

Short and Sweet

This brief, gentle practice is perfect for times when your body needs extra TLC.

Three-Part Breath

Range-of-Motion Sequence

Supple Spine Flow

Spinal Balance

Sphinx

Knees to Chest

Hand to Big Toe

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.

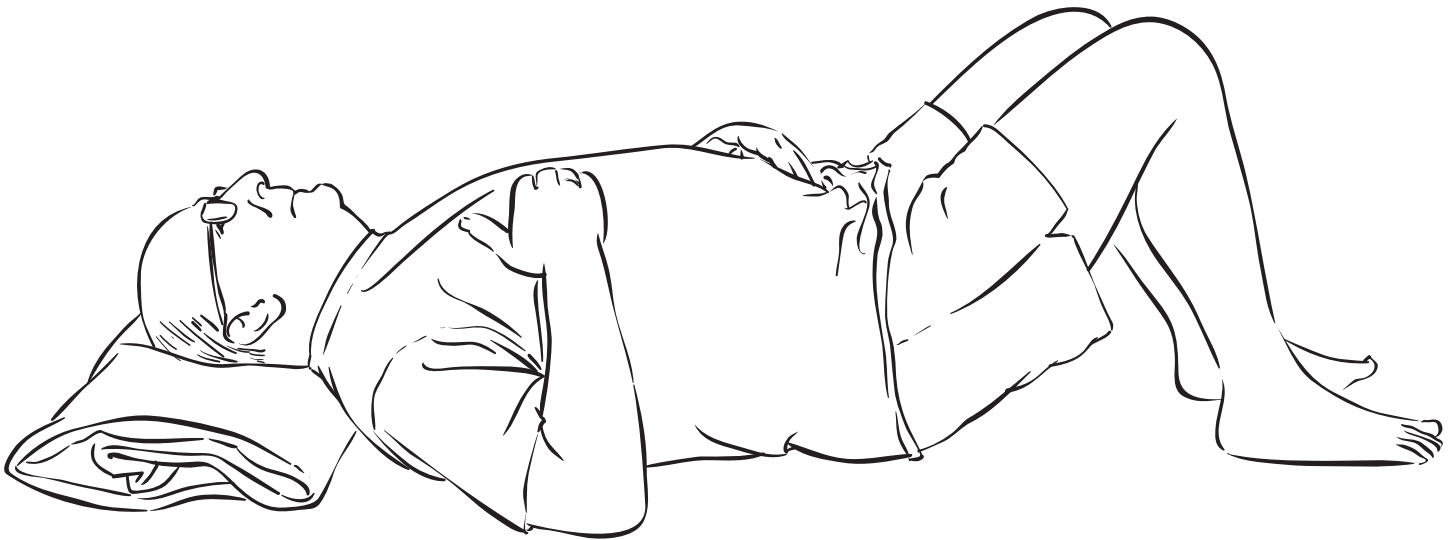


Figure 5.1 Three-Part Breath

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

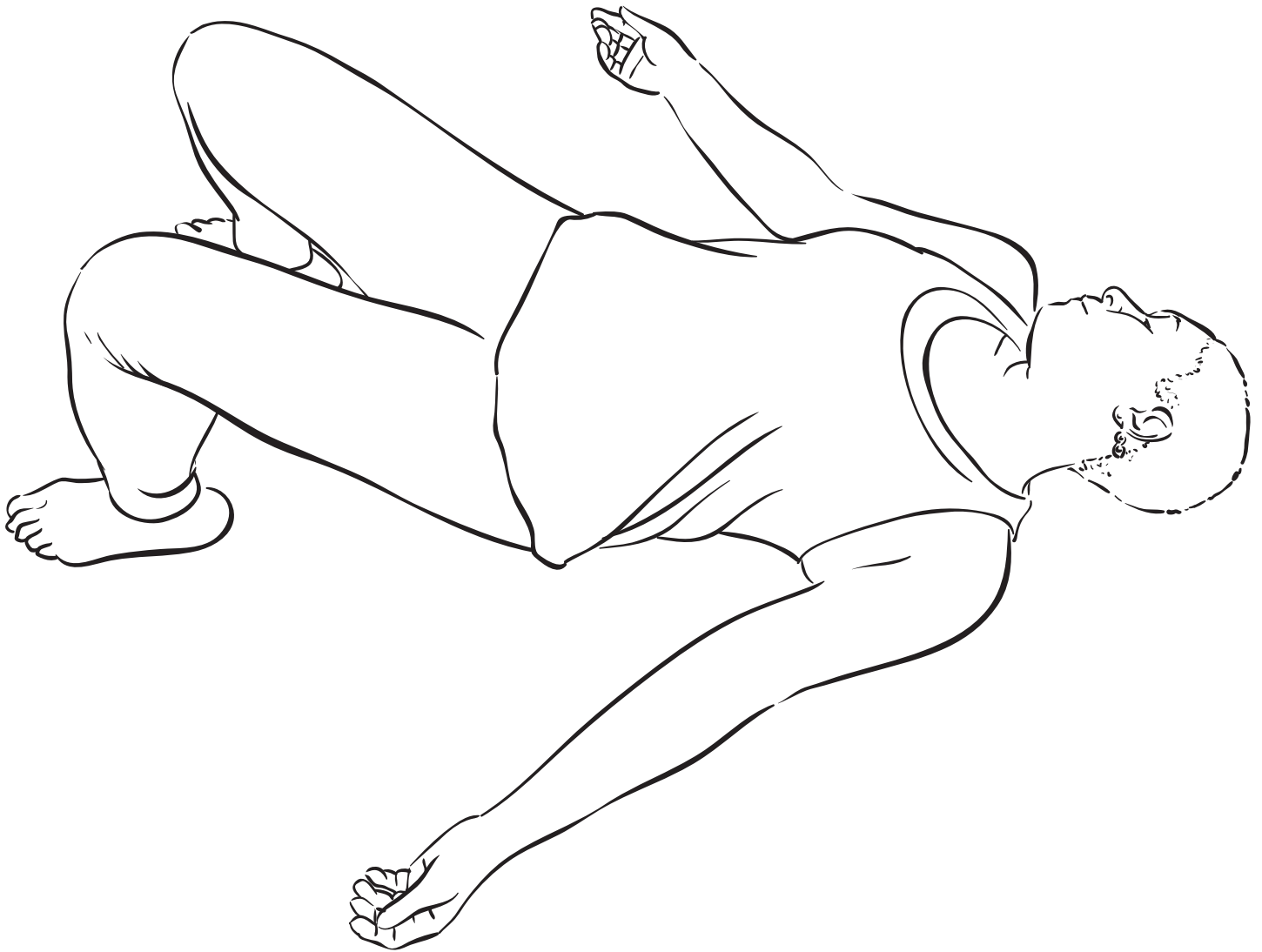


Figure 5.2 Neck Release

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

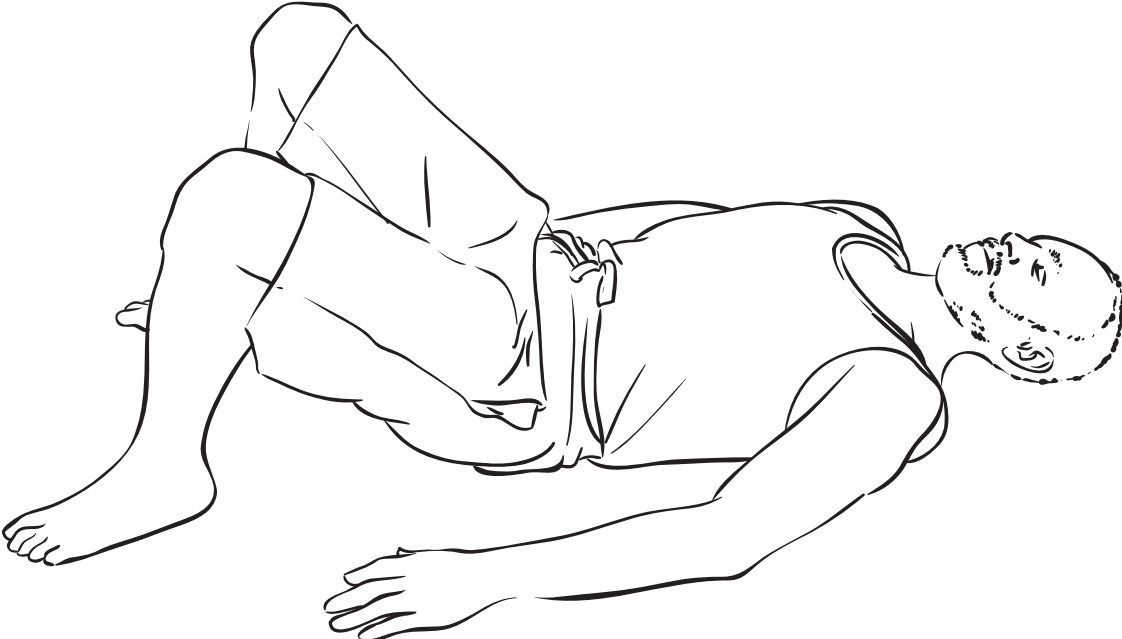


Figure 5.4



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

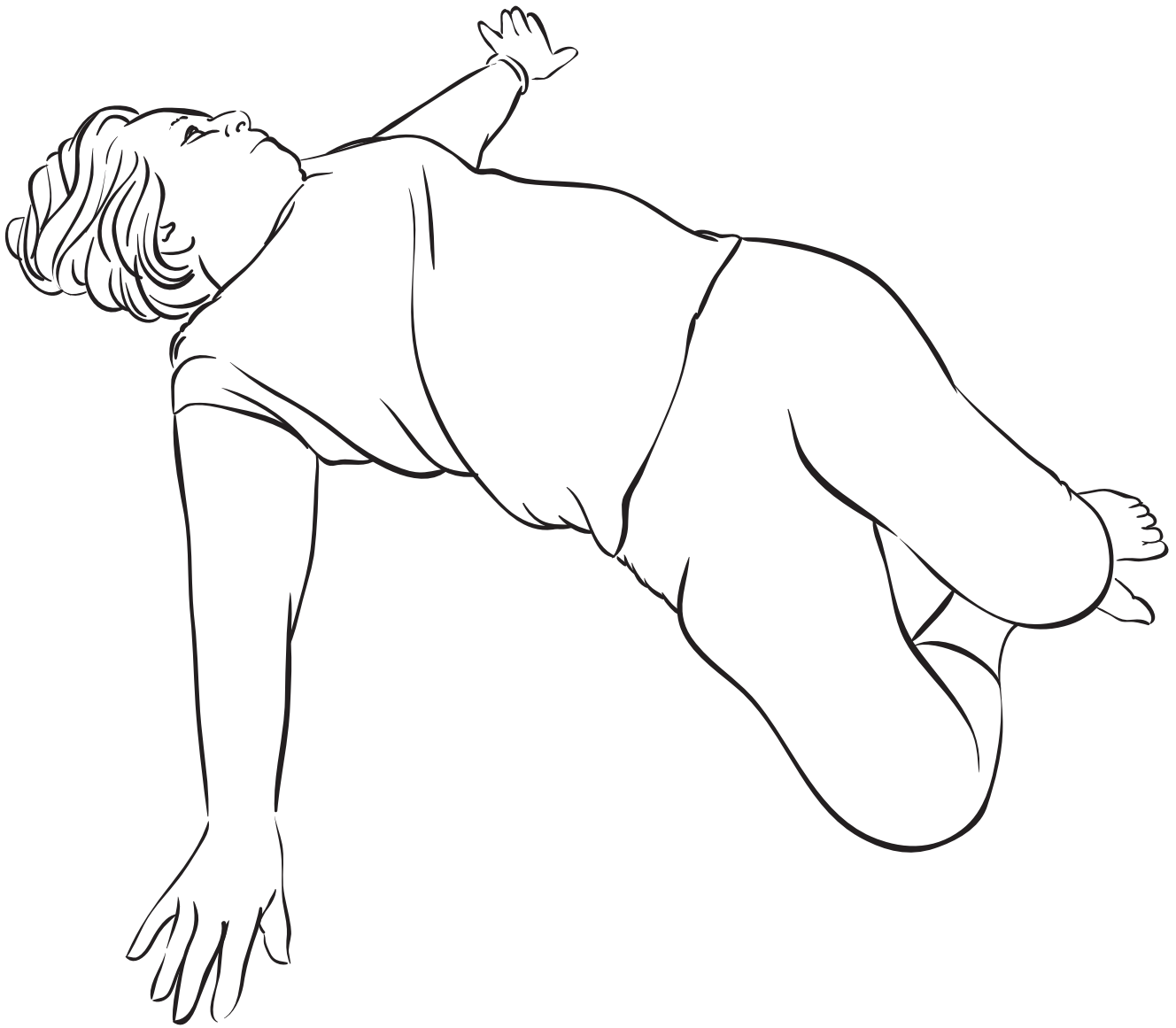


Figure 5.8 Supine Twist

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.

Supple Spine Flow

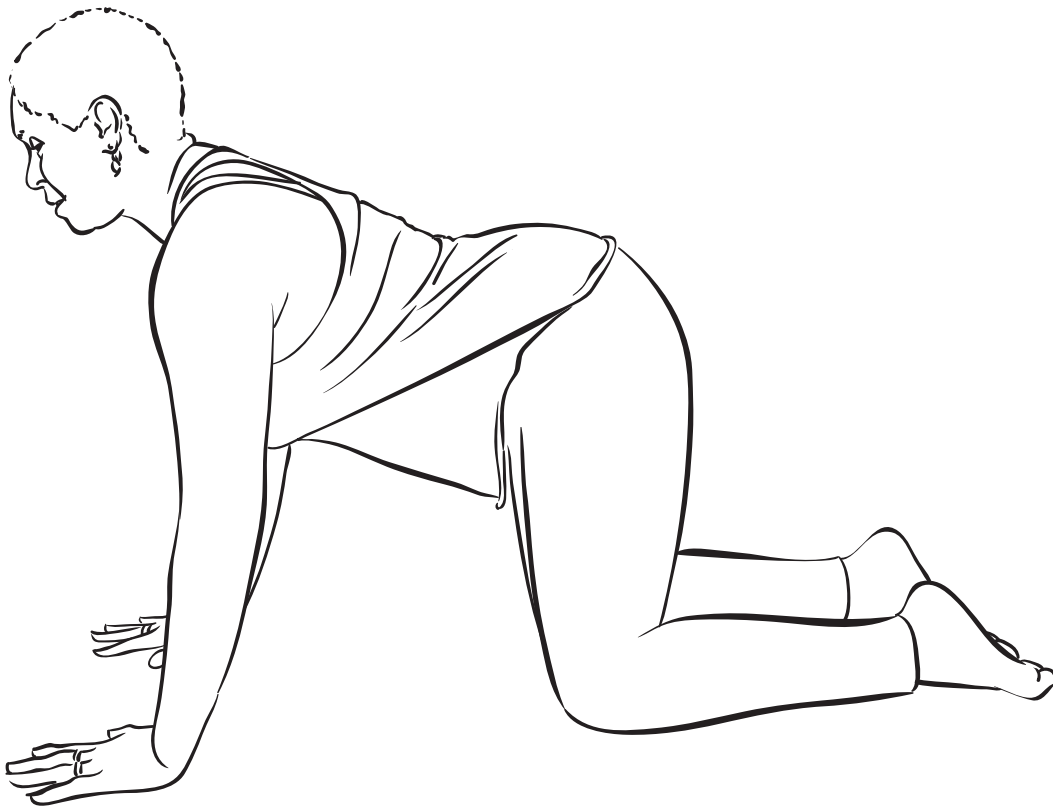


Figure 9.1

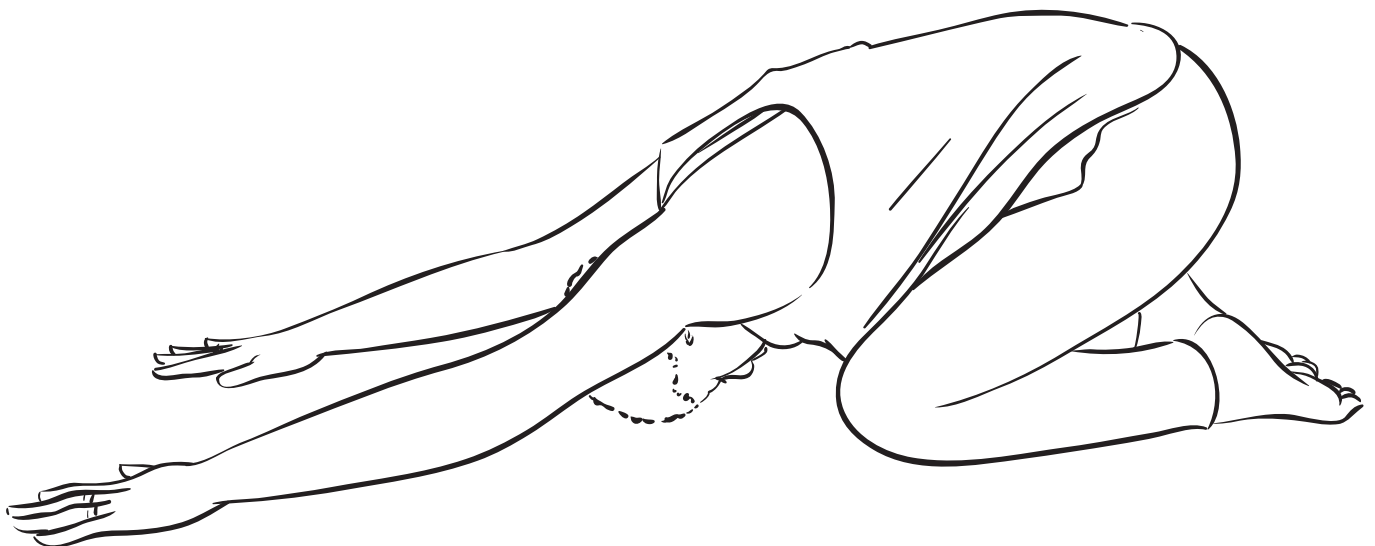


Figure 9.2

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.

Spinal Balance

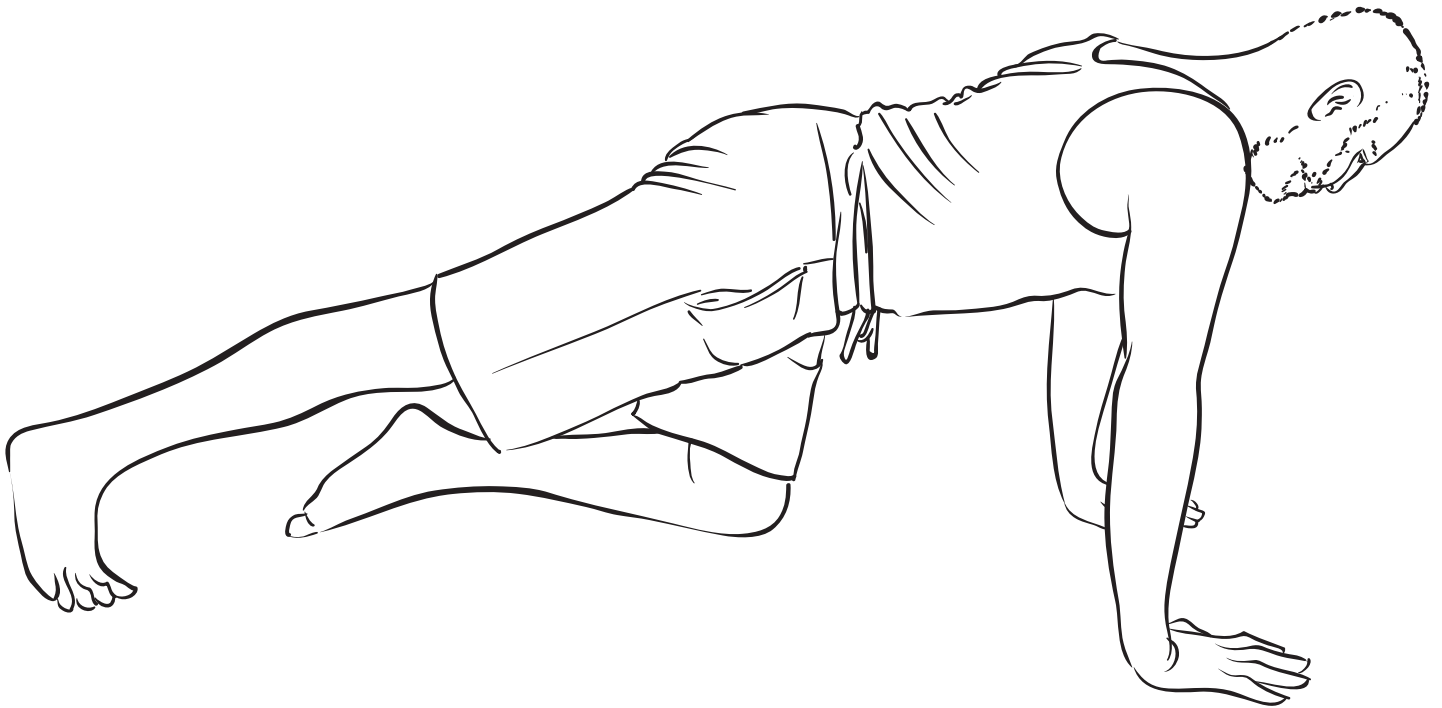


Figure 10.6

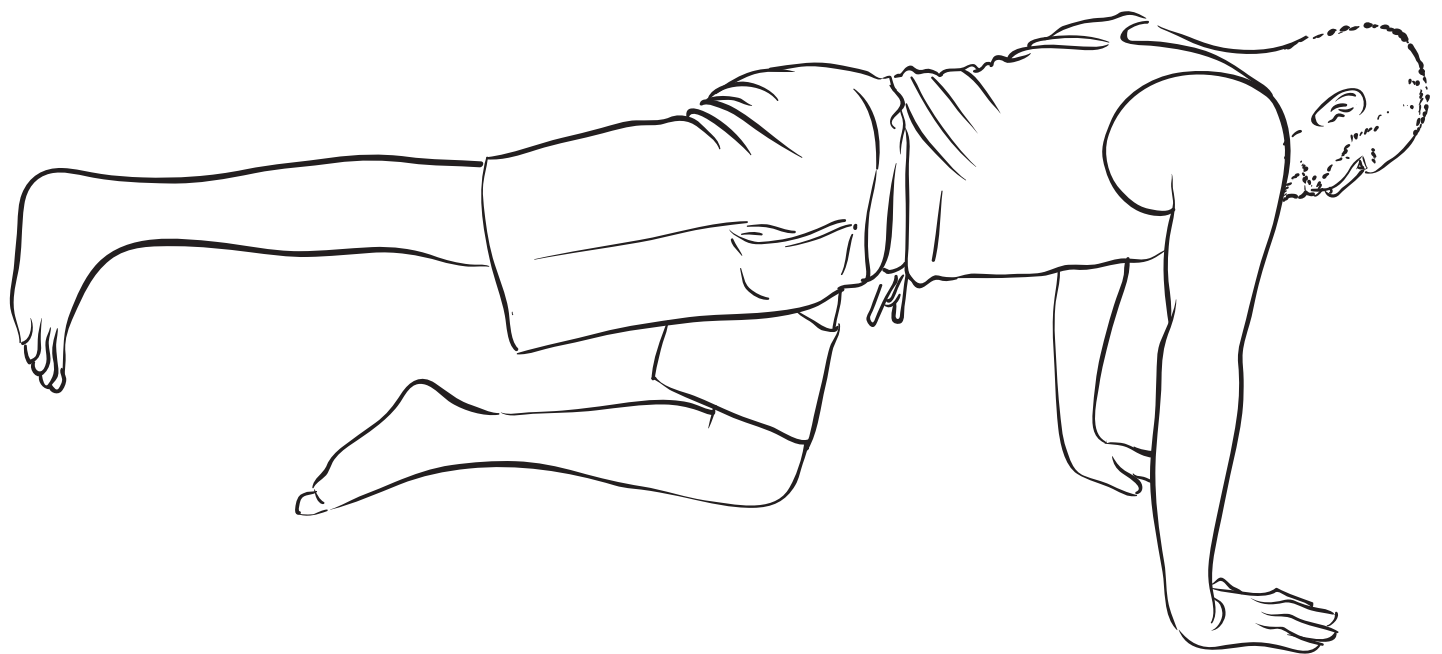


Figure 10.7

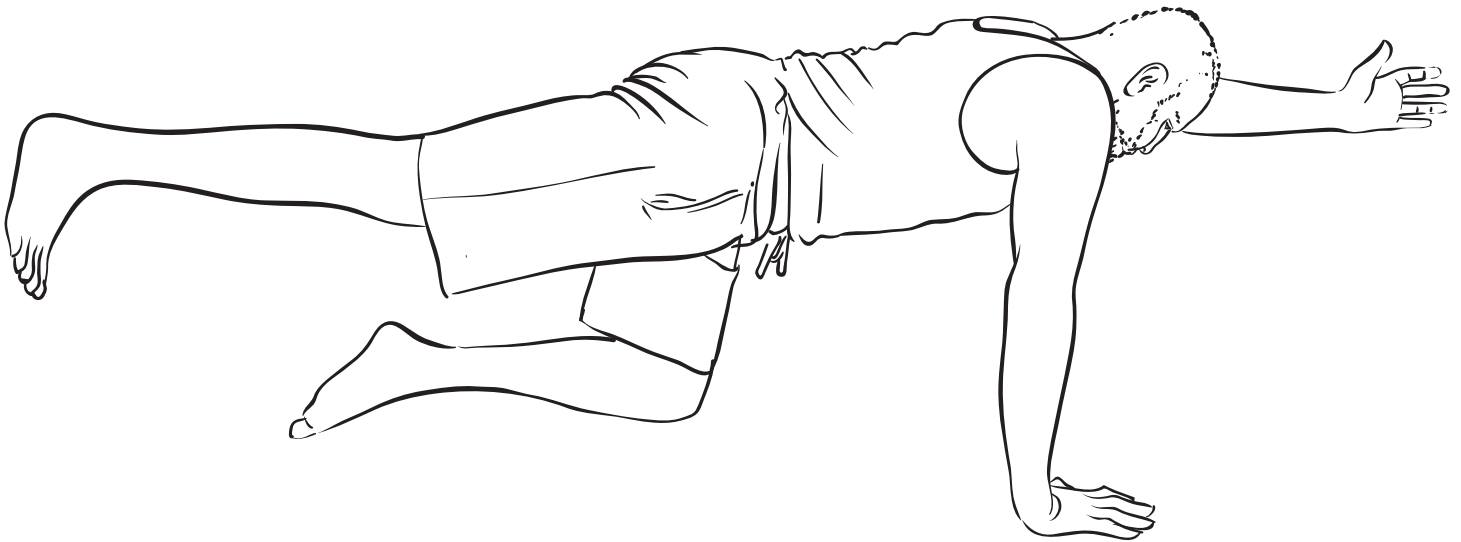


Figure 10.8

Setup

Come onto your hands and knees on a mat or soft carpet. In this tabletop 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. Tune in to your breath.

Movement

Root down into your hands. Feel a sense of aliveness in your arms and chest. Be sure to keep length in your spine, with the top of your head extending forward and your tailbone extending back.

Draw your belly toward your spine using the action of the Royal Cough (see page 168).

Extend your right leg back and tuck your toes under so they rest on the ground (see figure 10.6).

On an inhalation, lift your right leg up with your foot flexed, keeping the front of your knee and the tips of your toes pointing directly toward the ground (see figure 10.7).

Keep your breath flowing as you continue to extend your leg back, as if your heel could touch the wall behind you. Be sure that the front of your right hip is parallel to the ground.

To add more challenge, crawl the fingers of your left hand forward, then float your left arm up (see figure 10.8).

Rotate the palm of your left hand so that your thumb is pointing toward the sky.

Maintain strength and awareness in your belly to support your extended limbs by hugging the belly to the spine.

Lengthen across the diagonal of your body, extending from the fingertips of your left hand to the heel of your right foot.

After a few breaths, return your hand and knee to the ground.

Relax your head and let your tailbone be heavy.

Breathe into your back.

Repeat on the other side.

When you are finished, feel free to rest for several breaths in Child's pose.

Remember

- Let your breath be easy.
- If your knees are uncomfortable, try placing a pillow or rolled towel under them.
- If this position is too demanding for your wrists, try coming down onto your forearms, or make fists and balance on your knuckles. Sometimes a little cushion under the heels of your hands (such as a folded washcloth) can help.

Caution

- Avoid pushing into your hands too strongly—be sure not to round your back when you root down into your hands.

Sphinx

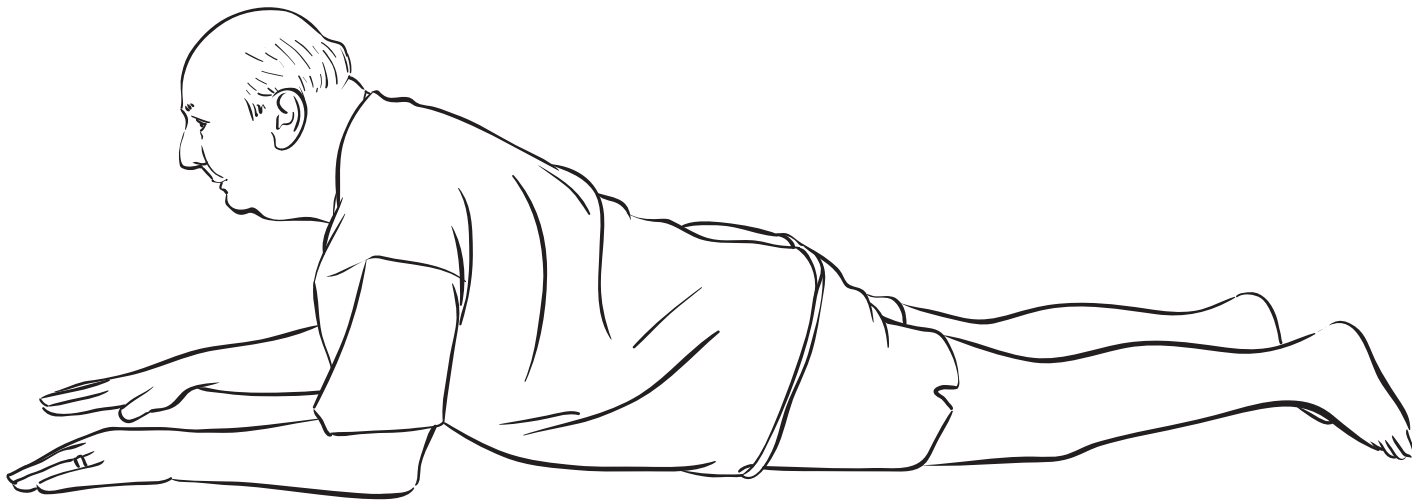


Figure 9.4 Sphinx pose

Setup

Rest on your belly. Place your elbows under your shoulders and bring your forearms parallel to each other with your palms on the ground.

Movement

Root the front of your pelvis into the ground.

Lengthen your legs behind you and press the tops of your feet into the ground (see figure 9.4).

Draw your shoulders back and down.

Beginning with your tailbone, invite each vertebrae to extend forward and up.

Lengthen up through the crown of your head.

Continue to lengthen back through your legs.

Root your forearms into the ground as you explore the action of “pulling the ground toward you” isometrically.

Breathe into your belly and chest for several breaths.

When you are ready to come out of this backbend, open your elbows out to the sides and pull the ground toward you with your hands to lengthen the spine.

Rest on the ground for several breaths. Then return to Crocodile pose one more time, if you like.

Remember

- Feel how and where the breath moves after a backbend.
- Notice if you feel a sensation of stretching across the front of your torso.

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.

Hand to Big Toe



Figure 11.21



Figure 11.22



Figure 11.23

Setup

Rest on your back with your knees bent and the soles of your feet flat on the ground. Have a strap nearby. Bring your arms alongside your body, palms down, and tune in to your breath.

Movement

Bend your right knee toward your belly and place a strap around the ball or arch of your right foot.

Inhale and extend your right foot up toward the sky, straightening your leg as much as you comfortably can. Keep your left knee bent, with your left foot on the ground (see figure 11.21).

Exhale and flex your right foot as you let your right thigh be heavy in the hip socket.

Pause here for several breaths, extending up through your right heel and releasing down through your right hip.

To deepen the stretch, extend your left leg along the ground, flexing your left foot and pointing your toes toward the sky (see figure 11.22).

Take several breaths here.

Take both sides of the strap in your right hand and place your left hand on your left thigh.

Bend your left knee again so that the sole of your left foot is flat on the ground.

Open your right leg to the right (see figure 11.23).

Keep your left hip and buttock heavy on the ground and allow your left knee to drift slightly to the left to help you counterbalance the weight of your extended right leg. Place your left hand on your left thigh or hip to keep the left side of your pelvis from lifting up.

Linger here for several breaths.

Inhale and bring your right leg back to center.

Exhale and allow your right foot to return to the ground.

Repeat on the other side.

Remember

- Extend the lifted leg only as long as is comfortable.
- If your chin juts upward and the back of your neck feels crunched, place a folded towel under your head.
- If you are unable (or prefer not) to get down on the ground, try this practice lying in your bed.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and on the ground. You may need to slide your hands down the strap to avoid creating stress in your hands, arms, and shoulders.
- As you lengthen into the stretch, bring attention to the different qualities of sensation that are present.

Relaxation

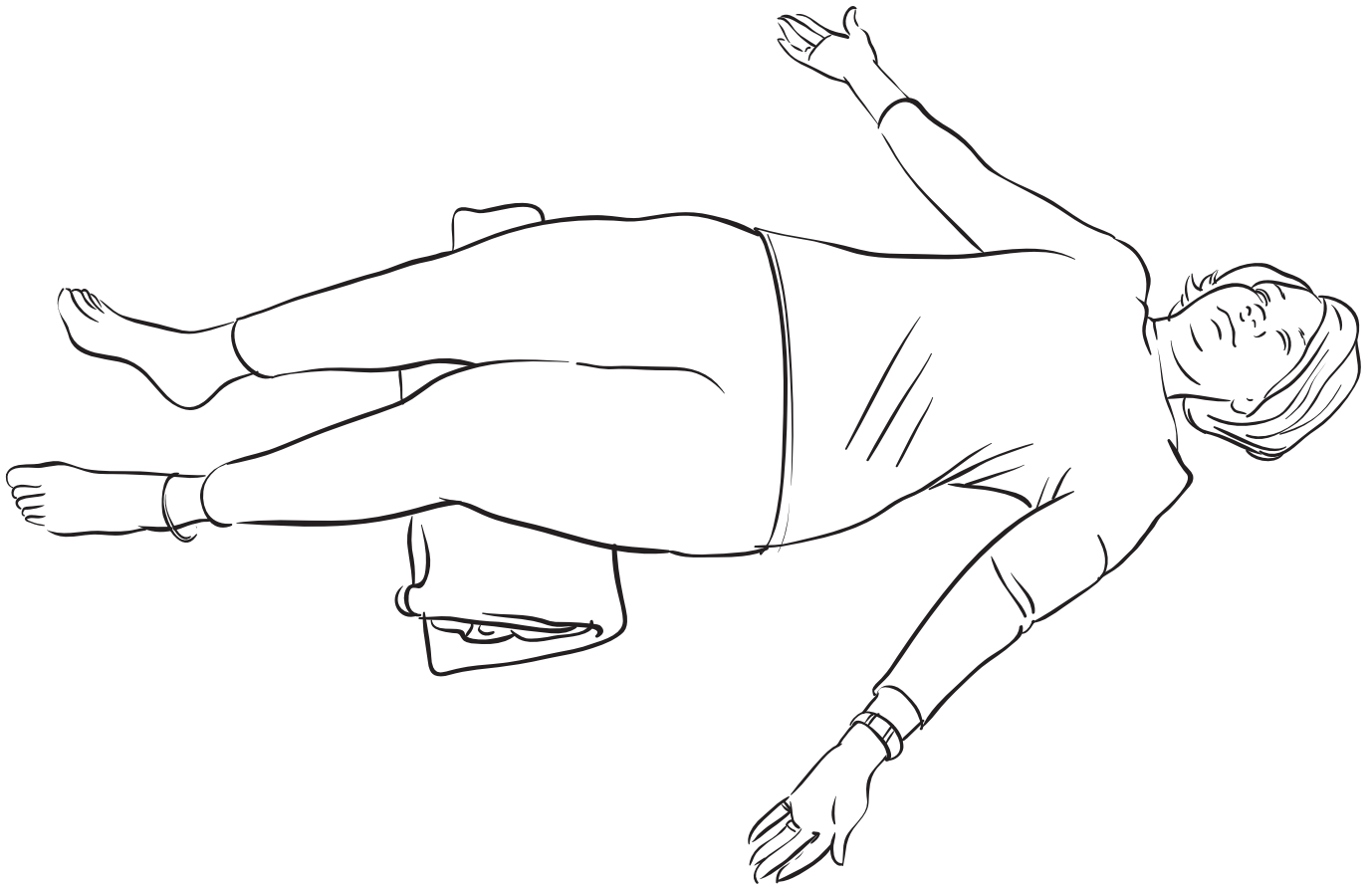


Figure 5.9 Relaxation pose

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.