













**'Sample' yoga class** focusing on feeling what is going on with the breath during poses. Is the pose an opening pose which facilitates a good inhalation, or perhaps a relaxing, closing pose which enables a longer exhalation? A focus on where in the body is the breath concentrated? *Note: illustration precedes instruction.*

<p>Intention – ref. the limbs of yoga such as non-harm to self, acceptance of own limitations. Reflection: “How am I feeling at beg. of class” (this can be redone at end of class, too, as a comparison).</p>	<p>Basic breathing lying in semi-supine Breathing in turn into Upper Abdomen, Mid-chest, Upper chest and breathing out in same order.</p>		<p>Lying in apanasana, arms at side of trunk, palms down. On inhalation raise legs to ceiling and take arms overhead. On exhalation return knees to chest and return arms to floor, palms down.</p>
	<p>To open hips, practice vrksasana (tree) lying. Support the knee of the bent leg with blanket/s. Extend arms overhead.</p>		<p>Lying in semi—supine position, place hands on to abdomen and note the rising of this area on inhalation and the passive, receding movement upon exhalation. <b>(abdominal breath).</b></p>
<p><b>Sitting on a chair or kneeling with blankets or in a crossed legs position:</b></p>			
<p>Practice breathing in, pursing lips and making a “Who” sound as you breathe out. The sound is like the sound in a sea shell or a little like blowing against a candle flame without putting it out. This breath is energising, happens automatically for standing and more energetic poses (mouth closed) and moves the rib cage (diaphragmatic breath).</p>		<p>Parvatasana (mountain). In seated position, interlink fingers, place them on your head, palms up if able. On an inhalation raise them up aiming to keep elbows parallel. You are now practising breathing into the upper chest.</p>	<p>Loosen neck with movements such as looking down at chest area, stretching back of neck, looking up, stretching front of neck, taking right ear to right shoulder, stretching left side of neck; taking left ear to left shoulder, stretching right side of neck.</p>
	<p>Practice Dandasana (staff pose), a base (starting) pose for many seated poses. You can also raise your arms in this position.</p>		<p>Practice a simple twist based on Matsyendrasana. Place sole of left foot at side of right knee, stretch up and turn to the right and reverse. The next stage of this stretch forms a wonderful stretch for the piriformis muscle (important to do for many).</p>
	<p>Adho Mukha Svanasana, a wonderful elongation in the spine and good stretch for the hamstrings. More accessible if practised against a wall.</p>		<p>Picture of a standing pose – Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II). This pose enhances the diaphragmatic breath as it requires some strength and core engagement.</p>

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 <p>Warrior II can be entered into in stages using the support of the back of a chair. Next stage: arms will be extended forwards and backwards as per the classic pose.</p>		<p>Come to lie prone on the mat and practice an easy cobra pose, brushing the nose and chin against the mat as you lift into a supported back bend. Note arm position at front of mat.</p>	
<p>Put hands underneath shoulders as you push back to extended child pose (Utthita balasana). Notice the breath high in the chest due to the position of the arms and the emphasis on a relaxing exhalation and a great stretch for the paraspinal muscles.</p>	 <p>Seated position for breathing practice to follow. Alternative: sit on a chair.</p>	<p>Repeat the breathing practice from the beginning of the class, breathing into Upper Abdomen, Mid chest and Upper chest in turn. Notice that you may be able to count up to 3 as you breathe into and out of each area and there will be a natural pause between the breaths.</p>	<p>Relaxation (Pratyahara) Attention is drawn inwards, senses away from their usual external orientation. We soften all muscles, release all tension and find a <i>nothingness</i> – where there is in fact <i>everything</i>. Awareness remains throughout.</p>

About yoga, beginning with notes on breathing which is key to life even if you don't practice yoga!

We breathe automatically as our breath is controlled by our autonomic nervous system. But many of us have developed unsatisfactory breathing patterns and these affect our health – such as only breathing low down into our abdomen – not moving our rib cage properly – and perhaps rounding our shoulders and poking our head forwards of our body. Some of us stick out our chest in an exaggerated ‘military’ posture and breathe only into the upper chest. We often hold our breath, particularly when we feel stressed. The practice of Yoga teaches us how to breathe using all parts of the breathing apparatus equally and in turn we use the whole of our lungs. This can improve our health very significantly; for the weight conscious it is useful to know that the practice of pranayama (yoga breathing) improves metabolic efficiency.

Practising yoga breathing can energise us and bring us to state of calm – different practices have different effects but the latter benefit will always be found. The pause between the breaths is absolutely *key* to finding our peace as the mind can then find its silence; the gaps between breaths are the window into the silence that is a backdrop to *‘everything’*. We manage one-pointed focus and we can get to know our ‘true self’. “Yogic speak” apart, we can find a state of equanimity, clarity and a feeling of removal from all the pressures of the busy world – attachment (e.g. to material things or to ‘only the times when life is going well’) and separation; our ego is tamed/quashed and we learn to feel united with our fellow men – at any rate, we can cope better in our relationships – we stop fabricating illusions - one of the failings of the human condition – “she thinks this”: “he doesn’t like me” etc.

A yoga class is not about achieving a perfect pose – e.g. a great backbend. The practice of asanas (postures) is only **one** limb of the eight limbs of yoga originally classified by Sage Patanjali. It is important to practise yoga intelligently – for example, a practice that suited you when you were in the bloom of youth may not suit you when you reach mid-life. Yoga is suitable for all. The awareness of all sensation felt during execution of the poses as well as the physical work takes in mindfulness and the core strength promoted in the practice of Pilates but **yoga** is so much more besides!