

# Chair Yoga



Chair yoga is a general term for yoga practice that can be carried out while seated in a chair, or using the chair as a support. It is attributed to Lakshmi Voelker-Binder, who developed this in 1982, but as it consists of generally well-known asanas (poses), it's perfectly possible to build up your own practice according to your preferences and needs.

Chair yoga is perfect to do after sitting for a period of time studying and can bring the benefits of traditional yoga with the advantage of having a 'mini practice'. It can help reduce stress, lower anxiety, develop strength and flexibility.

The poses don't require you to get into different clothing, or find a space with a yoga mat, and you can adapt many classic yoga poses so that you can still sit near your desk but have a beneficial break from concentrating on your studies. You don't need a special chair or equipment, though it's best not to use a chair with wheels. If your legs are on the short side and your chair doesn't lower so that your feet can easily rest flat on the ground, then place your feet on blocks, or a large book, or even a firm folded blanket so that your feet feel well supported.

Ensure that you don't force your body into an uncomfortable position. Yoga isn't about being super flexible or learning to become a contortionist. Respect your body and what it can achieve and work with effort but not pain.

Below are 6 ideas you can try, but you can also google Chair Yoga and see what comes up. If you commonly experience difficulties with mobility, or have health related problems, do seek advice from a GP before starting a practice.

**1.** There is a yoga movement named 'cat-cow', which is easily done on a chair. Sit upright, spine lengthened and imagine you are trying to touch the ceiling with your head. Place your hands on your knees/thighs and breathe in. As you breathe out, round your shoulders pushing them forward whilst your back rounds and your chin drops to your chest - cat position. As you breathe in aim to reverse the shape by lifting your head, pulling your shoulders back and your chest forward – cow position.

Repeat for 5 breaths.

**2.** (For this, you will need a chair that has a back which is approximately waist high). Stand, an arm's length away from the back of the chair. Bend from your waist and extend your arms to reach the back of the chair. You are aiming to achieve a 90-degree angle with straight, vertical legs and horizontal back. Reach forward so that you feel the stretch in your waist and your legs, without this becoming uncomfortable. Hold for 5 – 10 slow breaths.

**3.** Sit straight in your chair, looking forwards, spine straight. Have your arms straight down beside you with hands extending to the ground. As you breathe in slowly, raise your arms up as straight as possible to the ceiling. Stretch with your hands to the ceiling but encourage your shoulders to drop down rather than lift. As you breathe out, return your hands down to the ground

**4.** Sitting upright and with hands interlocked behind your head, bend your upper body over to the right to create a sideways bend. Go as far as feels a comfortable stretch. Avoid twisting your body by focusing on facing straight forward. As you breathe in, use your stomach muscles to pull you back to an upright position. Repeat this slowly for 5 times, then change the interlock of your fingers (it will feel unnatural) and repeat 5 times to the left side.

**5.** With your right arm extended in front of you, use your left arm to gently press the right arm over to the left, pressing it horizontally as close to your body as possible while still sitting tall. Repeat with the left arm moving over to point to the right

**6.** Sit upright facing forwards, and as you breathe out, move your left hand to your outer right thigh, your right hand to the back of the chair, and rotate your upper body round to the right. Move your head round as far as it will comfortably go. Avoid twisting the whole of your body round, by keeping your buttocks squarely on the seat and your legs facing forwards. Maintain for 5 breaths and then breathe in and return to the front. Breathe out and rotate round to your left.

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