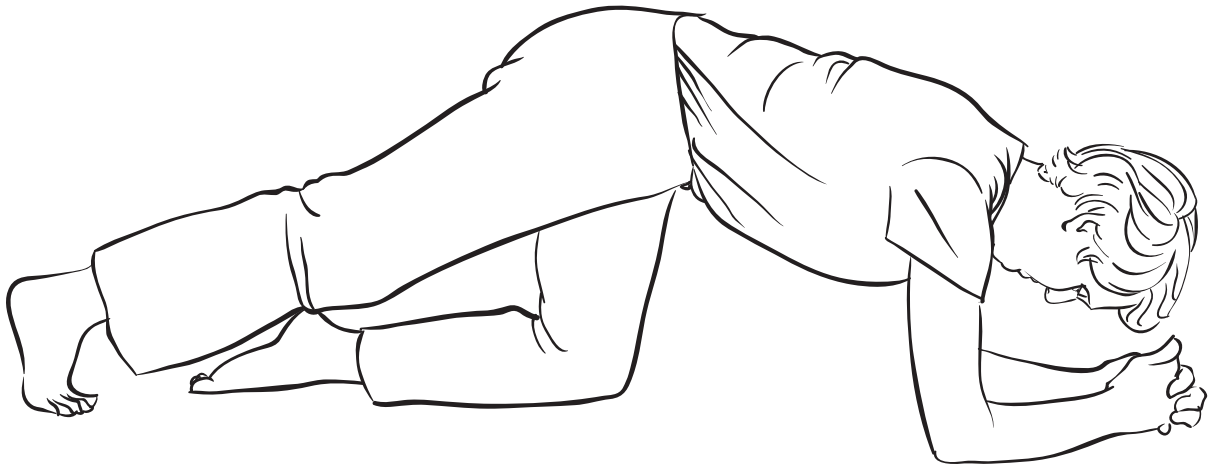


Figure 10.9

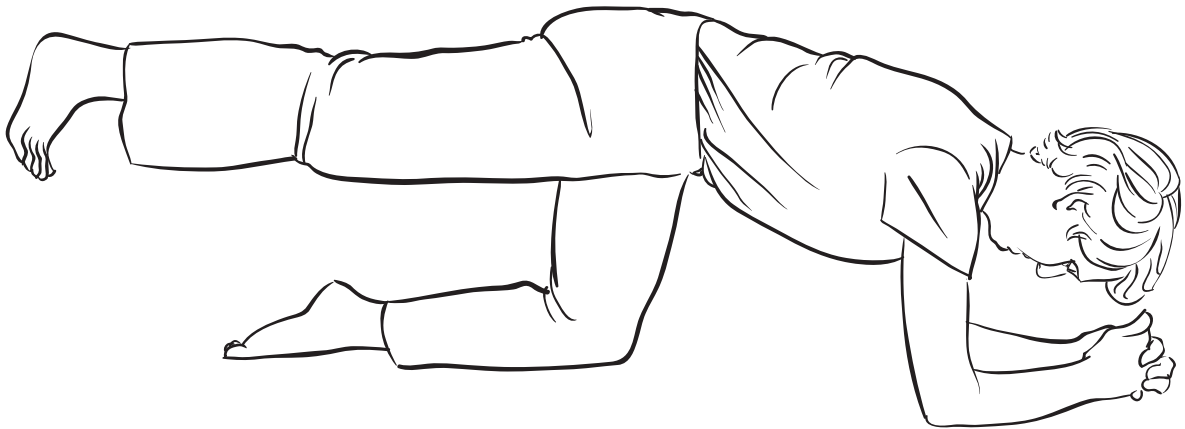


Figure 10.10

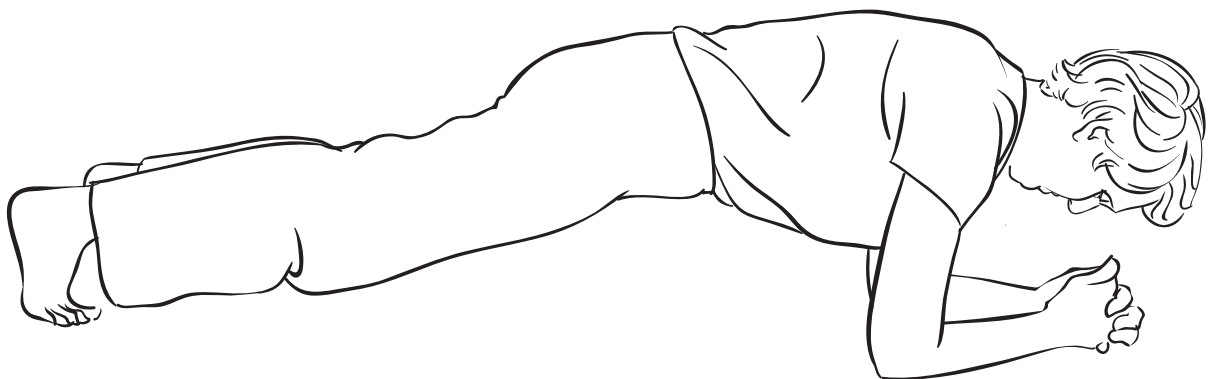


Figure 10.11

Setup

Come onto your hands and knees on a mat or soft carpet. Lower your forearms to the ground, with your elbows under your shoulders. Interlace your fingers and create a tripod of support. Tune in to your breath.

Movement

Engage the muscles of your lower belly using the action of the Royal Cough (see page 168).

Draw your shoulders back and down.

Root your forearms into the ground to engage your arms and chest.

Step your right leg back, toes tucked under so they rest on the mat or carpet (see figure 10.9).

Balance your weight between your right and left arms.

Explore lifting your right leg up to the height of your hip, toes and knee facing down (see figure 10.10).

Take a few easy breaths, then return your right knee to the ground.

Step your left leg back, toes tucked under, and balance the weight evenly between both arms.

Explore lifting your left leg up to the height of your hip, toes and knee facing down.

Breathe here until you are ready to return your left knee to the ground.

To increase the challenge, explore stepping both legs back with the toes tucked under (see figure 10.11).

Extend your tailbone toward your heels, root into the ground with your forearms, and engage the muscles of your belly.

Maintain ease in your breath.

When you are done, release your knees to the ground and stretch your back by bringing your hips toward your heels in Child's pose.

Remember

- Keep your breath flowing smoothly.
- Move through the variations as you feel ready. There is no rush. Strength will build over time.

Mountain Pose

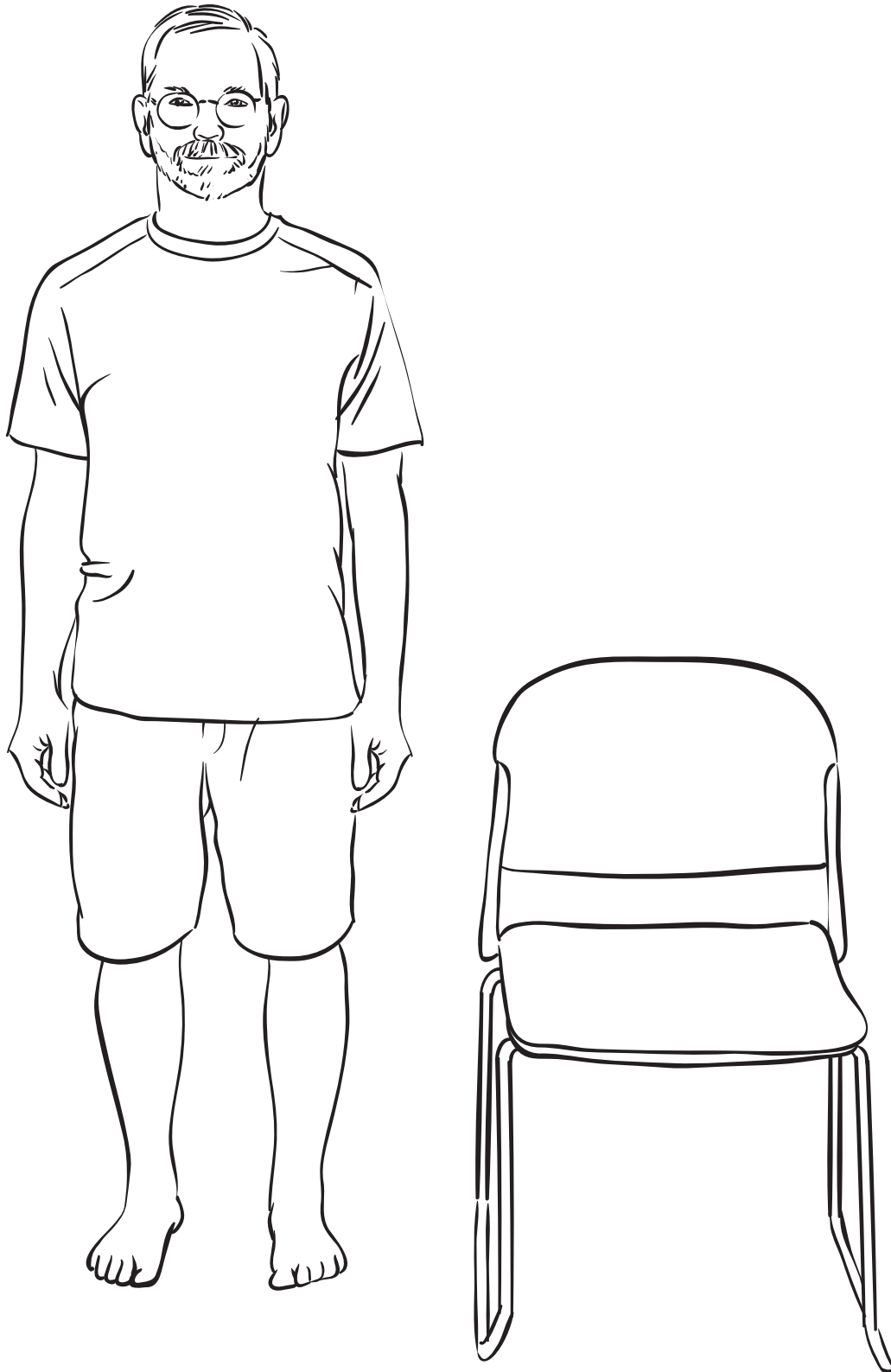


Figure 6.1 Mountain pose

Setup

Stand beside or behind your chair, close enough to lightly touch the back of the chair for support, if needed. Position your feet hip-width apart and snuggle the soles of your feet into the ground.

Movement

Energize your legs, as if you were drawing up energy from the ground.

Release your tailbone down toward the ground, lengthening your lower back.

Gently draw your lower belly in and up, and lift your rib cage up off of your pelvis.

Relax your shoulders down away from your ears, and allow your arms to rest by your sides.

Extend the top of your head up toward the sky, so that your spine elongates.

Let your chin be parallel to the ground, neither lifted nor tucked.

Gaze softly toward the horizon, with your shoulders, throat, and face relaxed (see figure 6.1).

Let the light of your heart shine forward.

Take several slow, easy breaths, filling and emptying your lungs completely.

Remember

- Feel yourself as strong and stable as a mountain.
- Sense the simultaneous downward and upward energies: rooting your legs and lifting your spine.

Warrior 2



Figure 6.5 Warrior 2 pose

Setup

Stand behind your chair with your legs in a wide stance.

Movement

Rotate the toes of your right foot 90 degrees to the right.

Rotate the toes of your left foot about 15 degrees or so to the right. Gently root into your left heel.

Inhale and extend your arms out to your sides while lengthening your spine upward.

Exhale and bend your right knee until it is over your right heel and pointing in the same direction as the toes of your right foot.

Rotate your head to look out over the fingers of your right hand (see figure 6.5).

Inhale and straighten your right knee.

Exhale and bend your right knee.

Continue for a few breath cycles.

Linger in the bent-knee position for a few breaths if you like.

Repeat on the other side.

Remember

- Make sure you can see your toes when you bend your knee—avoid bending the knee so deeply that you can't see your toes.
- Keep your bent knee pointing in the same direction as the toes to avoid straining your inner or outer knee.
- Hold the chair lightly with one hand if you need support.

Caution

- This is a large-muscle activity and can be demanding. Please keep your breath flowing comfortably. Avoid holding your breath.

Triangle



Figure 6.7 Triangle pose

Setup

Stand behind your chair in a wide stance, as with Warrior 2 and Side-Angle poses.

Movement

Rotate the toes of your right foot 90 degrees to the right.

Rotate the toes of your left foot about 15 degrees to the right. Gently root into your left heel. Keep your legs straight, but don't lock your knees.

Inhale and extend your arms to the sides while lengthening your spine upward.

Exhale and root into your feet as you tilt your torso to the right, keeping both sides of your torso long and your legs straight.

Lengthen your right arm toward your right leg. Let your right hand rest on the chair for support, if you like.

Extend your left arm either out to the left or up toward the sky (see figure 6.7). Keep your gaze forward, keeping the front and back of your neck long.

Linger here for several breaths, keeping your breathing steady and inviting any tense places to soften.

To come out of the pose, relax your arm down and bring your body back to center.

Repeat on the other side.

When you are done, come to Mountain pose and notice what arises.

Remember

- Keep both legs straight during this posture. It's fine to let your knees be soft and not locked.
- Be sure your top shoulder does not droop forward toward your chest. Feel broadness in your collarbones.
- If the shoulder of the lifted arm is tensing toward the neck, invite your shoulder blades to come together in the back of your body to bring softness and ease to the base of your neck.

Eagle

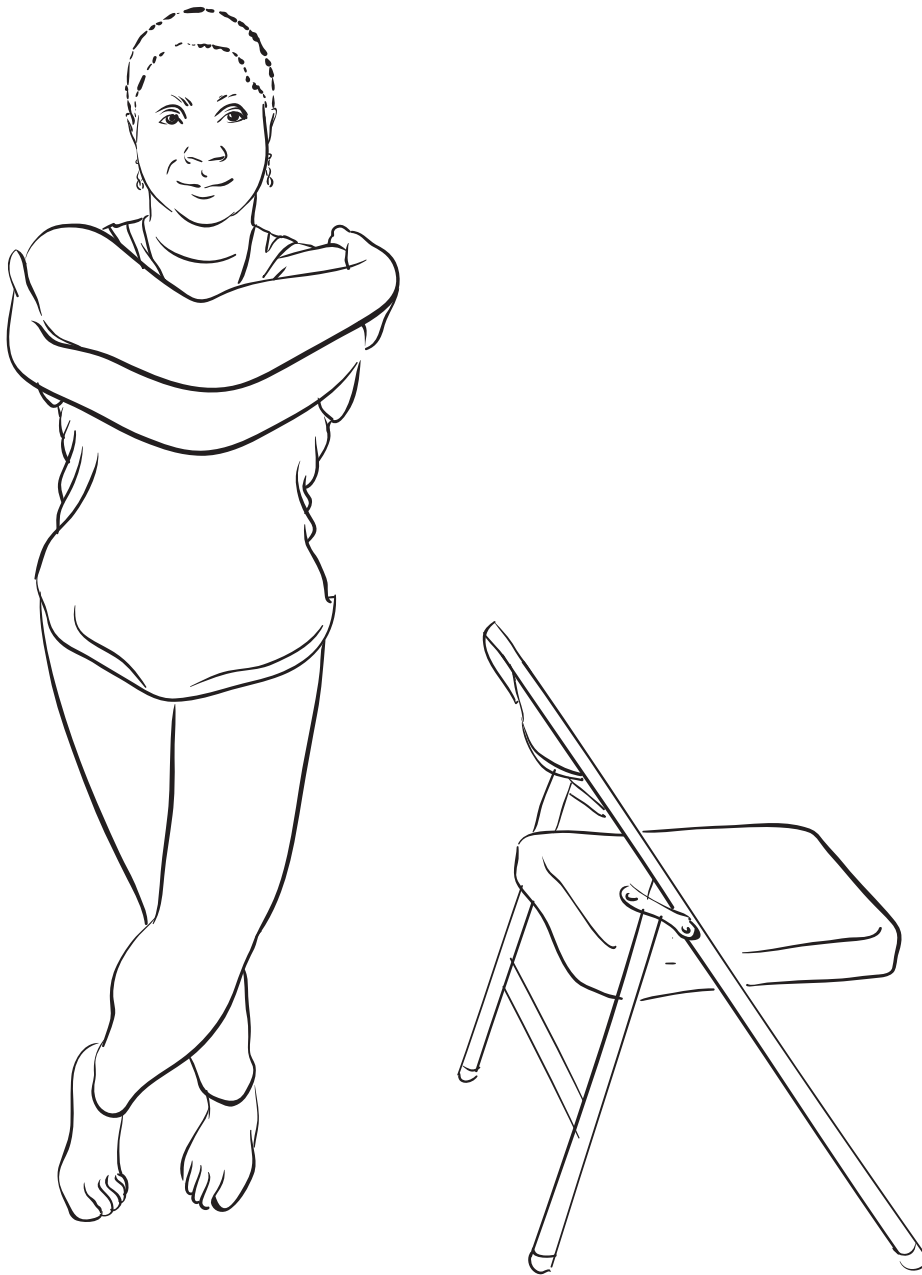


Figure 8.8

Setup

Stand behind or beside your chair close enough to lightly hold on to the back of the chair for support. Position your feet hip-width apart, and feel the ground beneath your feet.

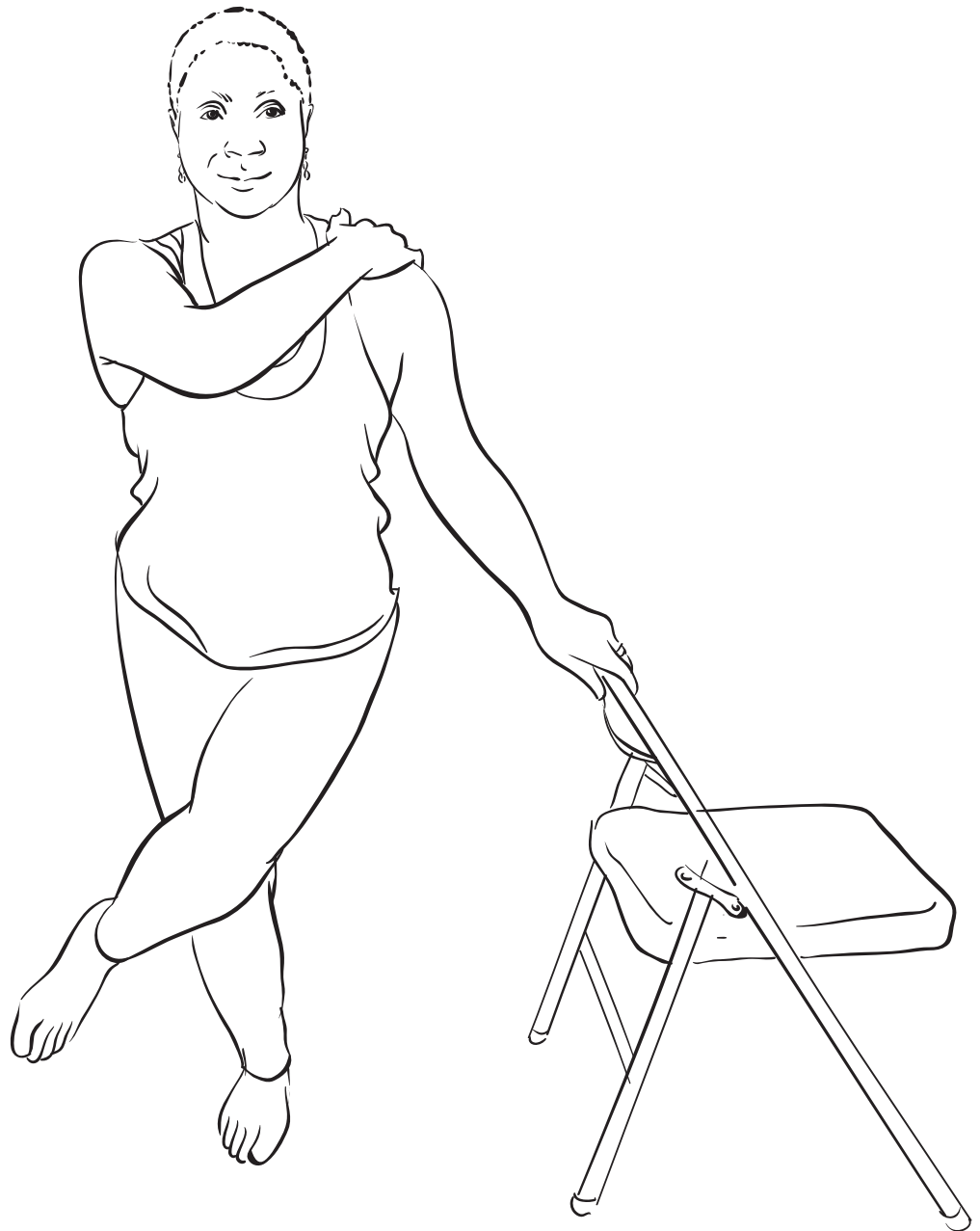


Figure 8.9

Movement

Stand tall in Mountain pose.

Inhale your arms out to the sides of your body so that they are extended at shoulder height.

Exhale and cross your right arm over your left arm in front of your chest, as close to your chest as is comfortable.

Land the right hand on the left shoulder and the left hand on the right shoulder.

Keep your shoulders relaxed as you invite your elbows to lift off of your chest.

Focus your gaze at a point on the horizon.

Shift the weight of your body into your right leg, keeping your hips steady.

Take a baby step forward with your left foot as you send “roots” down your right leg.

If this feels steady, move your left foot in front of your right foot.

If you still feel balanced, step your left foot over your right foot (see figure 8.8).

If this feels steady, lift your left foot off the ground, hugging your thighs together. Feel free to touch the chair for support with one hand if you like (see figure 8.9).

Find the position that allows you to maintain your balance.

Take a few easy breaths in the position where you feel challenged but comfortable.

Inhale and step your feet back into Mountain pose, extending your arms out to the side.

Exhale and relax your arms down to your sides.

Repeat on the other side.

When you are done, stand in Mountain pose and breathe comfortably.

Remember

- Check in with your balance at each step. Be sure you feel steady before you progress further.
- Notice any differences in how the standing leg feels after the pose.
- Feel the responses of the body: the sensations, the emotions, the thoughts, the breath.
- Pay attention to any self-talk, and remember to treat yourself with kindness.
- Stay present with the experience of the body letting go of the posture.

Baby Cobra



Figure 9.5 Baby Cobra pose

Setup

Rest on your belly with your elbows bent, one hand placed on top of the other as in Crocodile pose. Rest your cheek, chin, or forehead on the back of your stacked hands. Pause here and take several belly-focused breaths.

Movement

Move your arms down along your sides, palms down. Rest your forehead or chin on the ground.

Root the front of your pelvis into the ground.

Extend your legs back and press the tops of your feet into the ground.

Shrug your shoulders back and down.

Inhale and lift your head, shoulders, and chest up off the ground (see figure 9.5).

Exhale and soften a bit so that your body moves slightly back toward the ground.

Continue with this integration of breath and posture: inhale and lift, exhale and soften.

Keep energy moving down through your legs.

Explore remaining in the lifted position while still feeling the rise and fall of the breath.

On an exhalation, release back to the ground and rest.

Breathe into your back and notice where your breath moves.

Remember

- Only lift your head, shoulders, and chest as high as comfortable. Your strength will build over time with practice.
- Keep the front and back of your neck long, without jutting the chin forward. This means your gaze will likely be down, not forward.

Bridge



Figure 9.7 Bridge pose

Setup

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Place your feet flat on the ground and hip-width apart. Rest your arms at your sides, palms down. Tune in to your breath.

Movement

Inhale and root down with your feet and arms as you lift your hips up off the ground (see figure 9.7).

Exhale and release your hips back down.

Continue with this easy lifting and lowering: inhale your hips up and exhale them down. Try to keep your legs parallel—avoid letting your knees “knock” in or splay out.

For more challenge, stay in the “up” position for a few slow, full breaths.

When you are done, return your hips to the ground and rest.

Remember

- Be sure your head is properly aligned: your chin should be in line with the little “notch” in your collarbones.
- Bring your chin slightly lower than your forehead, but don’t flatten your neck. Be sure to keep the natural curve in your neck so that there is a little space behind it.
- Keep your breath flowing. Avoid holding your breath.
- Only lift your hips as high as comfortable. Your strength will build over time with practice.

Knees to Chest



Figure 9.8 Knees-to-Chest pose

Setup

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the ground, and arms at your sides. If your chin is higher than your forehead, place a folded blanket or towel behind your head so that your chin is at the same level—or slightly below—your forehead. Tune in to your breath.

Movement

Bring both knees toward your chest as close as is comfortable.

Hold on to your legs behind your knees or on top of your shins (see figure 9.8).

Welcome breath into the back of your body—your tailbone, your love handles, behind your heart.

Linger here for several breaths. You might notice that, as you inhale and fill your body with breath, your thighs move slightly away from your body. As you exhale and release used air, you might hug your thighs in just a little more and feel the sensation of stretch in your low back.

After 3 to 5 breaths, or when you are ready, return the soles of the feet to the ground with your knees bent.

Remember

- If it feels like a strain to hold your legs with your hands, use a strap over your shins or behind your thighs to keep your thighs close to your belly. If this still feels stressful, let your arms rest at your sides. You can also hug one leg at a time if that is more comfortable. If you have knee arthritis, it may be more comfortable to hold behind your thighs instead of holding your shins.
- Feel free to widen your thighs to make room for your belly, if you like.
- Notice how the waves of breath and the waves of sensation come into relationship.
- Discover the various responses—physical, emotional, mental, energetic—to the posture.

Relaxation

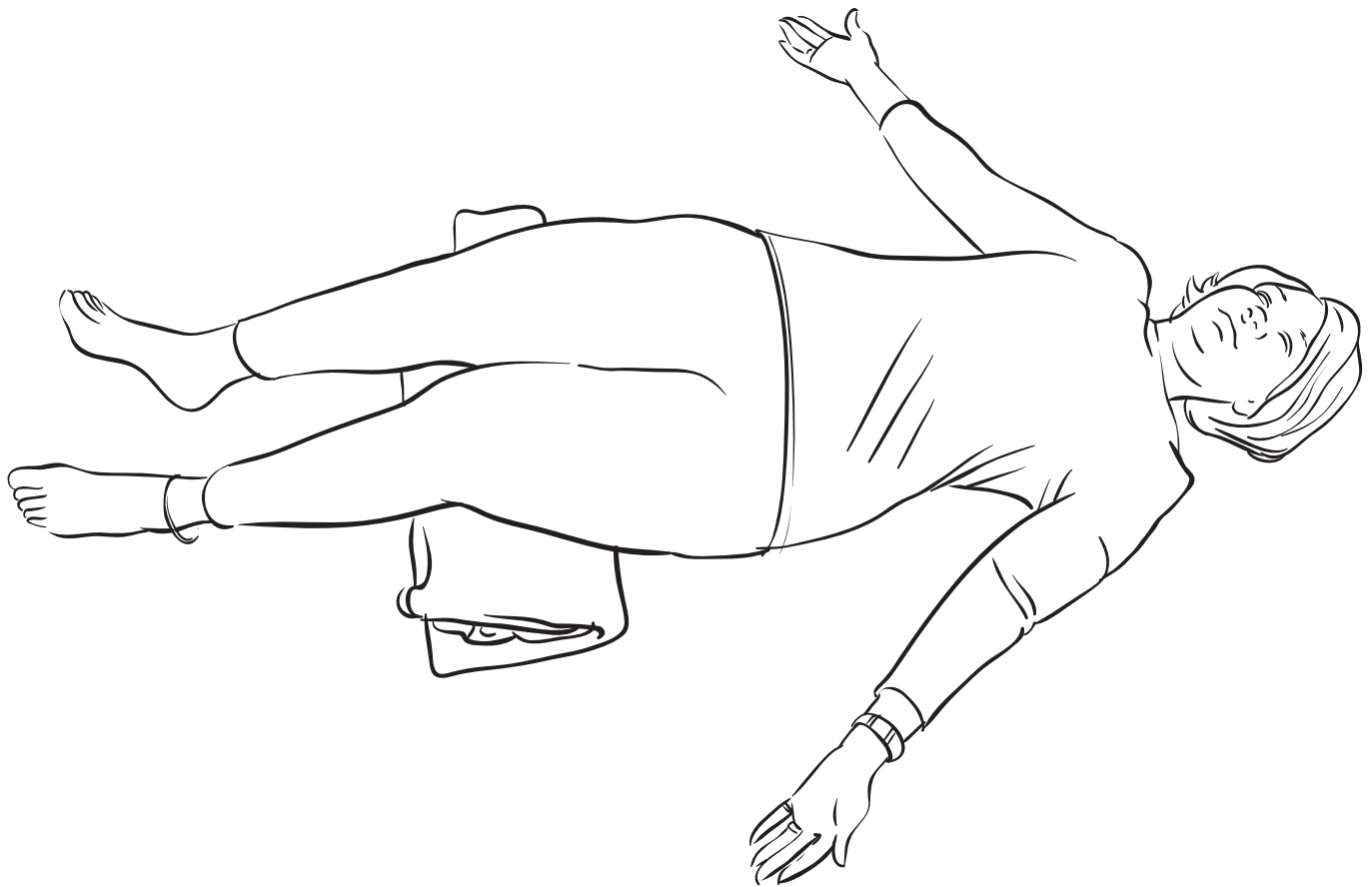


Figure 5.9 Relaxation pose

Setup

Rest with your legs straight or knees bent, whichever is most comfortable. Feel free to place a rolled blanket or towel under your knees. Let your hands relax by your sides, palms turned up or down, whichever position allows your shoulders to feel the most at ease (see figure 5.9). Close your eyes and give over the weight of your body to the ground.

Movement

Take a full breath in and let it go with a sigh.

Again, take a full breath in and release with a sigh.

One last time, take a full breath in and exhale with a sigh.

Become aware of the pool of sensation that is your body.

Feel the sensations of your feet, your legs, your pelvis, your torso, your hands, your arms, your shoulders, your neck, and your head.

Sense into your body as a whole, greet your body with kindness, and let it be.

Become aware of the waves of your emotional heart.

Sense the joy, the fear, the contentment, the anger, the sadness, the love.

Feel the currents of your heart all at once, greet your heart with kindness, and let it be.

Become aware of your thinking mind and the tendencies of your thinking mind.

Recognize the remembering, the forgetting, the liking, the disliking, the comparing, the evaluating, and the creativity.

Notice all of the tendencies of your thinking mind at once, greet your thinking mind with kindness, and let it be.

For now, the invitation is to simply *be*.

Remember

- The “undoing” is as important as the doing—learning how to let go and be still is as essential as learning how to move. Give yourself plenty of time for relaxation.
- Consider setting a timer for 5 or 10 minutes—or however long you want to practice Relaxation pose—so you can completely surrender to the experience.