

LEARNING MADE EASY



Chair Yoga

for
dummies[®]
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Perform classic
Yoga poses from a chair

Stretch muscles and joints, improve
breathing, and reduce stress

Follow 15-minute or
30-minute routines

Larry Payne, PhD
Don Henry

Foreword by Loren Fishman, MD



Chair Yoga

by Larry Payne, PhD, and Don Henry

FOREWORD BY Loren Fishman, MD

for
dummies[®]
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Chair Yoga For Dummies®

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Contents at a Glance

Foreword	xiii
Introduction	1
Part 1: Yoga for Life	5
CHAPTER 1: Checking Out Chair Yoga	7
CHAPTER 2: Getting Ready for Chair Yoga	19
CHAPTER 3: Inhale, Exhale: Controlling Your Breath	29
CHAPTER 4: Adding Meditation to Chair Yoga	41
Part 2: Chair Yoga for the Body	51
CHAPTER 5: Relieving That Pain in Your Neck	53
CHAPTER 6: Stretching and Straightening the Shoulders	65
CHAPTER 7: Bringing Your Back to the Forefront	75
CHAPTER 8: Paying Attention to Your Abdominals	85
CHAPTER 9: The Hips Don't Lie	95
CHAPTER 10: Getting a Leg Up	103
CHAPTER 11: Arming Yourself	111
CHAPTER 12: Ankles and Feet: Bearing All the Weight	123
CHAPTER 13: Don't Forget the Fingers, Hands, and Wrists	133
CHAPTER 14: Adding a Chair to Popular Standing and Inversion Poses	145
Part 3: Creating Home Routines	159
CHAPTER 15: Moving Ahead with Chair Yoga	161
CHAPTER 16: Fifteen-Minute Routines for Home	167
CHAPTER 17: Focusing on a 30-Minute Routine	175
CHAPTER 18: Working in Yoga at Your Desk	193
CHAPTER 19: Chair Yoga in Transit	207
CHAPTER 20: Sit Up and Weight: Adding Weights to Your Chair Yoga	215
Part 4: The Part of Tens	229
CHAPTER 21: Ten Things to Remember about Chair Yoga	231
CHAPTER 22: Ten Things to Do When Creating a Home Chair Yoga Practice	235
Index	241

Table of Contents

FOREWORD	xiii
INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	2
Icons Used in This Book	3
Beyond the Book	3
Where to Go from Here	3
PART 1: YOGA FOR LIFE	5
CHAPTER 1: Checking Out Chair Yoga	7
Harnessing the Power of Simple Movements	8
When a Yoga Mat Just Doesn't Work	9
Seniors need Yoga, too	9
Deskbound employees	9
Leaving on a jet plane	9
Yoga for expecting moms	10
Practicing yoga when you have limited mobility	10
Enjoying the Benefits of Yoga	10
Moving feels good	11
Working the joints	11
Stretching and strengthening the muscles	11
Building some bone	12
Relieving stress and anxiety	12
Giving Chair Yoga a Try	12
Cross/crawl patterning	12
Seated rejuvenation sequence	15
CHAPTER 2: Getting Ready for Chair Yoga	19
Deciding on the Guidance That Works for You	19
Attending real-time classes	20
Following videos on your own time	20
Pursuing a practice with books	20
Making Preparations	21
Talking to your health care provider	21
Scoping out your space	21
Knowing what to wear	22
Finding a Chair for Your Derriere	22
Snagging a sturdy seat	22
Preventing your feet from dangling	23

	Setting Aside Time to Sit and Get Fit	25
	Taking a Test Run in Your Chair	25
CHAPTER 3:	Inhale, Exhale: Controlling Your Breath	29
	Understanding Why Breathing Is Important in Yoga	30
	Connecting good breathing and good posture	30
	Sending a message to relax	31
	Extending your exhale	31
	Breathing with postures: A moving meditation	32
	Focusing on the Body Parts Used in Breathing	32
	Dealing with Breathing Problems	34
	Turning to Your Breathing to Manage Stress and Pain	34
	Focus breathing	35
	Belly breathing	36
	Alternate nostril breathing	37
CHAPTER 4:	Adding Meditation to Chair Yoga	41
	Eyeing Meditation as a Core Component in Yoga	42
	Claiming the power of your mind	42
	Considering common types of meditation	42
	Meditating with the chakras	43
	Seeking Enlightenment Right from Your Chair	45
	Seeing How Meditation Slows Dementia	45
	Decreasing Stress and Increasing Your Sense of Well-Being with Meditation	46
	Spending a Few Moments Meditating	47
	Breath awareness meditation	47
	Meditation using visualization (Example 1)	48
	Meditation using visualization (Example 2)	48
	PART 2: CHAIR YOGA FOR THE BODY	51
CHAPTER 5:	Relieving That Pain in Your Neck	53
	Banishing the Stress That Builds Up in Your Neck	53
	Feeling the effects of mental and emotional stress	54
	Talking about text neck	54
	Doing Chair Yoga for the Neck	55
	Chin swings	56
	Neck range-of-motion stretch: Forward tilt	59
	Neck range-of-motion stretch: Rotations	60
	Neck range-of-motion stretch: Lateral head tilts	61
	Mirror on the hand	62

CHAPTER 6:	Stretching and Straightening the Shoulders	65
	Looking at Where Tension Likes to Live	66
	Resisting the Tendency to Round	66
	Counteracting the Western lifestyle	66
	Improving your posture by channeling mom: "Sit up straight!"	67
	Avoiding sitting too much	67
	Surveying Chair Yoga for Your Shoulders	68
	Shoulder shrugs: Part 1	68
	Shoulder shrugs: Part 2	68
	Shoulder shrugs: Part 3	68
	Wing and prayer	70
CHAPTER 7:	Bringing Your Back to the Forefront	75
	Supporting Your Spine with Yoga	76
	Remembering to work your upper back	76
	Touching on your lower back	77
	Breaking Down Chair Yoga for the Back	77
	Alternating arm raises in a chair	78
	Seated cat/cow	79
	Seated side bends	81
	Seated camel	83
CHAPTER 8:	Paying Attention to Your Abdominals	85
	Supporting Your Back from the Front: Creating a Strong Core	86
	Avoiding back pain	86
	Helping your posture	86
	Contributing to better balance	87
	Adding Chair Yoga for the Abdominals and Core	88
	Sitting with a good posture	88
	Bent knee lifts	89
	Seated boat pose	90
	Seated twists	91
	Extended side angle	93
CHAPTER 9:	The Hips Don't Lie	95
	Taking Care of Your Hips	95
	Knowing what it means to open your hips	96
	Preventing injuries by strengthening your hips	96
	Getting a Handle on Chair Yoga for Hips	98
	Hip circles	98
	Seated pigeon	99
	Seated march	102

CHAPTER 10: Getting a Leg Up	103
Checking out Your Legs	104
Knowing Knees Need TLC, Too	104
Staying aligned	104
Encouraging free movement	105
Leg muscles support the knees	105
Chair Yoga for Legs and Knees	106
Seated warrior one pose	106
Seated warrior two pose	108
Seated one-leg forward bend	108
CHAPTER 11: Arming Yourself	111
Keeping Your Arms in Shape for Lifting, Reaching, and Hugging	111
Beautiful biceps	112
Functional forearms	112
Exceptional elbows	113
Examining Chair Yoga for Arms and Elbows	114
Elbow flex	114
Forearm rotation	115
Newspaper	117
CHAPTER 12: Ankles and Feet: Bearing All the Weight	123
Understanding Why Foot and Ankle Health Are So Important.	123
Part of the kinetic chain gang	124
Bones in the balance	124
Moving in the Right Direction with Chair Yoga for Ankles and Feet	125
Flexing and extending your feet	125
Circling your ankles	127
Flexing and extending your toes	128
Seated mountain pose	130
CHAPTER 13: Don't Forget the Fingers, Hands, and Wrists	133
Preventing or Relieving Stiff Fingers and Hands and Painful Wrists	133
Addressing arthritis attacks	134
Meditating on the median nerve	135
Choosing Chair Yoga for Fingers, Hands, and Wrists	135
Flexing and extending your fingers	136
Advanced finger exercise	137
Flexing and extending your wrists	140
Circling your wrists	140
Wrist stretches	142

CHAPTER 14: Adding a Chair to Popular Standing and Inversion Poses	145
Working on Balance with a Chair by Your Side	146
Flipping Your Perspective: Inversion Poses	146
Helping out your heart	147
Gaining a lot of relaxation by doing a little	147
Surveying Standing and Inversion Poses Using a Chair for Support	147
Half forward fold with a chair	148
Downward facing dog with a chair	148
Warrior one with a chair	149
Warrior two with a chair	150
Standing side kicks with a chair	151
Standing extended side angle with a chair	152
Standing half-moon with a chair	154
Standing warrior three with a chair	155
Standing tree pose with a chair	156
Inversion: Legs on a chair	157
 PART 3: CREATING HOME ROUTINES	159
 CHAPTER 15: Moving Ahead with Chair Yoga	161
Perusing Principles of Practice	161
Just breathing	162
It's not how it looks: Focusing on function over form	162
Embracing the dynamic/static approach	163
Choosing forgiving limbs	163
Keeping It Real: Starting Chair Yoga with the Right Mindset	164
Knowing you gain nothing from pain	164
Doing only what you need	164
 CHAPTER 16: Fifteen-Minute Routines for Home	167
Beginner Routine	168
Advanced Routine	171
 CHAPTER 17: Focusing on a 30-Minute Routine	175
Beginner Routine	176
Advanced Routine	184
 CHAPTER 18: Working in Yoga at Your Desk	193
Sneaking in Chair Yoga for a Physical and Mental Break	193
Clocking in for Chair Yoga at Your Desk	194
Searching for hot spots	194
The violinist stretch	195

Seated twist for work	197
Chest and shoulder stretch	199
Chair thunderbolt variation	201
Forward fold in a chair	203
CHAPTER 19: Chair Yoga in Transit	207
Benefitting from Yoga Near or Far, on a Plane or in a Car	207
Taking on Chair Yoga in Tight Places	208
Apple picking stretch.	208
Seated rowing	209
Knee to elbow	211
Forward bends for tight spaces.	212
CHAPTER 20: Sit Up and Weight: Adding Weights to Your Chair Yoga	215
Weighing the Fundamentals of Adding Weights to Your Chair Yoga	216
I don't own dumbbells: Expanding your view of "weights"	216
Evaluating whether Yogic breathing with weights is right for you	216
Using Weights in Chair Yoga	217
Shoulder shrugs with weights	218
Bicep curls	219
Triceps pulses.	221
Rowing with weights	222
Seated lateral raises with weights.	224
Seated twists with weights.	225
Heel lifts with weights.	227
PART 4: THE PART OF TENS	229
CHAPTER 21: Ten Things to Remember about Chair Yoga	231
It's Not That Easy	231
Simple Movement Is Powerful.	232
Don't Dangle.	232
Know When to Say When	232
Comfort Is Always in Fashion.	233
You Don't Need a Lot of Space	233
Keep Breathing	233
Make the Time	233
Don't Let It Hurt	234
You Don't Have to Use the Chair Forever (But You Can)	234

CHAPTER 22: Ten Things to Do When Creating a Home Chair Yoga Practice.....235

- Talk to Your Doctor236
- Check Out Some Books and Videos236
- Find the Right Expert.236
- Create a Dedicated Space237
- Build Practice Time into Your Schedule237
- Set Expectations237
- Invite a Friend238
- Be Still and Breathe.....238
- Meditate in Your Chair238
- Keep It Fun239

INDEX.....241

Foreword

Just like Larry Payne — a master Yoga teacher himself — and his co-author, Don Henry, this book about Chair Yoga is smart, easy to understand, and empathetic. Whether you're new to this type of Yoga or not, you will find this book methodically explains what to do and how to do it. It pays attention to your mind first, explaining and giving you the foundation you need not only for Chair Yoga but also for your general health. The meditation it teaches is crucial for Yoga and, in my opinion, for life itself.

Then comes healing stretching for the whole body from the neck down. Every part of the practitioner is subject to meticulous attention. And after that, there is creative thought about actually making Yoga part of a daily routine. The beauty of this is that what is asked of the practitioner is reasonable: first a short 15 minutes, and then more. Without being bound by traditional rules, there is a chapter on how to use weights while doing Chair Yoga. The Yoga itself helps with strength. Add weights, and the benefit is doubled.

Know that you are in excellent hands while reading this book; doing what it recommends undoubtedly adds to health and well-being.

—Dr. Loren Fishman

Introduction

You can find a wide array of Yoga “flavors” in books and even your neighborhood studios. Chair Yoga is just another type, but it’s not some trend created for modern audiences. Its roots actually reach into Yoga tradition. Chairs have historically been used as props in Yoga classes, often to

- » Help practitioners get more deeply into a pose
- » Provide a degree of safety by helping with balance or stability or by simply bringing the floor up closer

The great Yoga master, B.K.S. Iyengar, enthusiastically promoted using a chair in order to help his students experience more challenging postures with more security or support. Back in the 1980s, **Lakshmi Voelker** brought the idea of using a chair to America, making Yoga more accessible and even more therapeutic. And co-author Larry Payne dedicated a section of the first edition of *Yoga For Dummies* (Wiley) to Chair Yoga back in 1999.

Make no mistake about it: Chair Yoga is an effective way for you to experience the benefits of practicing Yoga in a way that may make it more accessible to you. Whether it’s because of injury or age, your travel schedule, or your work routine, sometimes being able to do Yoga from a chair just makes more sense. And for some people, that accessibility makes all the difference in the world — the difference between actually practicing Yoga or abandoning it altogether.

About This Book

As *Chair Yoga For Dummies* demonstrates, you can readily adopt Yoga as part of your self-care routine, right from your chair.

In this book, we try to offer you a digestible series of poses or movements, not an encyclopedia of all possible postures. The fact is that you can adapt almost any Yoga pose done on a mat to a chair.

Here, we present some of the best and most popular Chair Yoga poses and movements (with about 200 photos) and also incorporate those movements into some

sample routines you can do anywhere you find yourself sitting. *Chair Yoga For Dummies* is a great place to try out Yoga or to allow your existing Yoga practice to evolve right along with your body.

In addition to focusing on your muscles and bones, Chair Yoga also gives you an opportunity to nurture your mind. While there may be no one perfect approach to meditation, some form may be just what you need to help reduce stress. (And we all have too much stress, right?) This book dedicates a whole chapter to some of the most straightforward ways to meditate — an activity that’s easily performed and easily integrated into Chair Yoga.

Finally, while the book focuses on both the physical and mental benefits of Chair Yoga, it also highlights some vital breath work that can actually benefit both. Like meditation, breathing exercises are an essential part of a Yoga practice, and a chair may be the best place to perform those exercises.

Foolish Assumptions

As we were writing this book, we made a few assumptions about you, dear reader. First, we’re guessing that you have very good reasons for not pursuing a regular Yoga routine. In reality, however, those reasons are far from being very good— and this book will hopefully prove just that. Maybe you think you’re too old or too inflexible. Perhaps you think you’re too overweight or too injured. And secondly, if you’re still looking for an excuse, there’s always that onerous lack of free time or appropriate space. Our guess — our assumption — is you might be clinging to one or more of these “very good reasons.”

Of course, if you happen to be a super-flexible former gymnast (or maybe just an average 16-year-old), you may need to find the full, traditional expression of a particular Yoga pose simply to feel a stretch. If, however, your flexibility is more limited than that, you don’t have to go as deeply into a pose in order to feel the exact same degree of stretch or strengthening. Your so-called limitation may indeed be due to injury, inexperience, age, weight, or even workload. Or maybe you just (gasp!) have an average range of motion. The goal of a Yoga practice should be improved physical and mental health, so put less focus on what it looks like and more on what it’s doing for your body and mind. And Chair Yoga can do a lot.

Icons Used in This Book

We use several icons throughout this book to help you better navigate the text and find the most important and helpful bits:



TIP

This icon identifies special suggestions that you may want to keep in mind as you practice a Chair Yoga routine or try a pose.



REMEMBER

Some things are worth keeping in mind, particularly when attempting a new posture or trying a new routine.



WARNING

Even Chair Yoga, as accommodating as it attempts to be, can lead to injury if you're not mindful. These paragraphs may help you to pay attention to certain obstacles, but they in no way substitute for the good advice of your doctor or other health care practitioner.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Text marked with a Technical Stuff icon is interesting (we like to think), but ultimately it isn't essential for getting a handle on Chair Yoga. If you want to get in and get out, you can skip these bits without compromising your understanding of the topic.

Beyond the Book

An effective way to focus on some of the key concepts of this book is to check out the online Cheat Sheet that summarizes many of the important takeaways relating to a Chair Yoga practice. Go online to dummies.com and search for **Chair Yoga For Dummies Cheat Sheet**.

Where to Go from Here

If you want a complete picture of Chair Yoga, you can definitely read this book straight through. But you don't have to go cover to cover to meet your needs.

Want to target a specific part or parts of your body? Try the chapters in Part 2. Need a premade Chair Yoga routine for your busy schedule? Chapters 16 and 17 can help. Just looking for some tips on mindful breathing? Exhale and flip to Chapter 3. However you read this book, remember that Yoga — including Chair Yoga — needs to serve you, not the other way around.

1

Yoga for Life

IN THIS PART . . .

Uncover the health benefits of simple movements.

Consider what kind of teaching you want and how to prepare your Chair Yoga practice area.

Discover the power of your breath.

Review how meditation can have a profound impact on your mental fitness.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Moving for health
- » Using a chair rather than a mat
- » Noting the benefits of Chair Yoga
- » Checking out a couple of simple Chair Yoga exercises

Chapter 1

Checking Out Chair Yoga

Getting up and down off the floor or a Yoga mat can be a challenge for some people. But no one should be left off the Yoga bandwagon.



REMEMBER

For any number of reasons, you may choose to practice Yoga while sitting in a chair. Chair Yoga doesn't require that up-and-down flow you may find in other Yoga classes. You can remain in a seated position where you feel more stable — even safer — while still reaping some of Yoga's most significant benefits:

- » More flexibility
- » Increased strength
- » Better balance
- » Improved circulation
- » Decreased anxiety and stress
- » Reduced pain
- » Better sleep
- » Greater willpower

These benefits have been acknowledged over the years by not only Yoga teachers and students but also Western medicine itself.



REMEMBER

Chair Yoga is just one approach or technique, but it may in fact be the smartest one. The key to making your movements truly Yogic is to synchronize them with your breath. That coordination keeps you relaxed and allows your body to benefit from the power of simple movements.

Harnessing the Power of Simple Movements

Sitting in front of a screen or in a line of slow-moving commuter traffic can render you relatively motionless for hours at a time. In fact, health practitioners often warn about how being sedentary, especially sitting too much, is actually almost the same threat to good health as smoking is.



TIP

Yoga teachers and Yoga therapists alike talk about how much you can gain from the simplest of movements. Simple and safe movements can

- » Build muscle strength
- » Increase flexibility
- » Increase bone density (in some practitioners)
- » Lubricate your joints
- » Improve your will power
- » Decrease anxiety and stress
- » Exercise your heart and lungs

You can read more about some of these benefits in the following section.

The ultimate objective is to avoid inactivity but, at the same time, proceed both slowly and thoughtfully. That's where Chair Yoga comes in. Although you can move in many ways, Chair Yoga may be both the perfect and the safest activity. It's also a great way to supplement other aerobic and strength training exercises.

If you want to hang on to a Yoga practice but find your body is making new demands, consider Chair Yoga. If you're new to Yoga and maybe feel too old or too inflexible, this approach may be an ideal entry point.



REMEMBER

At the end of the day, Yoga — even Chair Yoga — needs to make you feel better. Listen to your body, don't allow yourself to endure pain, and most of all, have fun!

When a Yoga Mat Just Doesn't Work

The chair has a long history in Yoga. It's a traditional prop, often used for safety and support in the pursuit of the classic form of a pose. Great Yoga masters like B.K.S. Iyengar employed the chair by using innovative methods to help students move into otherwise difficult postures.

But Chair Yoga is something different. Popularized in the USA by Lakshmi Voelker back in the 1980s, it's more about making Yoga accessible to everyone. It's about finding ways for Yoga to accommodate the particular needs of the practitioner rather than finding ways for the practitioner to adapt to a pose. Chair Yoga is about practicing in a way that serves your fitness goals and makes you want to come back again and again.

Seniors need Yoga, too

Without a doubt, many senior centers have mat Yoga classes that are well attended by people in their '60s, '70s, and even '80s. These people use their mats in the traditional way, which means they get up and down off the floor at various points throughout the class. Some seniors, however, just can't do that. Chair Yoga provides an alternative for almost anyone.



REMEMBER

Your body changes as you get older, and you may lose certain capabilities. Even in an average Yoga class, practitioners can't do the things they did when they were younger — at least not without the risk of getting injured.

Deskbound employees

Whether they're self-imposed or handed down by an employer, productivity demands can keep you at a desk for too many hours at a time. (Of course, many people willingly sit in front of their computers for extended periods of time, oblivious to the clock and the rest of the world around them.)

Chair Yoga provides a way to counteract all the negative aspects of sitting at a desk for long periods of time and receive the benefits of thoughtful movements without leaving the desk chair.

Leaving on a jet plane

If you find yourself sitting for long periods of time on an airplane, watching an in-flight movie or even splurging on a cocktail often just isn't enough to help you relax or bring the circulation back into your limbs. And space is always an issue on a plane.

These are some of the challenges faced by the frequent traveler. Chair Yoga can certainly offer relief to the tight and tense traveler

Yoga for expecting moms



WARNING

All expecting mothers need to talk with their obstetricians about doing exercise. Knowing the things you should look out for or avoid entirely is critical.

This book doesn't deal specifically with prenatal Yoga. Chair Yoga, however, does offer the expecting mother some distinct advantages. Specifically, using the chair as a prop can help support body weight as well as bring the stability of the floor up higher.

The goal, of course, is to avoid any kind of pressure on the abdomen (including certain kinds of twisting), so listen to your body and your doctor when it comes to doing any physical activity — even Chair Yoga. Then, select the poses and movements you think would be beneficial.

The good news is that expecting mothers can certainly practice both breathwork and meditation from the comfort of their chairs. Both can reduce or eliminate stress and pain in your mind and your body.

Practicing yoga when you have limited mobility

Even people who have athletic Yoga practices find their abilities are constrained or deactivated from time to time. This typically occurs as the result of injury or illness. Chair Yoga is often a way for these people to keep practicing even though their range of motion is temporarily limited.

If this is you, be mindful of any warnings that may come from your doctor. But also remember that Chair Yoga is almost always a better alternative to complete immobility. A thoughtful practitioner can keep some parts of their body limber while allowing other parts to heal.

Enjoying the Benefits of Yoga

If you look at Yoga as more of a healing activity rather than simply a process of bringing your body into super-flexible poses, then the mental and physical benefits derived from a Yoga practice are definitely more important than how it may “look.”

As we note earlier in the chapter, even Western medicine recognizes the power of Yoga, and Chair Yoga offers most of the same benefits.

Moving feels good

“Sitting is the new smoking” has almost reached the status of being a cliché, but it still resonates loudly. The impact of too much sitting — of too much inactivity — takes a toll on both your body and your spirit. Clearly, moving makes you feel better.

The implication here is pretty straightforward. If you’re currently not moving around enough, adding Chair Yoga as a regular routine will yield returns. You may not readily see them initially, but they’ll ultimately become wonderfully apparent.

Working the joints

Just by doing some of the most basic movements in Chair Yoga, you keep your joints mobile and well lubricated. The key is to not overdo it, so always listen to what your body’s saying and stop moving when it’s time.

Anyone can benefit from good joint health, but if you happen to have arthritis, you may discover some particular relief associated with certain movements. Some arthritic pain, for example, comes from joint stiffness, so movements that reinforce mobility and range-of-motion can help. Check out Part 2 for Chair Yoga movements that target the joints.

Stretching and strengthening the muscles

In general, Yoga contributes to muscle health in many ways. By adding Chair Yoga to your routine (or using Chair Yoga to continue your already established Yoga practice) you may be building muscle, maintaining and expanding your flexibility, and even improving your balance as you strengthen the muscles responsible for it.

Although not every Yoga movement is intended to build muscle, some movements and poses do achieve that. Perhaps you hold a pose to build strength or perform several repetitions (it’s amazing how even the simplest movement can be challenging after a few reps).