



## Chair Yoga for a Healthy Immune System

This practice combines mindful awareness, conscious breathing, and movement to build a deep connection with the body. It includes strengthening poses and relaxing poses to release tension and help to manage stress.

### Why Practice Yoga?

*"I used drugs and alcohol for many years basically to kill the pain of my life. Yoga has helped clear my mind, deal with the pain, move into the present and just love myself and who I am."* J.B.

*"I have become stronger, more aware and feel I can control my anxiety better by breathing. I know now that yoga is not just physical. It's a way of life."* J.T.

*"Since beginning yoga, I am much more relaxed and better able to handle stress. I have a clarity of thought and stronger concentration. I have noticed an overall improvement in the way I feel and seem to be less susceptible to illness."* J.L.

### How Yoga Supports a Healthy Immune System?

Yoga and mindfulness practices help us to notice our body's reactions to situations. We can recognize our face flushing, muscles tightening, heart rate increasing, and the trouble we have relaxing or even breathing fully. All of this can take away the energy our immune system needs to fight illnesses and disease.

When we sense a threat, our bodies react to protect us. We can take action to calm our nervous system and feel better through certain movements and conscious breathing. Yoga helps us relieve stress and let our bodies know we are not in immediate danger. By releasing stress and tension, our immune system has more energy to do its job and protect us.

## Chair Yoga Sequence for a Healthy Immune System



### 1. Centering

Sit in a comfortable position. Let your spine lengthen allowing the top of your head to reach toward the ceiling. Notice the feeling of your feet on the ground; the feeling of your legs, your arms, and your hands wherever they are resting. Feel the felt sense of your entire body where you are seated. Bring your awareness to feeling your body breathing and take 10 slow inhales and exhales.



### 2. Neck Stretch

Bring your right ear to your right shoulder, and let go of your opposite arm and shoulder. Take 5 full inhales and exhales. Switch to the left side, left ear to left shoulder.



### 3. Shrug Shoulders

Shrug your shoulders to your ears 5 times. Inhale as you lift, exhale as you release. Afterward it may feel good to make circles with your shoulders, backward and forward.



#### 4. Raise and Lower Arms

Slowly inhale raising your arms overhead, and as you exhale slowly let them return by your side. Imagine you're moving your arms through water. Continue 5 more times, moving your arms up as you inhale, and slowly down as you exhale. Then raise your arms out to the side at shoulder-height and squeeze your shoulder blades together opening your chest. Do your best to relax while taking 5 full breaths.

#### 5. Side Stretch

Stay seated on the chair or stand up placing one hand as support on the chair. Reach your right arm up and over your head and move your upper body to the left. Take 5 full breaths here. Then switch to the other side and repeat.

#### 6. Flow Sequence

Inhale and stretch your arms overhead. Exhale as you fold forward at your waist and hips, arms reaching out with a long neck and spine, letting your arms and hands extend down toward your feet. Relax your neck and take a couple of breaths. Then inhale and slowly rise up. Repeat at least 5 times, until you begin to notice heat building in your body. Then pause, be still, and feel what you feel in your body.



#### 9. Flow Sequence

See #6 above. Complete as many times as feels good. Then pause, be still, and feel what you feel in your body.



#### 7. Seated Tree

Place your right ankle on top of your left thigh with your right knee out to the side. Breathe fully and stay for a few breaths. Then switch to the other side by placing your left ankle on top of your right thigh. If you want more of a stretch, slowly fold your upper body forward toward your legs until you've found your own limit.

#### 8. Standing Tree

Slowly stand. Place your hands on top of the chair or elsewhere for support. Press down into your left foot and place your right foot against your inner shin, calf or thigh (be sure not on the knee). Pull your belly towards your back, stand tall with the top of your head rising toward the ceiling. Hold this pose for 5 breaths. You might raise your arms and hands overhead for a challenge. Switch to the other side standing on right foot and repeat. After completing return to your chair.

#### 10. Chair Twist

Sit sideways with your left arm on the back of a chair. If seated on a bunk or floor, cross your legs (if comfortable). Take a full inhale and as you exhale twist your upper body to your left. Do not force it, rather move more deeply into the twist as you breathe. Take 5 full breaths; then release slowly. Repeat on the other side. When completed return to center.

#### 11. Closing/Relaxing

Sit in a comfortable position in a chair or cross legged on a bunk or floor. You can use a wall for support of your back if necessary. Rest your arms and hands comfortably in your lap, or hands on your knees. Try to keep your back straight and spine lengthened. You can close your eyes if that feels good. Begin by slowly moving your awareness from feeling your feet all the way to the crown of your head. Relax each part of your body as you go, particularly as you exhale. As you relax, let your body breathe itself without controlling your inhale and exhale. Take a few moments, 10 minutes if possible, to sit in stillness. See if you can focus on feeling your body naturally breathing. You may choose to feel the movement of your belly as you breathe, or the feeling of your breath as it moves in-and-out of your nose. If thoughts arise, see if you can let them go and concentrate on the feeling of your body breathing. *When you are ready to complete, bring your hands together in front of your chest, and bowing your forehead toward your fingertips, take a moment to acknowledge your own guiding light.*

To learn more about the Prison Yoga Project or to support our mission, please visit [www.prisonyoga.org](http://www.prisonyoga.org)