



YOGA FOR ALL SEASONS

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YOGA AND MASSAGE THERAPY FOR ENHANCED HEALTH AND WELLNESS

YOGA FOR A HEALTHY BACK –WEEK THREE

SHOULDER AND CHEST OPENERS

Scarecrow Stretch (Opens the chest and strengthens back muscles.)

Reach your arms out to the side, then bend them at the elbows, so the upper arm reaches up. Turn your palms to face out. Reach back with little finger towards the back wall, opening in chest and shoulders.

Wall Stretch.

Stand with your side to the wall. Reach the arm closest to the wall out behind you. The ideal is to have the arm aligned with your shoulder, but only bring up the arm high enough to create a *comfortable* stretch. Don't force your shoulder to touch the wall, simply place your hand on the wall and your shoulder as close as you can get while still feeling a comfortable stretch. As the shoulder tissues start to open up, experiment with intensifying the stretch by squaring your hips more to the front and/or moving closer to the wall.

Virasana (Hero Pose)

Sit on a yoga block or stack of books placed between your heels, your thighs parallel to each other with the feet and toes pointing straight back. The support between your heels should be high enough, so there is no strain on your knees, feet, or ankles. Lengthen through your spine, growing first from the lower back, then the middle of your back. Lift and open your chest, keeping the shoulders relaxed. Don't increase the curve of your lower back or protrude ribs. Lengthen your neck, lift through the crown of your head, align your ears over your shoulders.

Ideally, sit for five minutes twice a day in this pose. You can even do this pose while watching TV. This is a great pose to reinforce good posture habits, because it teaches proper alignment in all the spine's curves, and creates an alignment awareness that can be integrated into your activity afterwards.

Variations

- Clasp your hands behind your back for 1-2 min. Then clasp your elbows behind your back.
- Put a block vertically behind you, clasp your hands around it, press it into the floor; open the chest.

Supported Backbend (Restorative Fish) (Chest Opener, can do at night in Bed)

Lying on your back, place a pillow under your back, alongside your spine. Your sacrum should be off the pillow. Reach your arms over your head and clasp your elbows, or if this is too intense, simply bend your arms over your head. Lie like this for 5-10 min. to open the chest, shoulders, and stretch the fascia.

For more intensity, you can do this pose on the floor with a yoga block (flattest part) or yoga mat under your chest. If you use a yoga block, you will need to put a small pillow under your head, to support and protect the neck.