

LEARNING MADE EASY



Chair Yoga

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



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

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Chair Yoga For Dummies®

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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.

Part 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.

Chapter 1

Checking Out Chair Yoga

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**
-

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.