

Upper Back and Shoulders

We're going to start in a seated position today. You can sit cross legged or with your feet out in front of you. If you find this uncomfortable, sitting on the floor, try sitting on a rolled blanket or bolster. This will raise your hips and take the strain out of your low back. So take a minute now to get yourself situated. ()

When you're ready, sit up tall - reaching up through the top of your head to lengthen your spine. Relax your shoulders and relax your hips. Close your eyes and close your mouth, begin breathing fully through your nose. Relax your belly, so as you inhale, your belly expands, () and as you exhale, your belly relaxes back towards your spine. Focus in on your breath, making it smooth and fluid, letting go of any other thoughts, inhaling and exhaling completely. Notice how your body feels and simply take note where you may feel any tension, such as in your neck and shoulders, knowing that any tension will be gone by the end of this short practice, and you're going to feel great.

Take one more full deep breath, completely filling and emptying your lungs. Then open your eyes. Sitting up tall, drop your chin to your chest, drawing your shoulders back, stretching your neck. Raise your head, then drop your ear towards your shoulder, breathing into any tension in your neck. Inhaling, come back to center, exhale, drop your ear towards the other shoulder. Breathing into the stretch here. Come back to center, then turn your head, looking down towards your armpit. Feel that great stretch along the back side of your neck. Inhaling, come back to center, exhaling, looking towards your other armpit. You've got it.

Raise your head back to center. Place your arms on your upper back with your fingers pointing down your back. Pull your elbows down, allowing your fingers to massage your shoulders. Repeat this a few more times, inhaling as you raise your elbows, exhaling as you pull them down and massage your shoulders. That's it. (pause)

Come back to center. Inhaling, draw your arms back, looking up, opening your chest. Exhale, round forward, clasping your hands in front. Continue moving back and forth, breathing fully and deeply through your nose and connecting your breath with this movement. Inhaling, opening and exhaling rounding. Allow your shoulders and chest to relax and really open. Excellent!

Come back to center and extend both legs out. Place your right foot next to the outside of your left knee, holding onto your right leg with your left arm. Inhaling, sit up tall, exhaling, twist to the right, looking over your right shoulder. Breathe into the twist, breathing comfortably without any strain. That's it. Just relax here. Turn back to center, uncrossing your legs and bring your left foot next to your right knee. Hug your left knee in with your right arm and turn looking over your left shoulder. The more you hug your knee in, the more you'll feel a stretch in the back of your hip, along with the stretch in your upper back. (pause)

Turn back to center and come onto all fours. Check that your wrists are under your shoulders and knees are about hip width apart. Inhaling, sweep your right hand up. Exhaling, bring your right arm between your left hand and knee, dropping your shoulder towards the floor. Keep your hips raised high and breathe into the twist in your upper back. Press down with your left hand to go more deeply into this twist, breathing fully through your nose. Terrific. ()

Come back to all fours. Inhaling, sweep your left hand up. Exhaling, thread the needle, bringing your left arm through the space between your other arm and knee. Keep your hips raised high, breathing slowly and deeply in this position. Let yourself relax here and enjoy that stretch in your shoulders.

Come back to all fours, then walk your hands forward. Keeping your hips raised, drop your chest and forehead towards the floor. This is a wonderful position to open your chest and stretch your shoulders. Okay, so it may look a little funny, but it also feels great!

Come back up to all fours. Sit back on your heels and stretch your arms out for extended child's pose. Breathe into your back here. Inhale, feeling your upper back stretch. () Exhale, letting it release. (pause)

On your next inhale, come forward, dropping your hips down, exhale, pressing back to child's pose. Keep moving back and forth, moving with your breath and only dropping your hips down as much as is comfortable for you. Do your best to keep your arms straight as you move back and forth. This exercise is a great way to loosen your shoulders, hips and back. (pause)

Come back to child's pose. Look up, turning your hands towards each other. Push yourself forward, keeping your chest as low to the ground as you can. Pressing all the way through, then back into child's pose. Keep moving back and forth, keeping your chest close to the ground, then pressing back to child's pose. Okay, this is another strange looking exercise, but it's a great way to stretch your shoulders and chest and relieve tension there. (pause)

Then, lie down on your belly.

Bring your hands behind your back, interlacing your fingers and placing your thumbs on your tailbone. Drop your forehead to the mat. Inhaling, lift your head and chest, exhaling, press your hands towards your feet. Squeeze your shoulder blades together, opening your chest. Keep your head in a neutral position and press your shoulders away from your ears to lengthen your neck. Breathe comfortably here, or as comfortably as you can in this position. ()

Exhaling, come back down. Place your hands under your shoulders and press back to child's pose, allowing your back to stretch and relax. (pause)

Come back to all fours. Spread your fingers wide, curl your toes under and press your hips up and back, coming into down dog. Check that your hands are about shoulder width apart and your feet about hip width apart. Pump your heels and shake your head from side to side, letting your neck get loose. That's it. Shake your hips from side to side. Let go of that tension. You don't need it for anything, so let it go. Press your chest towards your feet. Lift through your hips, getting long and feeling great!

Walk your feet forward, bringing your feet parallel and about hip width apart and fold forward, holding onto opposite elbows. Keep your knees bent to take any strain out of your back. Drop your head, looking towards your knees and shake your head from side to side to relax your neck and shoulders.

Bend your knees more, lift your head and chest, and sweep your arms up overhead. Exhaling, bringing your hands to your heart.

Turn back to center, placing your feet a little wider than hip width apart. Hold on to your opposite elbows, lifting your arms to shoulder height. Pull your elbows to the left, back to center then to the right. Moving back and forth, standing up tall, allowing your shoulders to stretch. One last time. (pause) Come back to center, release your elbows, keeping your arms at shoulder height. Begin twisting your arms from side to side, keeping your lower body steady and still, bringing the twist into your upper back. Great. (pause)

Come back to center. Drop your arms down at your sides. Begin rolling your shoulders in a backwards circular motion, moving with your breath. Inhaling, up and exhaling, down. This works your shoulder blades and relieves tension from the muscles surrounding your shoulder blades. (pause)

Stop rolling your shoulders and turn to the side. Bringing your hands behind your back, interlace your fingers. Roll your shoulders back, expanding your chest. Inhaling, lift your hands away from your tailbone, as you drop your shoulders away from your ears, breathing deeply here. Then bend your knees, press your tailbone back and fold forward, lifting your hands away from your tailbone. Shake your head and let your neck relax. Inhale through your nose, then exhale through your mouth. This helps release any tension in the neck and shoulders. See how it works for you. (pause).

Drop your hands back to your tailbone, bend your knees and use the strength of your legs to come back to standing.

Check that your feet are still about hip width apart and parallel. Inhale, reach your arms overhead. As you exhale, cross your right arm under your left and bring your hands towards your face, making a “V”. Bring the backs of your hands together here or wrap your arms around each other, bringing your palms together as best you can. Whatever point you get to, lift your elbows until you feel the stretch in your upper back and bring your forearms into a vertical position. Focus on one point in front of you and on your breath, keeping it full and smooth. (pause)

Release your arms, inhaling, reach up, exhaling, cross your left arm under your right and bring your hands towards your face. Bring the backs of your hands together or wrap your arms around each other, bringing your palms together as best you can. Lift your elbows until you feel the stretch in your upper back and bring your forearms to a vertical position, again, if you can. Breathe slowly here. You’ve got it (pause).

Release your arms. Inhaling, reach up, exhaling drop your arms down to your sides.

Find a wall you can stand against. Stand with your back against the wall, feet about hip width apart. Raise your arms up to shoulder height against the wall with your palms out. Inhaling, reach up, exhaling, draw your arms down the wall. Keep your upper back and tailbone against the wall. This exercise strengthens the muscles in your upper back and helps improve your posture. Do one more. (pause)

Drop your hands and turn with your right side next to the wall. Reach your right hand up, bringing the inside of your right arm next to the wall. Draw your right arm back, keeping your hip next to the wall. Only go back a little ways, so you can keep your hip next to the wall and your chest turned forward away from the wall. Breathe into the stretch. (pause)

Release your hip away from the wall and drop your hand further down the wall, rotating your arm. Again, turn your chest away from the wall to stretch your shoulder. On your next exhale, drop your arm down to your side.

Turn to the other side, so your left side is next to the wall. Reach your left hand up, bringing the inside of your left arm next to the wall. Draw your left arm back, keeping your hip next to the wall. Only go back a little ways, so you can keep your hip next to the wall, as your chest turns forward away from the wall. Breathe into the stretch. Relax your shoulders. (pause) Release your hip away from the wall and drop your hand down further, rotating your arm. Again, turn your chest away from the wall to stretch your shoulder. (pause) On your next exhale, drop your arm down to your side. Excellent.

Come back to sitting on the floor. You can sit with your legs crossed or however works for you. Inhaling, reach your hands up, interlace your fingers, pressing your palms towards the ceiling. Breathe here, dropping your shoulders away from your ears, while you reach through your hands. On your next exhale, bring your hands behind your head and fan your elbows out to the sides, squeezing your shoulder blades together to expand your chest. Great. Exhaling, drop your elbows towards the right, stretching through your shoulders. Tuck your tailbone under, sitting up tall and breathing into the stretch. On your next inhale, bring your arms back to center, exhale, drop your arms to the left. Breathe into that open space in your side and chest. You've got it. (pause)

Bring your hands back to center and drop your hands down.

Turn to the side, sitting back on your heels, if you can. Otherwise you can place your feet out in front of you or sit cross legged. Bringing your hands behind your back, interlace your fingers. Draw your hands away from your tailbone, squeezing your shoulder blades together and opening through your chest. You can stay here, or as you exhale, fold forward, dropping your forehead toward the floor, as your hands come up away from your tailbone. Just relax here, as you feel that gentle pressure against your forehead, allowing your shoulders to relax more as you breathe deeply into this stretch. (pause) Drop your hands to your tailbone and come back up to sitting.

Place your hands in front of you, spreading your fingers wide. Curl your toes under and press your hips up and back, coming into down dog, allowing your legs to stretch and allowing your shoulders to relax. Shake your head from side to side, letting your neck get loose. (pause)

Come back down onto your knees and bring your hands behind you with your fingers pointing back. Inhale, expanding your chest, exhaling, lifting your hips. You can look forward or, if there's no strain, let your head fall back. Either way, keep reaching up through your chest, breathing deeply here, increasing the circulation to your heart and lungs. Draw your shoulders back more, squeezing your shoulder blades together. Excellent. (pause)

Come back to sitting.

Lie down on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor. Place your hands next to your head with your palms up. As you exhale, lift your head and neck, inhaling, lower back down. Continue carefully lifting your head as you exhale and lowering down as you inhale. Check in with your body and back off if you feel any strain in your neck. This is a fantastic way to strengthen the muscles in your neck. (pause)

Then lower back down and bring your arms to your sides. Turn your head from side to side, stretching your neck. Relax your shoulders and move your head slowly. (pause) Come back to center.

Stay where you are, or if you want to gently stretch your chest, take your rolled up blanket and place it just below your shoulder blades as you lie back on it. (pause)

You can also place a small rolled towel under your neck for extra support. The main thing here, is just to get comfortable, letting your body relax more with each breath. So do what feels best for you, whether it's placing a blanket under your back or lying flat on the floor. Draw your shoulder blades back slightly to open your chest a little more. Then take a deep breath in through your nose. Exhale through your mouth, allowing your body to release any tension. Let your shoulders relax and your chest open. Let your breath become soft and easy.

Stay here as long as you like, whether it's 5, 10, 20 minutes or more, whatever works for you. Stay here allowing your chest to open as you let your shoulders relax more deeply. When you're ready to get up, simply roll onto your side and remove your blanket to come back to sitting. Thank you so much for spending your time with me today. Have a wonderful day. Namaste.