

Asanas:

Effective Neck Stretching – Static vs. Movement

Short Practice: 8 Basic Postures

Name: Effective Neck Stretching: Static vs. Movement

If your neck muscles are tense, attempting to stretch them is similar to trying to pry open a clenched fist – it will be uncomfortable and ineffective.

When we are dealing with tight muscles, movement is the answer, as opposed to holding your head statically.

When you pump the blood into your muscles by contracting and then relaxing them, you bring nourishment to the area, developing muscle tone and making the muscles more elastic. As a result your muscles are able to relax better, which leads to tension release.

We cannot think of the neck, head and upper back as three separate entities. They function more like a tree trunk with the roots and the crown. Just like a tree needs to have an extensive root system to support the weight of the trunk and the crown, your neck requires extensive muscular connections to the rib cage, thoracic spine and shoulder girdle to support the weight of the head and allow for incredible mobility.

So if we want to increase circulation to the neck, we really cannot do it effectively without including the upper body, which means moving the thoracic spine and the shoulder girdle.

That's why more complex movements that include the movement of the head, thoracic spine and the shoulder girdle (via the movement of the arms) will be more effective in releasing tension in your neck and upper back.

Description: all movement is done in conjunction with the breath.

1. Flexion/Extension – ex: Cat n Cow

ex: Sitting or Standing – Place the hands on each other with palms facing up in your lap or at the belly, with this the chin is on the chest. On an inhale, with the chin slowly rising forward and towards the ceiling (it is not necessary to go too far in looking up), move the arms as if they were a flower opening with the elbows mid-torso height, hands above and more open while squeezing the shoulders blades towards each other, puffing out the chest. Exhale return to starting.

ex: the above can also be done while doing Warrior I beginning with a straight leg when the hands are low and bending the knee as you open the arms.

2. Rotation

ex: On knees, reaching out and up with the arms, sinking to Child's pose and turning the head in one direction and taking the extended arms back and placing them on the lower back.. Repeat and turn the head to the other direction.

ex: Sitting on a chair (or in the car). Placing the right hand behind and taking the left hand to the outside of the right knee, creating a torque/tension as you twist the entire body from hips to head to the right and look over the right shoulder. While keeping the twist turn the head to the left, pause and return it to the right shoulder as if you are looking out the rear window of your car. Repeat on the other side.

3. Lateral Flexion

ex: Sitting in a chair, release the right ear towards the right shoulder, you can hold on to the sides of the chair for security. Take the left arm and reach over the body towards the right side, hold and breath. Repeat on the other side.

ex: The above movement can be done while doing Side Angle Bend.

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4. Combined Rotation and Lateral Flexion

ex: Sitting in a chair or standing. Reach up with the right arm and let the head follow the right hand also looking up, then take the nose to the right arm pit, continue with the chin sweeping the chest until you are looking at your left shoulder and hand which the left hand is reaching to the floor. Return on the same path to the start.

ex: A more intense version of the above would be to reach over the body with the extended arm and again follow the same path. This involves the thoracic spine to a much greater detail.

ex: Triangle and Side Angle Pose with movement.

I would follow these movement with **shoulder rolls**, forward and backward, single and both together, small and large. Let the arms hang and just go along for the ride.

Name: Short Practice: 8 Basic Postures

The following is a suggestion if you would like to enjoy a 10-15 minute short yoga practice. I would warm up with the above neck release suggestion, adding a few hip circles and maybe walking in place for a minute.

Most of the poses are held for three breaths with an emphasis on elongating the exhale.

Description:

1. Standing Mountain Pose (Tadasana) tall and firm, well grounded.

2. Standing Forward Fold (Padahastasana) with the knees slightly bent, forward folding and releasing. (if you would like to add something here you can do a series of FF and Half-Way Ups with the hands on the shins, fingertips on the floor, or using a chair)

3. Sitting in a chair. **Cross one leg** with the outside of the ankle on the opposite thigh, near the knee. Let the elbow/forearm rest on the crossed leg to give the message for the hip to open and relax. You can take the moment to massage your foot, talk on the phone or read, if you must. Switch Sides.

4. Sitting in a chair. **Single leg hamstring stretch** with right leg straight and extended, foot flexed. Forward fold/hinging at the hip cradle bringing the belly forward either towards the right thigh or into a space between the legs (this is easier). Take the left forearm and lay it on the left thigh while you massage the right leg with the right hand where you are feeling the stretch.

You can also sit up straight with a strap around the extended foot, elbows at the waist and work your way into a forward fold gently and slowly.

Switch sides and stay for 1-2 minutes in each stretch.

5. Prone: Cat and Cow (Marjarisana)

6. Belly: Cobra (Bhujangasana)

7. Child's Pose (Balasana)

8. Relaxation Pose Supine: Savasana

General Class:

Restorative with the Breath: *Legs on the chair with blanket across and lengthwise.*

Attunement/Starting Pose/Supine: *Morning Wake-Up Stretch, Hip Openers with Bent Legs (Small Circles Together, Circles Apart and Large, In/Out Together), Ankles/Wrists Flex-Extend*

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Warm-Up/Prone: *Child's Pose, Cat n' Cow, Balancing Cat, Kneeling Sun Salutations: Child's Pose.... Up-dog/Plank/Down-Dog (your choice of four different asana in a flow) Hands under Hips Thigh Lifts R/L Both, Cobra x6*

Prone: *Heart Lifts, A-Symmetrical Locust Lifts + Symmetrical*

Standing/Balance: **Mountain Pose, Forward Fold**

Chair: **Effective Neck Stretching, Hip Opening with crossed leg R/L, Hamstring Stretch R/L**

Savasana: Supine and Relaxed

Miscellaneous:

Music: Deuter “Sattva Temple Trance”

Quote:

“Avoiding problems you need to solve is avoiding the life you need to live.” -Paul Coelho

Brazilian novelist, writer and lyricist.

Often known for his book “The Alchemist” which has been translated into 80 languages and is now the most translated book in the world by any living author.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo_Coelho

Essential Oil: doTerra “Lemongrass” (look for separate mailing with details on this essential oil)

The Living Temple, here in OWV, is offering a free screening on **“The Ancient Secrets of Essential Oils”** covering the history, medical research and existing possibilities for using essential oil in our modern times. I highly recommend having a look if you can put it on your schedule for Thursday August 16th, from 7-8:30pm. Here is the link to The Living Temple website: <https://thelivingtemple.com/>

Miscellaneous. Asana Information:

Printable Link to **Morning Wake-Up Stretch** on my website:

https://yogatherapyalacarte.com/2018/01/20/morning_wake_up_stretch/