

## **Restorative (Stretch and Soothe)**

Let's start lying down on our backs. Getting comfortable, drawing your shoulders back and relaxing them down. Placing your hands at your sides or on your belly, begin breathing slowly and deeply, through your nose, if possible. Inhaling, feel your belly rise - - exhaling, feel your entire body relax. As you inhale, let your belly rise and ribs expand -- - exhaling releasing any tension. With every breath in feel a wave of air rolling up the front of your body, then exhale completely, breathing slowly and deeply through your nose. Bring your focus to your breath, making it deep and rhythmic and letting go of any other thoughts or concerns you may have brought with you today.

On your next breath in, take a long slow inhalation. () Then a long slow exhalation. () Then two natural breaths. (pause) Again, repeating this pattern, with a long slow inhalation, then completely exhaling and two natural breaths. Continue this breathing pattern on your own, focusing in on your breath and on what you're doing in this moment. Instead of thinking about what you need to do 10 minutes from now, or what you regret doing ten minutes ago, simply focus on your breath and the sensations in your body, to fully enjoy this moment, right now. Take one more complete breath. (pause) Great.

Bend your knees, placing your feet on the floor, so they are parallel and about hip width apart. Place your hands at your sides, palms down. Inhaling, lift your hips off the floor, exhaling, slowly roll your hips back down. Again, inhaling raise your hips up, exhaling lower back down. Continue moving with your breath, raising and lowering your hips. On your next inhale, reach your arms overhead as you lift up, exhale, bringing your hands to your sides, lowering down. Focus on connecting your breath with your movement. This exercise provides a wonderful massage to your spine. Excellent. Then lower back down, bringing your hands out in T position with your palms down. Exhale, dropping your knees to the right, inhale to center and exhale, dropping to the left. Keep moving your knees from side to side. This exercise stretches your quadriceps, hip flexors and low back, and it just feels great.

Keeping your arms in T position, bring your knees to your chest and begin dropping your knees from side to side. Inhale to center, exhale, dropping to the side. Feel that massage across your sacrum and the stretch in your spine, relieving any tension in your back. Bring your knees back to center. Placing your hands on your knees, begin making opposing circles with your knees. Pulling your knees towards your chest, then pressing them away and back together. Keep your breathing full and deep. This exercise will help loosen your low back and hips. ()

Bring your knees back to center. Roll onto your side and come up to all fours. Check that your wrists are right under your shoulders and knees about hip width apart. Exhaling, round your back, dropping your chin to your chest. Inhaling, look up, drawing your shoulders back, opening your chest. Again, exhale, rounding, lifting your abs in, inhale, drop your belly and open your chest. Continue moving back and forth, doing your best to connect your breath with your movement, making both your breath and movement, smooth and fluid. I find it helpful to close my eyes while I'm doing this, so I can really focus in on what I'm doing and let go of any other distractions. (pause)

Come back to a neutral position.

Walk your hands forward as you drop your chest toward the floor. Keep your hips lifted, just dropping your forehead and chest towards the floor. Breathing slowly and deeply here, allowing your shoulders and chest to open and letting the gentle pressure against your forehead help you relax. And, yes this position does look funny, but it also feels great. (pause)

Come forward onto your belly. Extend your legs out behind you, turning your feet out. Holding on to your opposite elbows, push your elbows out a little in front of your shoulders. Inhaling, lift through your chest, exhaling, drop your forehead to your crossed arms. Check that your body feels completely relaxed here and adjust your arm position if you need to. This is Crocodile. Try breathing into your belly, feeling your belly press against the floor as you inhale and release as you exhale. Breathing this way can feel strange in this position, but it will help strengthen your diaphragm muscle and will provide a gentle massage to your internal organs. (pause)

Walk your hands back up and sit back toward your heels, dropping your belly towards your thighs. Stretch your arms out, coming into extended Child's Pose. Breathe into your upper back, allowing it to stretch as you inhale and release as you exhale. Focusing on your breath, making it fluid and deep. If you like, you can breathe into your belly, as we did in Crocodile, feeling it press against your thighs as you inhale and release as you exhale. Again, this is going to help strengthen your diaphragm, while also helping you relax more deeply. (pause)

Raise your head coming back up and bring your feet out in front of you, coming to sitting. Bend your left knee, bringing your left foot to the inside of your right thigh. Scoot back, so your sitting on the top or front of your sitting bones. This will allow you to tip from your hip thigh joint, rather than rounding down from your waist and putting strain on your back. Inhaling, raise your arms to shoulder height, exhale reach forward, lengthening your spine, bringing your belly towards the space next to your right inner thigh. Drop your hands down and draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears to lengthen your spine. Press back through your tailbone to stretch your low back and keep your neck in a neutral position, not tucking your chin to your chest. Breathe slowly and deeply here through your nose, focusing on a complete exhalation with every breath. This will help your body relax more deeply into the stretch. Don't worry about how far down you go. Just close your eyes and tune into how your body feels, going to the point where you feel a gentle stretch, but no strain. You're doing great. (pause)

Inhaling, come back up, shake your legs out and bring your right foot to the inside of your left thigh. Sitting up tall, inhale, bring your arms to shoulder height, exhale, reaching forward, dropping your belly towards that space next to your left thigh. Drop your hands to your extended leg or to the floor on either side of your leg. Draw your shoulders down away from your ears. Press back through your tailbone to lengthen your spine and stretch your low back. Breathe deeply through your nose, allowing your body to relax into this stretch. Really tune into your body here, just going to whatever point is comfortable for you and backing off when you need to. This is a great exercise to stretch your hamstrings,

calves and low back. So do it whenever you can, except maybe not at the office. ()  
Inhaling, come back up, and shake your legs out.

Bring your hands behind you with your fingers pointing either forward or back. Inhaling, press up through your chest, exhaling, drop your head back. If it's not comfortable to drop your head back, look forward, but keep reaching up through your chest, breathing deeply here, increasing the circulation to your heart and lungs, releasing any tension in your upper back and shoulders. Keep squeezing your shoulder blades together and opening through your chest. Excellent. (pause)

Come back up. Bend your knees, bringing the soles of your feet together. Push your feet forward, so your legs make like a diamond shape. Hold onto your shins or ankles. Lift your head and chest. Exhaling, fold forward, bringing your chest towards your feet for Cobbler's pose. Relax here, breathing deeply. This is a nice stretch for the back of your hips, improving the range of motion of your hips. And, it's a quieting pose for your mind and body.

Inhaling, come back up. Scoot yourself towards your heels, keeping your feet in place. Slowly lower down onto your back. Relax here, breathing into your belly, letting your hips release and open. Wonderful. This is a great way to really open the front of your hips. Feel the heaviness of your legs and allow the weight of your legs to open your hips a little further. You've got it. (pause)

Bring one knee up then the other, bringing your knees to your chest. Raise your feet, so the soles of your feet face the ceiling, or if you're lucky enough to be outside, then facing the sky. Hold onto your shins or the soles of your feet and gently pull your knees towards your armpits. Do your best to keep your shins in a vertical position. Relax here. This is called Dead Bug or Happy Baby. Don't you love those names. And, it looks ridiculous, but it's great for opening your hips, using gravity to really help you stretch. (pause)

Drop your feet, bringing your knees back to your chest. Hug your right knee in, placing your left foot on the floor with your knee bent. Hold onto your right shin or foot. Then extend your right leg and gently pull your leg towards your head. The main word here is "gently", only stretching as far as is comfortable for you. Don't go hurting yourself. Breathe fully, allowing your shoulders and neck to relax completely. (pause)

Drop your left hand to the side and, still holding on to your right leg with your right hand, drop your leg to the right. You can stay here, or if you want more stretch in your hip flexor, slowly extend your left leg, noticing if you feel any strain and stopping if you do. Feel the openness here and breathe into that open space. You can do it. (pause)

Bend your knees, bringing both knees back to your chest. Hug your left knee to your chest as you place your right foot on the floor with your knee bent. Bring your hands to your shin or foot of your left leg. Exhaling, slowly draw your left leg towards your head. Relax your head and neck and breathe slowly and deeply without any strain. Let your leg relax as you stretch a little more deeply. Terrific. Then, release your right hand to the floor in T position. Still holding your left foot with your left hand, exhaling, drop your leg towards the left. Again, you can stay here, or if you want a little deeper stretch, slowly extend your

right leg, stopping if you begin to feel any strain. Allow your body to open completely and breathe fully into that open space. This exercise stretches your hips, calves and thighs and relieves strain in your low back (pause)

Bend your knees, bringing them to your chest, rocking side to side. (pause)

Drop your feet to the floor with your knees bent. Place your right ankle on your left thigh, just above your knee. Placing your hands around your left thigh, gently begin pulling your leg towards your chest. Relax here, only going to the point where you feel an easy stretch. Keep your breath smooth and deep. Good job! This is a great way to stretch the rotator muscles in the back of your hip ()

Drop your feet back to the floor. Cross your left ankle on your right thigh just above your knee. Place your hands around your right thigh and begin pulling your leg towards your chest. Be careful here, only going to a comfortable stretch without any strain. Nice. Really allow the back of your hip to open. This area can get so stiff from all the sitting in chairs we tend to do. (pause)

Drop your feet back down to the floor. Place your hands out in T position with your palms down. Cross your left leg over your right and drop your knees to the right, keeping your shoulder blades on your mat. You may need to scoot a little to keep both shoulder blades down. Let your legs relax and become heavy, allowing them to pull you more deeply into this stretch. Breathe into the open space in the front of your body. Fantastic. This is a great way to stretch your spine and relieve strain in your low back. (pause)

Bring your knees back to center, uncrossing your legs. Cross your right leg over your left and drop your knees to the left, keeping your shoulder blades on the floor. Look out over your right hand if you like and let your legs relax and drop more here. Breathe fully and deeply through your nose, breathing into that open space in the front of your body. Feel your body completely relax, focusing on your breath and on the stretch of your spine. You've got it. ()

Bring your knees back to center. Uncross your legs and extend your legs all the way out on the floor, letting your feet flop out to the sides. Turn your head from side to side, gently stretching your neck. Draw your shoulders back to open your chest and relax them down. Get completely comfortable. Take a deep breath in through your nose --- and exhale through your mouth, allowing your body to relax completely.

Let your legs and hips feel loose. Feel your arms and hands become heavy, sinking into the floor. Open your mouth slightly and move your jaw around to relax the muscles in your face. Take one last deep breath in through your nose, () exhaling through your mouth, allow your body to melt into the floor, feeling the floor completely supporting the weight of your body. Then allow your breathing to become soft and natural. With every breath let yourself feel more calm and at peace. With each breath, going deeper inside to that quiet place we all have inside of us, where everything is quiet and still and no one else exists. Go there and stay in that place as long as you like, whether it's just a couple of minutes or maybe a half hour or more, letting yourself completely rest, and enjoying this time. Thanks so much for joining me today. Namaste.