

8 Poses to Relieve Tension

The following sequence offers poses that are helpful for opening the chest and stretching and relaxing the upper back and neck. Breathe deeply and slowly during all the postures and remember to relax the forehead, eyes, jaw, and tongue.

Tadasana (Mountain Pose): Discovering alignment and finding the centre



Standing upright with awareness is one basic way to discover your own unique posture. It is difficult to correct something until you have found out what is really there. Use the wall to identify your alignment, and then practice standing in the centre of the room.

Stand with your back to the wall, with your feet together. If that is uncomfortable, separate the feet three or four inches. Plant the feet firmly, feeling the ground with the soles of the feet. Check the distribution of weight between the right foot and the left. Move front, back, and side-to-side on your feet to find the most balanced stance. Make sure that the arch of each foot is lifted, the toes spread apart. The placement of your feet becomes the foundation of your awareness of your whole body. Give yourself enough time to explore and discover how you are actually standing.

When you are ready to move on, firm and straighten the legs. Bring the tailbone and pubic bone towards each other, but do not suck in the abdominals: Lift them. There should be space between the wall and your lower back; do not flatten the lumbar curve. With your "[mind's eye](#)," go into the area below the navel, inside the belly, in front of the sacrum. Locate this "centre" point. Extend the side torso up, lift the sternum without sticking out the ribs, and drop the shoulders. Take the tips of the shoulder blades and move them into the torso, opening the chest. Let the back of the head reach up. If the chin is raised, let it drop slightly, without tightening your throat; focus your eyes on the horizon. Make sure that the shoulders and back of the head both touch the wall. Relax any tension in the face and neck. Remember that your "center" resides in the area below the navel and in the belly, not in the neck and head. This exercise may feel very constricted if your head is normally forward of your shoulders. Use the wall to inform you, so that you know the relationship of your head to your shoulders, but try not to create more stress as you adjust your alignment.

On an exhalation, raise the arms up to the ceiling, bringing the elbows back by the ears. Let the arms grow from the shoulder blades. Stretch the little finger side of the hand and connect that stretch all the way down to the little toe and into the ground. Remember to keep the feet grounded, the legs strong, and the centre of your pose in the area below the navel. Observe whether the movement of the arms has caused tension in the neck area. As you stretch up with the hands, bring the tips of the

shoulder blades more deeply into the torso. Hold for a few breaths and then release on an exhalation.

Parsvottanasana arms: Opening the chest



Move a little away from the wall and roll the shoulders back. Clasp your elbows with your hands behind your back. If you have more flexibility you may join your palms behind your back, with the fingers pointing upward. On the exhalation, roll the upper arms back toward the wall, opening the chest between the sternum and shoulder. As you open, keep the ribs relaxed; make sure they don't jut forward. Remember to stay grounded in your feet and center the movement below the navel. Relax the eyes, jaw, and tongue. Release on the exhalation. Change the arm on top, if you are clasping your elbows, and repeat.

Garudasana arms: Opening between the shoulder blades



This pose is helpful for relieving pain between the shoulder blades. It reminds us to keep that area open in the process of stretching the upper back. Wrap your arms around your torso, right arm under the left arm, hugging yourself. Exhale and bring the hands up, the left elbow resting in the right elbow, with the hands rotated palms towards each other. Breathe and feel the stretch; after a few breaths, raise the elbows up higher, to the level of the shoulder. Remain grounded in the feet, centered in the area below the navel. Relax the eyes, jaw, and tongue. Feel the expansion of the inhalation between the shoulder blades and the release on the exhalation. Lower the arms on the exhalation and repeat with the left arm under the right.



Gomukhasana arms: Stretching the shoulders

This pose opens and facilitates movement in the shoulders, which helps correct the rounded upper back and forward head position. Plant your feet firmly in a parallel position and extend the sides of the torso up, pressing down through the sitting bones. The shoulders drop down, and the head rests on the body's midline. Lift the right arm into the air (with a belt in your hand if you have tight shoulders), stretching from the little finger side. Bend the right elbow and reach down between the shoulder blades. Bring your left arm behind your back and swing the left hand up to meet the right, clasping the hands or taking hold of a belt. Relax the ribs. Lift the right elbow into the air and drop the left elbow down. Make sure that the spine stays extended and is not leaning left or right to compensate for tightness in the shoulders. Release on an exhalation and reverse the arm positions.

Simple Seated Twist: Relieving strain in the back, rotating and stretching the neck



eyes, jaw, and tongue.

Sit on the chair, feet firmly on the ground, sitting bones pressing down, sides of the torso extended. On the exhalation, reach around and take your right arm to the back of the chair and your left hand to your right knee. Extend the back of your head up and make sure the head is on the midline. Turn on the exhalation, breathing low into the belly, then into the chest. Lastly, turn the head and eyes. Remember to keep the shoulders down, the chest open, and the shoulder blade tips in. Center the movement below the navel and in the belly; relax the

Setu Bandha (Bridge Pose): Actively opening the chest

Lie down on your back with your knees bent and feet hip-width apart. Roll the shoulders under and reach the hands towards the feet, keeping the little finger side of the hands on the floor. On the exhalation, raise the buttocks, lifting the sternum towards the chin. Elongate the back of the neck without pushing it into the floor; you want the neck to stretch, not flatten. Interlocking the fingers on the ground under the back helps to roll the shoulder blades under and is an interesting variation. Relax the facial muscles and jaw,



breathe deeply, and come down on an exhalation. This pose is not appropriate during the second half of pregnancy, or if you have been diagnosed with spondylolysis or spondylolisthesis.

Inverting the blood flow and calming the mind



Since this pose increases blood flow to the head, it is excellent in the beginning stage of a headache. But if you are having migraine symptoms, indicating that the blood vessels are dilated, and if the pain increases, skip this pose and rest in savasana. Do not do this pose if you have hiatal hernia, eye pressure, retinal problems, heart problems, or disc problems in the neck, or during menstruation or pregnancy.

Lying on the floor with a blanket or bolster under your lower back, place your legs up against the wall.

Remember to drop the chin down, creating length in the neck. Cover your eyes with an eye bag or wrap. Some people find headache relief in this pose when they place a weight, such as a sand bag, on the head, with one end on the forehead and the other

draped over the top of the head onto the floor. This additional pressure helps to drop the head further into the ground, releasing the strain in the neck muscles.

Savasana (Corpse Pose): Relaxing completely



Lie on your back on the floor with your eyes covered and a blanket under your neck and head. You may put an additional blanket under your knees. If you are pregnant, lie on the left side, extending the bottom leg and bending the top one, with a blanket under the top knee. Relax completely, breathe deeply, and let go.