



# CHAIR YOGA CURRICULUM

Yoga is an ancient science that originated in what is now Northern India about 5000 years ago. Yoga means “union” in Sanskrit, specifically, the union of body, mind, and spirit. Today, yoga has become a popular practice that helps one cope with the complexity and stress of modern life. At the Sean O’Shea Foundation we believe that the practice of yoga can help students of all ages to keep the body and mind working together to build strength, flexibility, balance and concentration while building new levels of body awareness, equanimity, and self-esteem.

The following chair yoga poses are organized into three sections: **warm ups**, **asanas** (postures), and **shavasana** (relaxation). Choose one or two from each section to create a practice for the amount of time available.

**Begin the practice** by sitting toward the front edge of the chair with a straight spine, sitting bones grounded, feet hip width apart and parallel. Encourage students to close their eyes, and practice some type of pranayama, eg. observation of the natural movement of the breath, three-part breath (inhale, hold, exhale), falling out breath (deep inhale, releasing with a big sigh) or alternate nostril breathing.

## WARM UPS

### SUFI CIRCLES

- ❖ Ground the feet into the earth, the sitting bones into the chair, and begin making small circles with the spine, focusing on the lower back and hips.
- ❖ Gradually increase the size of the circles as you bring your focus to the center of the spine and the core, making circles with your belly.
- ❖ Make the circles wider, including the shoulders and upper back and releasing head toward the chest.
- ❖ Slowly reduce the size of the circles until you are once again centered.
- ❖ Repeat in the opposite direction.
- ❖ At the end, sit up nice and tall and take a few deep breaths, bringing your focus to the entire length of the spine, from tailbone to crown.

### CAT/COW



- ❖ Open knees and feet diagonally from hips.
- ❖ Place hands on thighs, elbows out, fingers facing inward.
- ❖ Inhale, lift up through the sternum, lift your chin and arch your lower back (cow).
- ❖ Exhale, contract the belly inward, and round the spine until the chin is tucked in toward the throat (cat).
- ❖ Repeat 3-5 times, coordinating movement and breath.

### HEAD ROLLS

- ❖ Can be used as an alternative or in addition to Sufi Circles.
- ❖ Drop the chin toward the chest and roll it slowly side to side along the collarbone.
- ❖ *Variation:* Rest right ear to the shoulder; place the right hand on the head, left hand on left shoulder and gently pull the head toward the right shoulder, stretching the left side of the neck. Roll head to other side and repeat.
- ❖ To finish up, make a complete head circle in each direction.

## ARM STRETCHES

These are just a few variations. Remind students to sit up straight and ground the feet down. It's important to work with the breath. In general, inhale on the outward or upward arm movement and exhale as the arms come back in or down.

### Overhead Stretch



- ❖ *Basic:* Inhale and raise arms out to the sides and overhead, palms facing in. With the exhale lower arms to your sides. Coordinate movement and breath.
- ❖ *Variations:* 1) Interlace fingers and press palms toward ceiling 2) Take hold of opposite elbows behind the head and allow chin to drop forward. 3) With arms extended overhead, drop hands behind you toward shoulder blades, upper arms next to your ears. Each of these can be held for several breaths.

### Shoulder Stretch



- ❖ Inhale and open arms to sides, shoulder height; exhale and hug opposite shoulders. Switch arms with each repetition.
- ❖ *Variation:* 1) Wiggle fingers as if playing the piano as you open and close arms. 2) Keep arms extended and make wrist circles in both directions.

## Dolphin Arms



- ❖ With palms pressed together in prayer mudra, make a figure 8 with the finger tips.
- ❖ Bring hands back to center and make wrist circles in both directions, keeping the backs of hands together.

## Goal Post Arms



- ❖ Begin with arms in “goal post” position. Take three short inhales, moving the arms up with each breath until they are fully extended.
- ❖ Exhale and reach arms forward and down.
- ❖ *Variation:* Take one inhale to raise arms and three short exhales to lower them back down.

## ASANAS

### **SURYA NAMASKAR (Sun Salutation)**

- ❖ Begin with hands at heart center.
- ❖ Gaze to the tips of the fingers and as you inhale, watch your hands rise to the sky.
- ❖ On the exhale turn palms out and lower arms out to the sides and bring hands to thighs as you lower your head to the heart.
- ❖ On the next inhalation press hands into thighs, lift heart and gaze toward the ceiling, rolling the shoulders back and arching the spine. (Cow Pose)
- ❖ As you exhale, contract the belly and round the spine towards the back of the chair, tucking the chin towards the throat. (Cat Pose)
- ❖ Inhale, raise the arms out and up bringing the palms together and lift your gaze.
- ❖ Exhale and draw the hands and your gaze down to the heart center.

## ARDHA CHANDRASANA (Half Moon Pose)



- ❖ Hold onto the edge of the chair with the left hand.
- ❖ Inhale, raise the right arm out to the side and up to the ear. Exhale and hold.
- ❖ Inhale and extend out of the right shoulder and reach toward the left, and look down toward the left hand.  
*Variation:* With an inhale turn the gaze forward and hold for a breath; on the next breath turn the gaze up toward the extended arm.
- ❖ Hold for three breaths and repeat on opposite side.
- ❖ *Variation:* Raise both arms and stretch in each direction. Rest hands on head between sides.
- ❖ *Variation:* Bend the top elbow, reach up with bottom hand to grasp top hand, creating a “full moon” with the arms. Gaze upward.

## UTTANASANA (Forward Bend)



- ❖ Widen legs and turn toes outward.
- ❖ Inhale and raise arms overhead.
- ❖ Exhale, and draw the belly in as you fold forward.
- ❖ Release the head forward and tuck the chin in.
- ❖ Take hands to the floor, or modify by supporting the body on the lower legs.

## PARSVAKONASANA (Side Angle Stretch)



- ❖ Open knees diagonally from the hips; turn toes out.
- ❖ Place left forearm on left thigh. Inhale and raise right arm overhead.
- ❖ Exhale and extend the right arm closer to the ear and beyond the crown of the head.
- ❖ Ground the right hip down and lengthen the whole right side of the body as you extend out through the right fingertips.
- ❖ Take 3-5 breaths. The gaze can be down to the left, straight ahead, or up to the right arm.
- ❖ *Variation:* To deepen the pose and create core strength release the left arm along the left inner calf and hold for 3-5 breaths.
- ❖ Inhale and lift arm and torso back to center; exhale, release..right arm down. Pause for a couple of breaths and repeat on opposite side.

## SPINAL TWIST



- ❖ Place your left hand on the outside of your right knee
- ❖ Reach for the seat or back of the chair with your right hand.
- ❖ Inhale, lengthen the spine.
- ❖ Exhale, twist toward the right; press the left hand into the right leg.
- ❖ Let your neck, head, and eyes follow the twist over your right shoulder.
- ❖ With each exhale, move further into the twist.
- ❖ Return to center and repeat on opposite side.

## GARUDASANA (Eagle Pose)



- ❖ Cross your right leg over your left and if possible, wrap your right foot around the left ankle.
- ❖ Inhale and raise arms overhead.
- ❖ Exhale and bring right arm under left, hook at the elbows and wrap forearms so that palms touch. *To modify, hug opposite shoulders.*
- ❖ Inhale, sit up straight; exhale draw belly into spine and round forward hugging elbows down toward the navel.
- ❖ Take three purifying breaths: Inhale and squeeze the whole body, face and eyes, and then exhale with a big sigh, letting your body relax.
- ❖ Roll up with arms and legs still crossed, one vertebra at a time.
- ❖ Sit up straight, raise elbows in line with shoulders, and press hands and forearms away from you.
- ❖ Unwrap arms and bring them overhead, clap the back of the hands together; exhale and release arms down. Repeat on opposite side.

## JANU SHIRSHASANA (Head toward Knee Pose)



- ❖ Bring right ankle to left thigh.
- ❖ Place right hand on inner knee, left hand on inner ankle.
- ❖ Inhale, lengthen spine; exhale fold forward, pressing the knee gently down to deepen the stretch in the hip.
- ❖ *Variation:* Extend arms forward for core strengthening.
- ❖ Hold for 3-5 breaths.
- ❖ Inhale to center, exhale release leg. Repeat on opposite side.

## BACK BEND



- ❖ Hold onto chair edges with both hands
- ❖ Inhale, lengthen the spine and lift up through the sternum, drawing the shoulder blades together.
- ❖ Exhale, lift your chin and walk your eyes backward along the ceiling.
- ❖ Press down into sitting bones and feet to lift the heart.
- ❖ Hold for 3-5 breaths, exhaling through the mouth.

## VRIKSHASANA (Tree Pose)



- ❖ Stand on the right side of the chair and place left hand on chair back.
- ❖ Shift the weight onto your left foot and lift the right heel, placing weight on the ball of the foot.
- ❖ Open the right knee out to the right.
- ❖ Position right foot either 1) at the ankle, 2) at the calf, or 3) above the knee. *Avoid pressing foot into knee joint!*
- ❖ Inhale, raise your arm up to the sky.
- ❖ Practice letting go of the chair to find your balance.
- ❖ Take 3-5 breaths.

## UTKATASANA (Chair or Fierce Warrior Pose)



- ❖ Stand in front of your chair, feet hip width apart. The back of the chair just touches the legs.
- ❖ Raise your arms in front of you, hands in line with shoulders, palms down.
- ❖ Move into the pose with three breaths. On the inhale, lift through the crown; on the exhale, bend the knees, moving deeper with each exhalation.
- ❖ Keep the knees aligned with the feet.
- ❖ On the final exhale, release arms down to the sides of the chair. Hold for 3 more breaths. Release and sit down in the chair and march out your legs.

## SHAVASANA (Relaxation)

### EYE EXERCISES

- ❖ Sit in foundation – spine long, feet and sitting bones grounded.
- ❖ Imagine a giant clock in front of you and lift your eyes to the 12 o'clock position.
- ❖ Continue to move your gaze clockwise around the face of the clock.
- ❖ Look straight ahead and blink the eyes rapidly to lubricate them.
- ❖ Reverse.
- ❖ Rub your hands, creating warmth and friction, then cup the hands over the eye sockets. When you're ready, sweep the fingertips down your face and body.
- ❖ Keep the eyes closed and enjoy a few moments of stillness.

### MEDITATION

- ❖ Body Scan
- ❖ Poem
- ❖ Guided imagery



## ONLINE RESOURCES

### FOR KIDS

<http://www.seanosheafoundation.org/> - Visit our website to download an application for a free 7-week yoga and nutrition program for your San Diego or LA county school. View the schedule for upcoming chair yoga and meditation trainings for schoolteachers.

<http://www.learningmeditation.com/children.htm> - Best for younger kids. You can download text or MP3 meditations on topics like relaxation, awareness, and validation.

<http://children.meditation.org.au/index.asp> - From the Meditation Society of Australia, this website is geared to kids 6-13, with free MP3s of guided meditations. You can sign up to receive free daily meditations. You'll love the Australian accents!

<http://www.susankramer.com/ChildMeditation.html> - Read examples of guided lying, sitting and walking meditations.

<http://yogaminded.com/> - Geared to yoga for teens. You can sign up for a free newsletter, read blog posts on teaching teens and, of course, buy their books and videos.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~heartofthelotus/id31.html> - Sweet guided meditation with a dolphin theme. Don't focus on the spelling!

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703386704576186463216602684.html> - March 2011 article from *The Wall Street Journal* reports on yoga for kids in classrooms, including Paul Ecke Central Elementary, in Encinitas. Watch the video.

### MORE GENERAL

<http://www.yogajournal.com/> - A premier resource for yogis, Yoga Journal's website has lots of freebies, including guided meditations, yoga videos, and articles, including several on yoga for kids and teens.

<http://www.shambhala.org/> - Shambhala is a Buddhist organization. This website has links to all kinds of free meditation-related resources (Click on the "Intro to Meditation Programs" link with the pink lotus blossom) as well as links to different teachers.

<http://pemachodronfoundation.org> - Pema Chödrön, a wonderful Buddhist teacher, is associated with Shambhala. Her website has free articles and mp3 downloads on all aspects of meditation and Buddhism.

<http://www.project-meditation.org> - This website is selling a meditation program, but it has some useful articles and links on the history of meditation, different types of meditation, benefits of meditations, etc.

<http://www.wisdomheart.org/> - Subtitled "A Spiritual Path for Real Life" this website is the work of Eric and Devi Klein, authors of *50 Ways to Leave Your Karma*, which you can download for free. Free enewsletter, blogposts and videos on various aspects of meditation, yoga and mindfulness training.

"Thoughts Romp..."



Dharma Doodle by Eric Klein , *50 Ways to Leave Your Karma*, [www.wisdomheart.org/50ways](http://www.wisdomheart.org/50ways)