



# **Yoga Teacher Training**

## **Chair Yoga**

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## **Chair Yoga Introduction**

Chair yoga is a term used to describe a gentle form of hatha yoga that is practiced sitting in a chair. It is one of the gentlest forms of yoga available. Chair yoga is one of the safest ways to start a yoga practice. It uses modifications of traditional hatha yoga postures to meet the needs of students who are unable to participate in a regular yoga class due to limitations from age or disability. Yoga moves are generally practiced in a chair or wheelchair, but may also include some standing postures where students use their chairs as props, depending on the group.

Most people in chair yoga classes have health issues and a health care professional may have recommended that they try yoga. It's important to ask your students about any limitations before you begin teaching them. Make sure that students use armless chairs and sit towards the middle or front of the chair with their feet firmly planted on the floor, legs hip width apart and back straight. Students in a chair yoga class can learn many modified yoga postures, as well as breathing techniques, meditation and relaxation, with the aid of a chair.

## **Benefits of Chair Yoga**

Chair yoga has been found to help people with symptoms of hypertension, anxiety, arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, clinical depression, and chronic pain. A few seated poses can build strength, increase circulation, and quiet the mind. In chair yoga classes, it's important to remind students that the purpose of yoga is not to perform complicated postures; the purpose is to develop awareness of the mind and body, while eliminating discomfort in the body and in the mind.

## **Format of a Chair Yoga Practice**

In a chair yoga practice, it is still important to start with breathing exercises and warm-ups. Breathing exercises help to focus the mind, while the warm-ups help get circulation moving and prepare the body for this gentle practice. You can also incorporate chair modified sun salutations (see next page) as part of your warm ups. After warm ups, you want to include chair yoga postures that flex, extend and rotate the spine. You can end the class with meditation or a relaxing visualization. If appropriate, you can have students end class in savasana, lying on their backs. Otherwise, students can end class in a chair version of savasana.

## **Chair Yoga Postures and Sequence**

Like regular yoga classes, it's a good idea to start class with some focused breathing or gentle breathing exercises. Then move into warm-ups and then postures, before final relaxation.

## Warm Ups for Chair Yoga Practice

### Alternate Nostril Breathing



- Sit on a chair with the spine long and both feet flat on the floor.
- Close your eyes and take a few slow deep breaths through your nose.
- Bring your right hand to your face, placing your thumb on your right nostril and your ring finger on your left (middle and index fingers rest on the third eye area of your forehead)
- Inhale through both nostrils, then block the right nostril and exhale left.
- Inhale left, then switch and block the left nostril and exhale right.
- Inhale right, then switch and block the right nostril and exhale left. Inhale left.
- Repeat this pattern of breathing about 6 times.
- Then block both nostrils and hold the breath in for a few seconds after the final inhalation on the right side.
- Exhale through both nostrils.
- Take a few more slow deep breaths and open your eyes.

## Chair Cat-Cow Stretch



- Sit on a chair with the spine long and both feet planted flat on floor
- Inhale, arch your back and squeeze your shoulder blades together and look up
- Exhale, round your spine, letting your shoulders and head come forward
- Continue moving back and forth with your breath for 6-8 breaths
- Variation: Add arm movements – Keep your elbow straight, and open arms wide on inhale, then clasp hands together in front of you on exhale.

## Chair Warm-Up Twist



- Sit tall with both feet flat on floor
- Raise your arms, placing your fingertips on your shoulders, elbows out to sides
- As you exhale, turn to the right
- Inhale, twist to the left
- Continue twisting back and forth, moving with your breath

## Chair Sun Salutation

### Steps

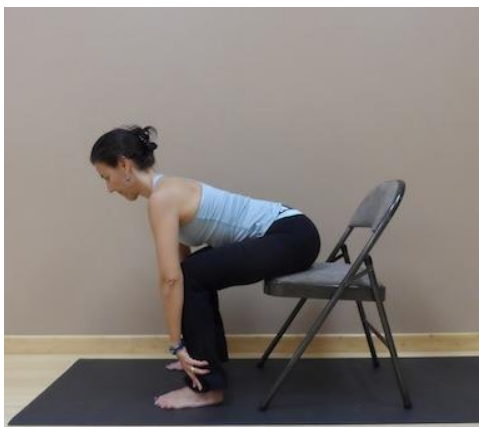
- Sit tall with both feet flat on floor
- Inhale, reach arms overhead and slightly arch back
- Exhale, fold forward, bringing hands towards feet or hold opposite elbows
- Inhale, bring hands to ankles or shins, lift head and chest to lengthen through the spine
- Exhale, fold forward
- Inhale, sweep arms overhead as you come back up to sitting
- Exhale, bring hands to heart
- Repeat this process 3 or 4 times



**Step 1 - Inhale arms up**



**Step 2 - Exhale fold forward**



**Step 3 - Inhale lift chest**



**Step 4 - Exhale fold forward**



**Step 7 - Inhale, reach arms up**



**Step 8 - Exhale, hands to heart**

## Chair Forward Bend



- Sit tall with both feet on floor at least hip width apart
- Place hands on your thighs (just above your knees) and reach forward with your chest as you slowly fold forward, hinging from the hips.
- Relax the belly on the thighs, and let your head hang loose.

## Chair Forward Fold Twist



- From seated forward fold, bring your left hand to the floor on the outside of your left foot.
- Open your chest as you twist to the right on an inhale, bringing your right hand and gaze up towards the ceiling
- Stay here for 3-4 breaths
- Bring the right hand down on an exhale
- Repeat on the other side. Repeat on both sides one more time
- If your hand won't reach the floor, bring it to your forearm to your thigh instead (or use a block on the floor) and twist from there
- For a more intense stretch, bring your hand to the opposite foot on the floor before twisting.



**Chair Lunge/Warrior Series** (Lunge, Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior, Extended Side Angle, Chair Dancer)

Do all the postures on one side first, before switching to the other side.

**Chair Lunge**



- Turn to your right and sit sideways in the chair
- Keep your right leg in position with your foot flat on the floor
- Sweep your left leg behind you
- Turn the left foot out, placing the heel on the floor and straighten the left leg
- Keep your torso facing over the right leg as you raise your arms up to the ceiling on an inhale.
- Stay here for 3-4 breaths.
- Go into Warrior 2, Reverse Warrior, Extended Angle, and Dancer (see below) from here and then repeat on the other side

## Chair Warrior 2



- Start in Chair Warrior 1 (right foot in front)
- Exhale, turn the torso to the left open the arms with the right arm in front and left arm going back
- Keep looking forward over the right hand
- Check that shoulders are directly over hips (not forward or back)
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Go into the rest of the Warrior series from here, then repeat on the other side

## Chair Reverse Warrior



- From Warrior 2 (right knee bent, right foot forward), drop the left arm down the back of the left leg
- Lift the right arm up to the ceiling
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Go into the rest of the Warrior series from here, then repeat on the other side

## Extended Side Angle



- From Reverse Warrior (right knee bent, right foot forward), bring the right forearm to the right thigh, and sweep the left arm next to the left ear.
- Open the chest up and look up towards the ceiling.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Go into Chair Dancer from here to complete the series, and then repeat on the other side.

## Chair Dancer



- From Extended Side Angle (right knee bent, right foot forward), bring your left arm down, and swing your left leg forward to meet the right, so you are sitting on the side of the chair, facing to the side, with both feet on the floor
- Move to the left slightly, so the left leg is partially off the chair.
- While holding onto the back of the chair with the right hand, bring the left foot back and hold onto the left ankle with your left hand
- Press the left knee towards the floor, until you feel a stretch in the front of the thigh
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths, then lower the left foot back to the floor
- Bring both legs to the front of the chair before repeating the warrior sequence on the other side.

## Using the Chair for Support in Other Standing Postures

### Warrior 3 with Chair



- Start standing, facing chair
- Step back about two feet away from the chair
- Place your hands around the sides of the chair
- Begin to straighten your arms and legs, as you lift your right leg up
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Exhale, lower your leg back to the floor
- Repeat on the other side

### Half Moon with Chair



- Start standing with your right side facing the chair
- Bend your right knee and place your right hand in the middle of the chair
- Inhale, lift your left leg off the floor and lift your left hand overhead
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths.
- Exhale, lower your arm and lower your left foot back to the floor
- Turn to the other side and repeat on your other side

## Chair Arm Balance



- Sit tall with both feet flat on the floor
- Place your hands at your sides, with your palms on the chair and fingers curled around the sides of the chair.
- Round forward slightly and begin to push down with your hands to support more of your weight with your arms.
- Continue to push down until your feet begin to float off the floor.
- If you can hold your body weight with your feet off the floor, stay in that position. Otherwise just hold some of your weight in the arm balance by keeping your toes on the floor.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths.
- Relax your arms, rotate your wrists and shake out your wrists and arms.

## Crescent Stretch



- Sit tall with both feet flat on the floor
- Place your left hand around the front of your right thigh
- Inhale, reach your right arm up next to your ear
- Exhale, stretch to the left side while keeping your right arm next to your right ear
- Open your chest towards the ceiling
- Stay in this position for 3-4 deep breaths
- Come back up and drop both hands next to your sides.
- Repeat on the other side.

## Chair Eagle



- Sit tall with both feet flat on the floor
- Inhale, reach your arms overhead
- Exhale, bring your arms down, crossing your right arm under your left
- Bend your elbows and wrap your arms around each other, bringing your palms together
- Pull your elbows into your chest and look over your fingertips
- Cross your right leg over your left and wrap your right foot behind and around your left leg
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Then, with arms still wrapped around each other, raise your hands up and drop your chin towards your chest.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths.
- Repeat on the other side.

## Chair Pigeon



- Sit towards the front of the chair with both feet flat on the floor.
- Place your right ankle on your left thigh (just above the knee)
- Place your right hand on your right knee and your left hand on your right foot
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, reach forward with your chest as you fold forward, bringing your belly towards the open space between your legs
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Inhale, come back to sitting
- Repeat on the other side.



### **Chair Sun Worshipper**



- Sit towards the front of the chair with both feet flat on the floor
- Draw your arms back and curl your fingers over the back edge of the chair seat
- Inhale, squeeze your shoulder blades together and lift up through your chest
- Exhale, drop your head back (if it's okay with your neck)
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Come back to center and then repeat one more time

### **Chair Straddle Forward Fold**



- Start sitting up tall
- Spread feet apart, so they are a little wider than the base of the chair, with your toes pointing forward.
- Fold forward, and hold onto your ankles
- Inhale, lift your chest slightly and lengthen through the spine
- Exhale and fold forward, pulling against your ankles to fold a little deeper
- Let your head and neck relax completely
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Slowly come back up to sitting.

### **Chair Hamstring Stretch (one leg and double leg)**



- Sit tall facing forward with both feet flat on the floor
- Extend your right leg, straightening your knee and placing your heel on the floor with your toes flexed up towards the ceiling
- Inhale, sit up tall with your hands placed on your thighs
- Exhale, reach your chest forward and press back through your sitting bones as you hinge forward at your hips.
- Relax your head and neck
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Slowly come back up to sitting.
- Repeat on the other side.

### **Chair Leg Lift**



- Sit tall facing forward with both feet flat on the floor
- Extend your right leg, straightening your knee and placing your heel on the floor with your toes flexed up towards the ceiling
- Inhale, sit up tall with your hands placed on your thighs
- Exhale, lift your right leg off the floor.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat on the other side.

## Chair Cow's Face



- Sit tall with both feet flat on the floor
- Inhale, reach your right arm up
- Bend your right elbow and drop your right hand down your back
- Bring your left arm out to the side with your palm turned back
- Bend your left elbow and reach your left hand up your back until it connects with your right hand
- If your hands don't reach each other, use a strap to bridge the gap and help you to work your hands towards each other.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat on the other side

## Chair Locust



- Sit towards the front of the chair with both feet flat on the floor
- Fold forward bringing your belly onto your thighs
- Inhale, lift your head and chest, and draw your arms back squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Press your shoulders back away from your ears and breathe slowly
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Slowly lower back to forward fold
- Repeat this posture one or two more times

## Chair Spinal Twist



- Sit tall facing forward with both feet flat on the floor
- Place your left hand on the outside of your right knee
- Place your right hand on the back of the chair
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, look over your right shoulder and twist to the right
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- While you are still twisting to the right, turn your head to look over your left shoulder.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Release your hands and turn back to face forward

- Repeat on the other side

### **Final Relaxation**



- If you want to stay seated for final relaxation, place a bolster or folded blanket across your thighs.
- Rest your hands on the blanket or bolster, with your palms up
- Gently close your eyes
- Sit tall, stacking your head and torso directly over your hips
- Take a deep breath in through your nose and exhale through your mouth
- Let the muscles in your face and shoulders relax completely
- Let your breathing become relaxed and natural, and follow the rhythm of your breath with your mind.
- Stay in this relaxed state for a couple minutes
- Slowly open your eyes and stretch your arms overhead.

In addition to final relaxation, you may want to include a brief visualization exercise or meditation practice.

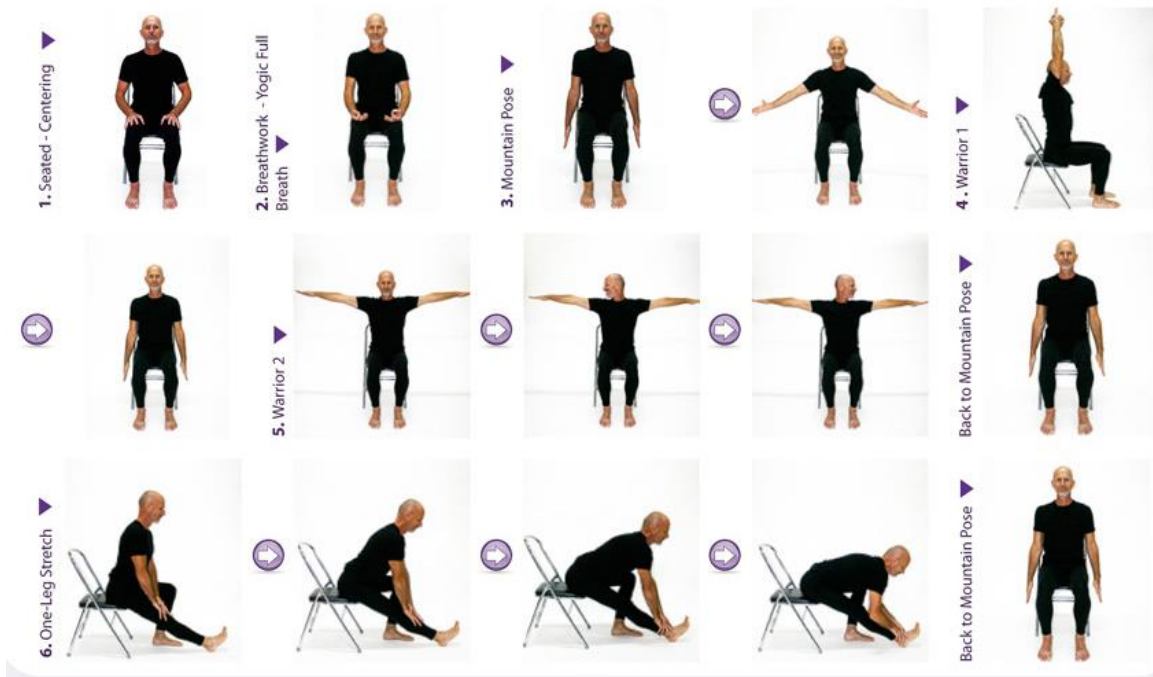
## Sample Chair Yoga Sequences

The next few images show you some sample sequences that you can use in a chair yoga class, depending on the abilities of your students.

### Chair Yoga – Sun Salutation and Warm-Up



## Sequence 1



## Standing Chair Sequence



## Standing Chair Sequence



## Seated Chair Sequence





## **Create a Chair Yoga Sequence**

Develop your own chair yoga sequence and practice teaching in posture in the sequence.

Breathing Exercises:

Warm Ups:

Chair Yoga Postures:

Final Relaxation/Meditation: